

The Notion of School ‘Functionality’ in a Teaching-Practice Placement Policy

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ABSTRACT Placement of students in schools for teaching practice is an integral component of teacher education. When these placements are arranged, several factors are taken into consideration, including availability of co-operating teachers, space and alignment between teacher-education institutions and schools. While there is abundant literature on placing students in schools, few studies have investigated the policies underpinning these placements, and the meanings embedded in them. Within this context, teaching-practice placement of students in ‘functional’ schools with different racial contexts, as stipulated in the teaching-practice crossover policy, was investigated. The goal was to establish the meaning and understanding that students attached to ‘functional’ schools, and to assess the impact of this understanding on students’ growth and development. The study was informed by the situated learning theory. The design was qualitative. Data were collected using semi-structured focus-group interviews from 47 first-year Black students enrolled in a Bachelor of Education teacher-education programme. Only students who had been placed at least once in a ‘functional’ school with a racial profile other than their own were included. The findings revealed that due to the ambiguity of the term *functional* in the policy, students developed their own definitions based on their personal experiences. Similarly, the perceived impact of the placements was shaped by their experiences in these contexts. The study ended with implications for teaching-practice placement policies.