



EPWORTH

Preparatory School for Boys and Girls
High School for Girls

DRAFT STATEMENT: TRANSFORMATION AND DIVERSITY AT EPWORTH SCHOOL

What does Epworth School mean by “transformation” and “diversity”?

- “Transformation” requires a complete change in something; this change is one that is perceived to be for the better. It is associated with permanence.
- “Diversity” is a concept which includes both acceptance *and* respect. It requires us to understand that each of us is a unique individual and to respect one another’s individual differences. It places us in a position of exploring our varied race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies in a safe, positive and nurturing environment.

As a School, all stakeholders – pupils, parents and staff – within our community need to understand what we mean when we discuss “transformation” and “diversity”, with particular reference to race as South Africa’s particular historical anathema. These terms need to be understood in the context of our fractured and damaged past, because they continue to inform our fractured and damaged present. If, as a School, we do not address the microcosmic divisions and unconscious biases within our institution which reflect the macrocosmic divisions and unconscious biases of our nation and our world, we are in danger of allowing them to continue into our future.

Transformation

For the purpose of this document, the transformational focus will be on racial transformation, in line with ISASA guidelines. There are already extant spaces for discussions about, and support of, issues associated with gender differences; a separate process and strategy will be defined going forward. For some time there have been policies and strategies in place to support diverse academic abilities as well as cultural and language identities.

Structural racism is Machiavellian and pervasive as well as difficult to eradicate – this is true of educational, religious, business and other power structures in our country. Unconsciously, it has been adopted by many in our country. There is no greater gift an educational institution can offer its pupils, staff and parents than advocating for diversity and true democracy.

As a South African school, Epworth acknowledges how it has been shaped by our colonial history and apartheid past, despite our many, valiant attempts to be a centre of resistance at

key points of our School and national history. It is critical to our Vision, our Mission and our Values that we “seek[ing to] find a way” to create an environment in which we are able to explore our assumptions, challenge our prejudices, respectfully hear, learn from and try to understand the context of one another’s narratives in order to embrace our sense of identity and individuality.

For some years, it has been acknowledged that there is an “urgent need for schools to transform into genuinely South African institutions” [*Independent Education*, May 23, 2012]. Epworth School acknowledges that this may be a difficult process for some individuals and different constituents within our School; difficulty, however, must be trumped by need.

From late 2018 moving into 2019 and beyond, it is imperative that Epworth School demonstrates our robust and determined commitment to transformation by negotiating and designing a diversity-driven strategy, before going on to draft measurable steps to achieve this strategy. It must be noted that this is no longer merely educationally, sustainably and socially desirable; it is legally required.

Diversity

ISASA defines diversity as “the celebration of difference and the promotion of inclusivity”.

We agree. In our Epworth School story of diversity, there is room for everyone to “be extraordinary”.

It is also important to note that creating a culture of inclusivity and diversity is more than a numbers game. It is facile to assume that if the numbers of racially diverse staff and pupils are increasing, our School is successfully diverse.

Diversity requires inclusivity; the notion of *ubuntu* referred to in the Statement of Transformational and Diversifying Intent and Purpose. Before Epworth School can be sure that our culture is inclusive, it is essential that we recognise and evaluate – and perhaps challenge – the personal beliefs and attitudes that inform all our School interactions. All of our leaders and senior members of staff need to reflect on their own worldview around diversity; their “cultural competency” [Alaina Love: *Leadership and Management*, October 22, 2018].

“Cultural competency” means an individual’s ability to recognise his or her personal beliefs around all the descriptors of diversity noted above. It requires individuals to recognise that these personal beliefs will influence their behaviour around those they consider to be “different” or “other” than them.

Epworth School will embrace diversity training in our future but we need to acknowledge that accountability measures and feedback are necessary to maintaining an inclusive culture.

Why do we need a Statement of Transformation and Diversity in a post-Apartheid South Africa?

Apartheid is no longer a legislative reality in South Africa; post-1994 the heinous laws which made Apartheid the status quo for all South Africans have been removed from the statute books. However, the social and economic consequences of Apartheid continue to exist. White privilege is a reality and one which we need to help our staff, pupils and parents to consider and to negotiate within the context of our evolving society. We cannot wait for organic change; we need to hasten it if we are going to build a truly “new” South Africa.

The time has come to move away from an evolutionary change in transformation and diversity and move towards a targeted and deliberate strategy of institutional change:

1. Advocacy (cascading from the Epworth Trust and the Board, driven by the Head and the Head of the Prep School, through staff, pupil leadership and pupils as well as parents)
2. Institutional change
3. Individual change

What are we already achieving and implementing on our journey of transformation and diversity?

1. Our Board and Trust are diverse and representative bodies.
2. Themes of transformation and diversity have been foregrounded at Prep School and High School staff development presentations during the course of 2018 and earlier.
3. Some staff have been given the opportunity to attend transformation and diversity workshops.
4. As of 2018, timetabled opportunities for “Woke” presentations and discussions have been created, with the co-operation and support of pupils. [“Woke” will be rebranded in 2019 to I.D.E.A.S.]
5. As of 2018, High School girls have been offered opportunities to attend workshops around inclusivity, diversity and transformation.
6. The High School continues to highlight and celebrate significant dates in our political calendar such as Youth Day and Women’s Day.
7. Epworth School has begun, and will continue to enhance, strong relationships between community engagement and transformational imperatives.
8. The roles and responsibilities of pupil leaders, particularly the High School Deputy Head Girls, have been re-written to create specific diversity and transformational responsibilities.
9. Grades 11 and 12 pupils have been included in the planning and discussion of critical conversations and ways of creating safe spaces for discourse which might be perceived as uncomfortable for some.
10. The High School Deputy Head: Pastoral is part of a group of local staff who meet termly to strategise and share their schools’ journey towards representative South African schools.

What do we plan to achieve in the near future?

Diversity and transformation require conscious and mindful decisions and oversight. These require conscious practices.

All decisions that we make at our School are subject to certain touchstones:

1. We are guided by our Vision, our Mission and our Values.
2. We are guided by the Christian identity of our School as well as the Constitution of South Africa.
3. We are inspired by our drive for educational excellence.
4. We are driven by the long-term sustainability of our School.

In order to achieve our transformational and diversity goals, we need to have a plan in order that our development is structured and thoughtful, not ad hoc.

Using ISASA’s Guidelines and other sources, the following goals will either be set or enhanced for more successful outcomes:

1. Finalise Epworth School’s *Statement of Transformational and Diversifying Intent and Purpose* as well as our *Statement: Transformation and Diversity at Epworth School*. [These documents will not be considered final until relevant constituents within the School have had input. This may well include pupil leadership, such as the Head Girl, Deputy Head Girls and the Head of the LRC.]
2. Communicate the above statements to all School constituents: these must be understood, accepted and supported.
3. Embark upon diversity training with the staff, with specifically identified goals in mind. This will commence in January, 2019 and be ongoing.
4. Emerging from diversity training, a transformation task team must be constituted. This committee must include representatives from across the School community: pupils, staff and parents.
5. The transformational task team will need to interrogate and debate the draft Transformation Policy which will need to be finalised and passed by the Board during the course of 2019.
6. Create an environment in which challenging conversations can take place respectfully and within the context of embracing our diversity as strength.
7. Enable our community to understand the difference between “inclusivity” and “assimilation”.
8. Continue to transform the pupil population in terms of race.
9. Continue to transform the staff population in terms of race.

Bibliography and sources consulted:

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary>

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“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 2, verse 12

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