

Colour-blind educational leadership policy: A critical race theory analysis of school principalship standards in South Africa

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Abstract

In the light of recent media reports of racism in South African schools, this paper examines the role of school principalship standards in addressing race in South African educational leadership. The paper draws on tenets of critical race theory to examine how issues of race are addressed in the Policy for School Principalship Standard in South Africa and the implications thereof for leadership preparation and leadership practice. The methodology involves the employment of content analysis underpinned by key tenets of critical race theory that challenge notions of colour-blindness, meritocracy and neutrality. The analysis reveals that there is no explicit mention or treatment of race and ethnicity as social constructs in the principalship standards. It also reveals that diversity and culture are used more, suggesting the emphasis on difference rather than inequality. The paper argues that, although driven by principles of social justice, the Policy for School Principalship Standard is colour-blind. Through this omission, the policy denies the existence of racism and fails to recognise the power and influence of school leaders (and principals, in particular) in shaping the race dynamic in schools. The paper ends with implications for the improvement of leadership policy and practice.

Keywords

School leadership, principalship standards, leadership policy, critical race theory, colour-blindness, race, racism

Introduction

In this paper I draw on some tenets of critical race theory (CRT) to examine how race is considered and represented in the Policy for School Principalship Standard in South Africa (*the Standard*). The premise for using CRT is that through its tenets, CRT can help to explain the endemic nature of

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racism, the adoption of a white supremacist approach in apartheid South Africa and the maintenance of white privilege and a colour-blind approach in post-apartheid South Africa. CRT emerged as a scholarly civil rights movement in the USA, but has since reached beyond its origins developing several ‘off-shoots’ that have stretched CRT concepts, applying them to various other contexts (Warmington, 2018). In South Africa, the use of CRT in educational leadership is yet to make a mark, hence this ground-breaking analysis. The primary question driving this analysis is: How does *the Standard* address race or evade discussing race? The answer to this question has implications for leadership development and leadership practice. The paper starts by providing an historical background to racial inequality in South Africa to set the context for the exploration of a colour-blind approach in South African educational leadership policy. This is followed by a brief outline of CRT as an analytical framework and a detailed account of the methodological approach taken in the analysis. A brief summary of the literature on colour-blindness and educational leadership is presented followed by an overview of *the Standard* and its analysis using CRT. The paper ends with a discussion and implications for leadership policy and practice.

Under apartheid South Africa, education was fragmented into 19 racially and ethnically determined departments that provided different qualities of education. These departments were unequally funded, with the government spending five times more for a white child than it did for a black child (Nyanda, 2015). A brief background to the apartheid system is provided in a later section, but this legislated system of racial segregation created lasting racial inequalities within the South African education system that endured 26 years of the first democratically elected government, and has left the majority of black people destitute. In post-apartheid South Africa, the first democratic government adopted a corrective approach to redress and transform racial inequalities, driven by a plethora of legislation and policies that were informed by principles of *Ubuntu* (humanness) and *Batho-Pele* (people first).¹ However, recent media reports show that racism is rampant in South African schools. For example, in 2018 South African media reported on a separatist language policy in a school in the Gauteng province that saw black learners being excluded from school because they did not speak Afrikaans (Mail and Guardian, 2018). In other cases, learners in a classroom were split according to race in a school in the North-West province (BBC News, 2019) and a controversial school policy on black girls’ “untidy hair” (The Guardian, 2016) were reported. With regard to educational leadership, media reports have been equally rife. An opening line to one of the newspaper reports read “Teachers feel excluded from South Africa’s school by race and culture” (Davids, 2018). In this same bulletin, Davids alludes to the extent of racial exclusion that is becoming a common phenomenon for both learners and teachers in some of the wealthy independent and fee-charging South African schools that historically served white learners. While some of these examples of racism are learner-focused, school leaders have the responsibility to oversee educational policy at the school level and ensure equity and a socially just education experience. These events in South Africa, and those happening in the world over at the time of writing, most notably the *Black Lives Matter* protests in the USA and globally,² suggest that racism is still raw in many parts of the world. In this article, an attempt is thus made to contribute to the racial inequality and racism discourse, as it seems timely and relevant.

Scholarship on race and racism in education confirms that South Africa remains “deeply racialized” (46; Chaplin, 2020; Davids and Waghid, 2018) despite the deracialisation enforced in the democratic dispensation. Yet, race remains an elusive subject that is not well-covered as a social construct in the educational leadership literature. Bush and Moloi (2007) identified the lack of attention to race in educational leadership more than a decade ago and it remains a gap to date (Wray et al., 2019). Bush and Moloi (2007) showed that black leaders in the South African context

experience discomfort and alienation in previously white schools, where they also experience racism and discrimination. Wray et al. (2019) used their experiences to illuminate incidents of racial bias in schools and called for transformation and inclusion for both teachers and learners in these previously white spaces. Other studies featured race under the broad banner of diversity (Moorosi, 2012; Perumal, 2007; see, for example, Chisholm, 2001; van Vuuren et al., 2016), where it is often integrated with other diversity issues such as gender. While the intersection of race and gender is useful and inevitable, Callender (2019) argues that the broad banner of diversity obscures the direct engagement with racism and racial issues, leaving race as a social construct, a relatively uncharted area as far as educational leadership is concerned.

The historical legacy of race in South Africa

Understanding the history of race in South African education is deemed necessary if a meaningful approach to addressing racism is to be adopted. As Chisholm (2019) asserts, history plays a large part in understanding the inequalities; ignoring it only serves as an excuse to maintain the status quo. As such, South African history is best understood from studying what went on before 1994, as it helps us understand how a deeply unequal society was created and recreated overtime (Chisholm, 2019) and how it shaped more recent history (Chaplin, 2020). Chisholm (2019) cautions, however, that understanding the history of race on its own may not necessarily help with the development of better policies, as they themselves are a product of a long-standing system of politics and politicking, but will help in dealing with the current racial tensions and conflicts and explain why the inequalities cannot be addressed with “short-term quick-fixes” (p. 10).

In her insightful account on the history of teacher preparation in South Africa, Chisholm (2019) shows how the South African education system has always been subjected to international trends and influences from the colonial period, right through apartheid and post-apartheid. Indeed, Chaplin (2020) concurs that racism in South Africa must be understood within the context of “European expansionism” and “global influences” (p. 43). Before 1994, South Africa had been under more than four decades of the apartheid system that legislated racial segregation, which was itself preceded by white colonial rule that had dispossessed black native communities from their land and entrenched an unequal system of existence (Moloi, 2014). Chisholm (2019) provides a helpful overview of the historical legacy of race, helping us understand that racism in South Africa did not start with apartheid in the 1940s and that provision for education was different and unequally funded for blacks and whites even before apartheid.

However, it was the apartheid laws that institutionalised and legalised white supremacy, with major ramifications for black communities (Ndimande, 2013). Some of the most notorious pieces of legislation of the apartheid system, included the following: the *Population Registration Act of 1950*, which classified South African people into four racial groups (Africans, coloureds, Indians and whites) that were used as a base for segregation; and the *Group Areas Act of 1950*, which assigned the different racial groups into different residential areas. These pieces of legislation not only banned inter-racial mixing, but they also deliberately sustained economic structures that disenfranchised black communities, and made “Black poverty permanent” (Milazzo, 2015: 14). Perhaps the most notorious and cruel of the apartheid legislations remains the *Bantu Education Act of 1953*, which provided black African people with a system of education known as Bantu Education; a repressive system that only served to deepen the segregation of black South Africans and perpetuated the ideology of social inequality, offering lesser quality education aimed to prepare the black South Africans to perpetually serve under white supremacy (Ndimande, 2013). Not much is

known about the preparation for school leadership during the Bantu Education era, but teacher education occurred within the designated colleges of education in the respective racially determined systems of education. According to Chisholm (2019), teacher education was partially funded for Africans and yet fully funded for whites, thereby sending messages that less was expected from African teachers. Fiske and Ladd (2006) confirmed that apartheid left a legacy of unqualified teachers who taught black children, and Prew (2003) puts it more starkly, that black teachers were deliberately under-trained, leading to a cycle whereby under-trained teachers would under-teach pupils who then go to college to be under-trained.

After 1994, the various departments of education were merged into a unified system of education, which is administered under the nine provincial departments. The mandate of the new department of education was (amongst other things) to promote equity and a non-racial education system and provide all of South Africa's children with quality education. However, as Davids and Waghid (2015) show, a racially based funding of apartheid had put learners in white schools 10 steps ahead of black learners in township and rural schools. White people, who constitute less than 10% of the population, "own approximately 85 percent of the land, 85 percent of the entire economy, and over 90 percent of the largest companies" (Milazzo, 2015: 8). Policy efforts to equalise education opportunities for all South African children have been made by the South African government, yet, as Fiske and Ladd (2006) and Spaul (2013) observed, the post-apartheid government has never been able to match the expenditure on black learners to that of white learners. More recently, reports from Amnesty International (2020) and Spaul (2019) shows that the life chances of South African children are still determined by where they were born, how wealthy their parents are and the colour of their skin.

It is perhaps important to highlight that incidents of racism, such as those mentioned at the beginning of the article and the structural consequences of apartheid, persist despite the democratic black majority state power and control over policy. Since 1994, government had an insurmountable task of addressing economic disparities and facilitating economic growth, which they did by prioritising "education as an area of expansion and reform" (Spaul, 2013: 436). A plethora of equity-driven policies were also put in place, the majority of which have facilitated the development and growth of a black middle class, yet leaving racial inequalities in schools intact. Despite the overall expenditure of 20% on education, the quality of education continues to be better at schools that were historically privileged (Ndimande, 2013; Ocampo, 2004; Spaul, 2013, 2019). Amnesty International (2020) acknowledges the achievement of the democratic government since 1994, but also highlights that government keeps missing its own targets for providing quality education for all South African children. Spaul's (2013) work depicts South Africa "as a tale of two schools" (p. 444): one functional and wealthy in the form of independent and fee-charging public school status with a teacher-learner ratio of 1 to 15, which caters for the minority; and one poor and dysfunctional with a ratio of 1 to 30 at best, which sadly caters for the majority of black children. Ocampo (2004) poignantly noted that Bantu education may be gone, but black learners are still at the bottom, albeit unofficially. Amnesty International (2020) goes further to suggest that the inequalities in education in South Africa and government missing its targets on providing quality education for all learners is no longer just an accountability issue, but it is becoming a human rights issue.

Critical race theory as an analytical framework

The paper draws on some tenets of CRT as an analytical framework. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define CRT as the study and transformation of the relationship between race, racism and power. Since its inception in the mid-1970s, CRT has been transferred from its original context of law in

the USA and used in many disciplines, including education, to explain the pervasive nature of racism. Indeed, scholars of CRT agree on many basic tenets of CRT, but the current paper is premised on a summary of a few: that racism is pervasive, permanent and that it must be challenged (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gooden, 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1998; Milner, 2017; Vaught and Costagno, 2008). These principles are central to making a case for the endemic nature of racism in the South African education system.

Firstly, the pervasive nature of racism is seen through what Ladson-Billings and Tate (1998) described as a normal order of things and Vaught and Costagno (2008) referred to as a “pervasive, systemic condition” (p. 96) that pervades institutions and relationships. Concurring, Warmington (2020) added that racism is “so ordinary, so business-as-usual, that its very existence is routinely denied” (p. 5). This ordinariness, manifests in neoliberal policies that emphasise meritocracy and individuality (Gillborn, 2014), promoting the notion of colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Bonilla-Silva defined colour-blind racism as a blame the victim “covert armour” of institutionalised racism that has become a “formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order” (p. 3). As part of this scholarship, what Gillborn (2014) and other scholars of CRT (e.g. Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2017, Warmington, 2020) agreed is that while race is socially constructed, racism is much more complex and subtle and easily hides behind everyday normal activities, including rules and policies that proclaim to treat whites and blacks the same. Davis et al. (2015) acknowledged that, “the inherent subtlety that comes from being ordinary makes white racism harder to detect, and therefore more difficult to address” (p. 341). This is even more problematic for contexts like South Africa, where racism prevails despite state power and control over policy by a democratic government representing a black majority that has abolished overt and legally binding racial hierarchies. As Conradie (2016) cautions, even this abolishment does not guarantee freedom from racism, making CRT and particularly the notion of colour-blindness even more relevant. In this context, CRT aims to challenge the nature and interplay of “structural disparity and interpersonal prejudice” (Conradie, 2016, p. 8).

Secondly, critical race theorists agree that racism is permanent. Its permanence was observed and described by Bell (1992), who called it an “indestructible component of American society” that “ensures that civil rights gains will be temporary and setbacks inevitable” (p. ix). Although the idea of permanence negates change, and might appear to contradict the social constructivist nature of race, the deep-seated and ineradicable nature of racism has been acknowledged and felt in many societies with a history and legacy of segregation, such as South Africa. As a product of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, “race is always available as a tool for ordering society” (Warmington, 2020: 24) and unless an effort is made to investigate, analyse and understand it, racism will always prevail. The end of apartheid did not by any means signal the end of racism because as Bell (1992) observed, the latter is in itself “permanently embedded in the . . . culture of the modern world” (p. x). Thus, because it treats race as a social construction, CRT emphasises the “need to understand racism within its social, economic, and historical context” (Gillborn, 2015: 278). By taking historical records into account, and revisiting history, CRT “affords the opportunity to provide a counterstory or counternarrative”, which “involve[s] research reflecting the voices of the marginalized” (Davis, et al., 2015: 342). Historical revisionism is known to provide an opportunity for the re-interpretation of historical accounts (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001), thereby making room for counter-narratives or “counter-storytelling” (Milner, 2017). By so doing, it challenges common assumptions about notions that are taken-for-granted as addressing the common good: what Conradie (2016) calls “power-evasive ideologies” (p. 9). Conradie sees as part of the CRT response to “examine and dismantle discourses that contribute to this occluding effect” (p. 9), challenging

discourses that “serve to justify the desire to avoid obtaining knowledge about the way race plays out in society” (p. 9). Such notions include race-neutral and/or colour-blind discourses that claim racism is no longer a problem in post-apartheid South Africa, including equal opportunity policies that emphasise individual autonomy and disguise for the interests of black and white people alike, while they help maintain the status quo of racial inequality. In this context, it is necessary to challenge institutionalised white supremacy and disrupt white racial privilege that endures decades of post-apartheid rule.

Thirdly, critical race theorists are driven by the impetus to challenge social inequities resulting from and in race-neutral, colour-blind scholarship. Thus, “concepts of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy must be challenged” (Gooden, 2012, p.69). This is informed by a commitment to social justice that is linked to the CRT principle of “interest convergence” (Gooden, 2012, 69), which suggests that poor black people’s interests will receive attention only when they converge with the interests of white and/or other privileged elite (see also Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). This is where the intersection of race and other social identities, such as class and gender, becomes apparent and unavoidable. Indeed, while Gillborn concluded that intersectionality is an important aspect of understanding race inequity, he also maintained that “racism retains a primacy for critical race scholars” (p. 277). Gillborn called this the “primacy of racism” (p. 284), and it is indeed what is driving this analysis despite the acknowledgement of its intersection with other forms of social inequality. Challenging these notions contributes to the promotion of research that investigates ways in which race acquires meaning through normal everyday practices and policies.

Methodology

This analysis was inspired by the work of Davis et al. (2015), which analysed the US principalship standards through the lens of CRT. It is thus underpinned by some tenets of CRT that challenge notions of colour-blindness, meritocracy and race-neutrality of *the Standard* of principalship document in South Africa. The methodology involves a textual analysis of *the Standard* document, with a specific employment of the content analysis technique as a subset of textual analysis. According to Frey et al. (1999), textual analysis is a method used to describe and interpret content, structure and functions of the messages expressed in visual text. A systematic textual analysis is normally performed with the use of a step-by-step content analysis that combines some quantitative and qualitative steps. Content analysis is, thus, described as a process that identifies, enumerates and analyses occurrences so that valid inferences can be made from the data (Frey et al., 1999; Krippendorff, 1989). According to Krippendorff (1989), content analysis further “ensures that all units of analysis receive equal treatment . . . [and] allows researchers to establish their own context for inquiry” (p. 404).

Borrowing from Davis et al. (2015), the method of analysis followed three phases of content analysis, as outlined by Stemler (2001): firstly, the procedure entailed reading *the Standard* document and conducting a search of keywords and phrases, which were counted and whose frequencies were analysed (Bryman, 2012). These keywords and phrases comprised race and social justice words, such as race, ethnicity, colour, culture, diversity, equity and social justice. Bryman (2012) stated that the choice of such words depends on the researcher’s questions. These keywords were therefore chosen because they were related to race and regarded to have potential to denote race inequality and to lead towards some thinking along social justice lines. The less frequent use

of the race terms would signal colour-blindness, which would suggest concealment and/or normalisation of racial injustice.

Secondly, keywords that could be regarded as “counterpoints” (Stemler, 2001: 139) were analysed. According to Stemler, counterpoints are words whose frequency “counts to make inferences about matters of importance” (p. 139). Keywords, phrases or sentences that are often used in the South African nomenclature of transformation and redress that could imply social justice and/or race were used. These keywords and phrases included transformation, redress, equity, exclusion, inclusion, equality and other counterpoints that could potentially reveal and lead to more hidden references to race. Although they are less specific and less controversial (Davis et al., 2015), their use could signal awareness of racial prejudice, and hence are relevant for CRT analysis. These words may include synonyms that may not be immediately apparent to the researcher, or “Key-Words-In-Context (KWIC)” (Stemler, 2001: 139) as used to ensure consistency of the usage of the word throughout the text. Stemler (2001) explains that KWIC allows the researcher to look at the key term and assess its meaning in context, the process of which strengthens “the validity of the inferences that are being made from the data” (p. 139). For this phase and the previous one, the coding was “a priori” (p. 139), which means preconceived and influenced by words related to social justice and preconceived on the basis of CRT. According to Stemler, a priori coding is appropriate when the categories are decided beforehand based on theory.

Thirdly, the last phase of analysis involved impact analysis of *the Standard* document, what Davis et al. (2015) called “unravelling the hidden impact”. This analysed the extent to which *the Standard* addresses or fails to address race. Coding in this phase entailed some aspects of what Stemler (2001) called “emergent coding” (p. 139), which involved reading and re-reading the text, searching for meaning in words, phrases and sentences that were not preconceived but those that could tell the researcher about the extent to which *the Standard* document may be implicit or indirect in its address of race.

Educational leadership and colour-blindness

In South Africa, the strength of the discourse on race equality has been largely based on non-racial policy. Non-racialism is a principled stance taken by the democratic government to ensure that “no one [is] treated differently simply because of [their] race” (Fiske and Ladd, 2006: 5). However, Sutter (2012), views it as an ideology that claims that races do not exist and that the banishing of racial categories does not help with society’s progress in addressing racism and achieving a non-racial society. Fiske and Ladd (2006) also argued that non-racialism does not go far enough as a moral principle, particularly in view of the unequal playing field inherited in 1994. Concurring, Davids and Waghid (2015) argued that [non-racial] policy is insufficient in cultivating where teachers and learners are exposed to diversity and are free to engage racial issues. They acknowledge that the onus to make such spaces available rests on school leadership and governance structures to realise their responsibility in preparing learners for what it means to participate in a pluralist society. Notwithstanding, the authors acknowledge that, although policy is limited, its recognition of the racial difference would be a helpful starting point to cultivating and ensuring a more open discourse about race in schools. The absence of such conversations leads to colour-blind leadership, which creates further marginalisation and avoidance of race and ethnicity differences.

According to several international scholars (Davis, et al., 2015; Gooden, 2012; Mabokela and Madsen, 2005), the colour-blind ideology allows teachers and leaders to view themselves as racially neutral, thereby exonerating themselves from the responsibility of ensuring race equality.

Such educators are not able to account for the full identity of their students and are also not able to acquire the relevant knowledge they need to teach, because colour-blindness “devalues the salience of race and obstructs any critical examination of the status quo” (Davis et al., 2015: 343). Mabokela and Madsen (2005) argued that schools have a responsibility to create and maintain cultures that reflect their diversity and that it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that such cultures do not alienate children and teachers of colour. In these contexts, race matters, and it is imperative that race is addressed so that race equality can be achieved. Mabokela and Madsen (2005), thus, see the role of the school leadership as central to the discourse of race in schools. They found in their study that principals who avoided racial realities were unable to deal with racial undertones in their schools, while colour-conscious principals had the wherewithal to put colour into their leadership practice, thereby enabling responsiveness to their students’ needs and establishing an inclusive culture. Davis et al. (2015) put it bluntly that:

When schools and their leaders fail to interrogate White privilege, they also fail to understand how issues of race permeate education, and opt out of professional learning in the areas of race and social justice. (p. 344)

As Milazzo (2015) observes, a significant body of post-apartheid scholarship on race in South Africa rejects the use of racial categories and race-based policies (e.g. Alexander, 2007; Jansen, 2009); perhaps not surprisingly, given the country’s principled stance on non-racialism, and more significantly some undesirable consequences that affirmative action policies had of promoting the new middle class while leaving racial poverty intact (Spaull, 2013). Notwithstanding a deliberate effort by the democratic government to skew resources to the poorest – for example, providing for no-fee schools, feeding schemes and per capita subsidy – the education department has not been able to bridge the racial inequalities (Nyanda, 2015). The reasons for the lack of success are beyond the purview of this article. However, in view of what others have said, it is arguable that race-neutral policies may have been too moderate to radically change the lives of poor black children, who continue to be disproportionately affected. Milazzo (2015) argues that the banning of the use of racial categories institutionalised colour-blindness in South Africa and has led to the “demonization of race-based affirmative action policies” (p. 11). Milazzo contends that it is not the racial categories in and of themselves that reproduce colonial violence and create racial conflict, but the institutional racism that is being ignored. Perhaps the question remains as to how racial justice or a true non-racial South Africa is to be achieved if the same racial categories that were used to create the racial injustice and inequalities are ignored. This ignorance and overlooking of racial categories and the rejection of race-based policies is what Davids and Waghid (2015) suggest leads to “an invisibility that pretends there is no [racial] difference” (p. 164). Indeed, as Bonilla-Silva (2015:78) argued, “assuming that race-based policies are racist ignores that the goal of such policies is to advance racial justice and, more significantly, that these policies are needed because we still have a race-based reality”.

The South African standard for principalship

The South African Standard for Principalship (*the Standard*), is a policy guiding professional standards of school principalship in South Africa. There is a longer history to the deliberation of this policy, but *the Standard* was officially adopted in 2015 as policy to serve five purposes:

- i. define the role of school principals;
- ii. define key aspects of principal professionalism;
- iii. define the image and competencies required;
- iv. serve as a guide to address professional leadership and developmental needs; and
- v. serve as a policy to address professional leadership and management development needs (DBE, 2015: 3).

It is a 28-page prescriptive document that lists actions that are expected to be performed by a school principal in the South African context. Although *the Standard* was developed together with other documents, such as the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), *the Standard* is the only policy document, thus far, to address school leadership directly. It is worth mentioning that the scope of the document covers “all South African schools” (p. 8), including public and independent.

The Standard outlines eight key areas that are regarded as core to the functioning of principalship in the South African context:

- leading teaching and learning in the school;
- shaping the direction and development of the school;
- managing the quality of teaching and learning and securing accountability;
- developing and empowering staff and others;
- managing the school as an organisation;
- working with and for the community;
- managing human resources in the school;
- managing and advocating extramural activities.

Under each of the key areas is a list of actions and knowledge requirements that a school principal should have. There is a total of 68 actions with more emphasis on leading teaching and learning. To illustrate, 26 of the 68 actions are under the “Leading teaching and learning in the school” key area, which also has five types of leadership around which the principal must have knowledge. *The Standard* makes mention of other supplementary documents, and relevant legislation that informs it. A statement taken from the policy itself states that: “The Standard, in line with other policy initiatives, is designed to improve professional standards of leadership and management for the benefit of learners and the quality of the education service as a whole” (p. 5).

Analysis

Race keywords search

The Standard document was reviewed word for word, reading and counting the keywords. The purpose of this review was to assess the extent to which *the Standard* document addresses race. The question addressed with the keyword search was: How does *the Standard* document address race – or evade discussing race? To answer this question, the keywords were divided into two categories: race keywords (e.g. race, ethnicity, culture) (Table 1) and social justice keywords (e.g. social justice, equity, exclusion/inclusion, transformation, redress, fairness) (Table 2). Race keywords were informed by CRT and social justice keywords included general discourse about social justice in South Africa. It is worth mentioning that words such as transformation and redress may not necessarily form part of the general social justice discourse globally, but were added as an attempt to “remain attentive to national particularities” (Milazzo, 2015, 9).

Table 1. Race keyword frequencies.

Word	Race	Ethnicity	Culture	Language	Discrimination	Racism	Prejudice	Diversity
Frequency	1	1	21	2	0	0	0	10

Table 2. Social justice keyword frequencies.

Word	Social justice	Equity	Redress	Equality	Non-racialism	Fairness	Inclusion/exclusion	Transformation
Frequency	0	3	0	2	0	2	1	3

Table 3. Racial categories keyword frequencies.

Black	White	Coloured ³	Indian	African	Colour
0	0	0	0	0	0

This level of analysis yielded telling findings on the frequencies of the keywords as Table 1 illustrates.

As can be seen, with only one mention, *race* as a keyword hardly features in *the Standard* document. This was particularly problematic for this analysis, as the absence of *race* as a keyword meant there was no intention to make race part of *the Standard* document discourse. There is also one mention of *ethnicity* and, strikingly, both *race* and *ethnicity* are each mentioned once and in the same sentence (together with gender) (p. 21). In contrast, *culture* enjoys 21 mentions, albeit not definitive on any one meaning.

Language was mentioned only twice. In a country that has 11 official languages and where language is so intricately tied to culture and race, and where learners are often turned away from schools because their mother tongue cannot be accommodated (Davids and Waghid, 2015; Spaul, 2019), this was quite surprising. What is even more disturbing is that this kind of exclusion is legally justifiable. Historically, language was used (and to a large extent is still used) as a racial tool to exclude and its two mentions suggest that it is not a priority in the school leadership policy discourse. CRT analysis suggests that the frequency and the careful usage of these keywords could lead towards addressing equity and challenging the status quo.

As Davis et al. (2015) also observed in their analysis, the limited use of race terminology means that race does not form a significant part of the school leadership discourse. However, it could also mean that the race discourse might be submerged in the wider diversity discourse or missing completely, which could further conceal race issues and perpetuate colour-blindness in educational leadership. It was also perplexing that no mention of racial categories was even alluded (Table 3). Given the principle of non-racialism that South Africa adopted, this was hardly surprising. More worryingly, however, is the non-use of keywords including racism itself, as well as discrimination and/or prejudice, which suggests blindness to all forms of oppression, including xenophobia and gender. However, given the history of South Africa, this avoidance demonstrates an extreme example of colour-blindness.

Key-Words-In-Context

The next level of analysis is KWIC analysis. Keywords in this section were found to be broader and less specific than words that are referred to as race terms above. Davis et al. (2015) argue that exploring social justice constructs in an authentic manner can serve as a “conduit” to discussions about race in education, despite their non-specific and somewhat confusing status. The authors call these “conduit” terms as they could be used to express race but are not explicit. These are social justice terms because they do not explicitly suggest a focus on any social identity and yet they could arguably be used in ways that carry racial connotations. Hence, it becomes important to understand the meaning of keywords in context.

Starting with *diversity*, Table 1 suggests that it featured 10 times in *the Standard* document. However, it is noticeable that even where *diversity* was mentioned, it was not with reference to race but more in general terms and denoting difference, as in anything from “promoting cultural diversity” (p.12) and “diversity of the school and its wider community” to “diversity of resources” (p.21).

Without a glossary of terms and a definition, the wide usage of *diversity* can only be assumed to mean difference as in below:

In the South African context, schools face a wide variety of circumstances arising out of, amongst others, socio-economic, cultural, and language diversity. Acknowledging this wide diversity, the Standard provides information that will be useful to all stakeholders who have an interest in a particular school. (p. 8)

It is observed that diversity is featured twice in this one paragraph, which is quite early in the document and because it is the definition of scope section, its association to race is discernible albeit not explicit. What is explicit is diversity meaning difference. Interestingly, the paragraph continues to show how the purpose of *the Standard* document is intended to help in the recruitment, selection and appointment of principals and, yet, at this stage, there is not a clear definition of what is meant by diversity or at least ways in which it could be interpreted in order to facilitate implementation. Arguably, understanding South Africa simply in terms of difference or diversity is an example of colour-blindness because South Africa’s history is of diversity being translated into inequality and white supremacy.

Although *culture* was treated as a conduit term for race for purposes of this analysis, its meaning in context suggested it was not always used with a race connotation. The keyword *culture* is featured 21 times in the document; it is noticeable that most inferences associate with learning culture rather than societal culture; the latter would denote as association with race. The analysis shows that the use of culture in *the Standard* document has multiple meanings, which would probably explain its high frequency. However, culture is not used to denote race. To illustrate, *the Standard* refers to the development and enhancement of a “learning culture” and there is mention of a “culture of achievement” as part of a repertoire of knowledge requirements of teaching and learning that a school principal must have. As an action, the school principal must be able to “promote a positive learning culture” (p. 14). A closer reference to societal culture that could denote race is the reference that the principal must have knowledge of the “socio-economic, political, cultural characteristics of the wider school community” (p. 21).

Revealing the hidden impact of the Standard policy

In the final stage of the analysis, the whole text was examined with specific focus on the actual content of the document and the language used. As indicated earlier, by using emergent coding that

is not based on preconceived themes, the hidden meaning was expected to surface a little more. There is no avoiding the glaring issue of culture that seemingly receives greater attention than any other keyword. However, the lack of clarity on what is meant by culture is even more conspicuous in the analysis. On the surface, culture seems to be well represented, yet digging a little deeper reveals some ambiguity. In their analysis of the US principalship standards, Davis et al. (2015) also found culture to be featured more than any other keyword. However, the prevalence of culture was associated with positive school culture, leading them to conclude that culture was not used to represent differences in society in any way. In the current analysis, culture in the South African standards seems to be more attached to the culture of learning, which on the surface has nothing to do with societal culture. This is seen in principal actions phrased as *developing a culture of learning* or *promoting culture of achievement* (p. 11). Both of these usages do not have to do with difference, race or societal culture. Yet, further on in the section focusing on cultural leadership, a definition of culture is provided as:

Culture refers to the way of life of a specific group of people and encompasses behaviour, beliefs, values, customs, style of dress, personal decoration such as make-up and jewellery, relationships with others, and special symbols and codes. (p. 12)

This definition is the only formal definition of a keyword provided and it clearly refers to societal culture, yet it is not the prevailing meaning of culture in the document. In this section alone, which is half a page long, culture is mentioned six times and reference is made to other aspects of societal culture, such as religion and language, and even gender equality (noticeably the only mention in the document) is made in this section. There is some literature on educational leadership and societal culture (e.g. Dimmock and Walker, 2005) and cross-cultures of leadership (e.g. Miller, 2017). This literature seems to suggest that leadership practice is shaped by context, which in turn is shaped by people and their cultural backgrounds, with Dimmock and Walker (2005) highlighting the significance of understanding culture in developing theory, policy and practice in educational leadership. In this literature, culture is associated with societal differences and ways of living, but without highlighting inherent inequalities. Warmington et al. (2018) argue that terms such as culture (and ethnicity) have sometimes been used to acknowledge diversity or as euphemisms for race, but without much success. Thus, a difference is seen between how culture is used in *the Standard* and how it is used in the rest of the leadership literature.

With regard to other social justice keywords, besides culture and diversity, a noticeable presence is that of transformation as a keyword driving the change and redress agenda. It is remarkable, though, that even this gets only three mentions, all of which appear at the beginning (the Introduction) of the document. The introduction seems to be the only place where reference to social justice is made, albeit without once mentioning the term social justice or race. The document refers to *transformation* of the education system or educational goals; however, there is no definition or further explanation of what kind of transformation is being referred to. Transformation is associated with change and improvement, which is dependent on the professionalism of school principals. It is noticeable that the focus is on “good principals” who “do not act in isolation but lead and manage their schools professionally and in ways that are grounded in and embraced by the principles of Batho Pele and Ubuntu”(p. 5). This is the only reference to the principal not to act in isolation. The rest of the document focuses on the principal alone as a sole leader, following notions of hierarchical leadership that are socially exclusive (Grant, 2011), in contrast with current discourses of shared leadership, and also carry significant equity implications on race and gender

grounds. As Milazzo (2015) reiterates, the term “transformation” in post-apartheid South Africa has come to indicate official and unofficial attempts to redress racial inequality, especially in educational institutions and the workplace. However, without a clear definition, transformation may be used to drive a colour-blind ideology.

Discussion

Relating this discussion to CRT, that racism is subtle and normalised, a policy that does not use nor encourage the critical use of racial categories denies that racism exists. Conradie (2016) suggests that non-racialism risks denying the existence of subtle racism. Through this denial, the policy fails to recognise the power and influence of school leaders (and principals, in particular) in shaping the race dynamic in schools. It also misses an opportunity to empower school leaders and hold them accountable for improving the education quality for black children, which itself would be a significant step towards tackling race inequality and racism. While it is possible that some of these issues are provisioned for in other policies, as policies do not work in isolation, a critical race perspective would argue that mainstreaming race equality is essential. *The Standard* makes no attempt to get race into the language of professional identity for school principals. In fact, one would go so far as to argue that race and ethnicity have been completely overlooked in the principalship professional standards discourse. Judging from this avoidance, it is arguable that programmes of professional development are likely to adopt the same race-neutral approach, which is likely to maintain the existing status quo of racial inequalities currently prevalent between white and black teachers as well as white-led and black-led schools in the South African education system. If there is silence around race in policy documents, there is bound to be silence around race in schools, and this is quite ironic given that the inequalities in education are primarily a result of past overt racism. Direct avoidance of the terms race, ethnicity and colour also makes it harder to use *the Standard* to frame questions relative to how leadership preparation programmes should address issues of race at their very root.

Although driven by principles of *Ubuntu* and *Batho-Pele*, which are cornerstones of the South African Constitution and central to the commitment to social justice, *the Standard* policy is itself colour-blind. CRT rejects colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Noticeably, neither culture nor diversity are used specifically to denote race. Perhaps given that the foundation of the South African Constitution is based on non-racialism, this avoidance of race terms in itself should not be surprising. It is arguable that putting people first and treating them with humanity does not necessarily ensure that existing racial disparities will be addressed. Gotanda (2000) argued that while non-racialism claims moral superiority, non-recognition of racial categories is self-contradictory and fosters denial of racial oppression and allows it to continue. This ignorance renders *the Standard* document powerless in combating racial inequality, hence racism is likely to persist. Indeed, Milner (2017) argued that issues of race and racism are “ingrained and deeply embedded in the policies, practices, procedures, and institutionalized systems of education” (p. 294).

With regard to the principle of “interest convergence” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001), which suggests that black people’s interests will only materialise when they converge with those of the white elite, Marishane (2016) makes a useful point that *the Standard* was developed at around the same time as similar policies were being developed in other parts of the world. This would suggest that addressing race and/or social justice in educational leadership was not a priority for *the Standard*, but perhaps the priority was more a response to global pressures that the Department of Basic Education had to do something about developing standards for school leadership, albeit

20 years after democracy. Marishane notes that *the Standard* was the first document to use school leadership instead of school management and thus, was finally in alignment to and catching up with the developed world discourse. Considering that the policy was initially conceptualised around the same time as the first pilot of the national qualification for school leadership programme, which also notably had been revised to focus more on leadership rather than management, it is interesting that even the racial disparities that led to the development of a national school leadership development programme, such as poor levels of preparedness of many school principals in township and rural schools, the majority of whom are black, did not seem to have encouraged a focus on racial justice in the policy. Bearing in mind the economic disparities in schools (Moloi, 2014; Ocampo, 2004; Spaul, 2013), and the series of racial incidents highlighted at the beginning of this article, *the Standard* policy appears to ignore that racism exists. It is acknowledged that the vast majority of school principals are not having to deal with racism and/or racial diversity on a daily basis because of the mono-racial state of many schools. However, racism is still an issue that needs leadership, albeit to a different degree compared to what principals in former whites-only schools or independent schools would confront. There is no divorcing the current state of education from the endemic nature of structural racism engineered from the past. *The Standard* uses the meritocratic language of excellence and achievement, effective principalship and high standards expected from all principals in South Africa, assuming that South African principals share a level playing field. It ignores that poor performance in schools and poor preparedness of black teachers and school principals is a result of institutional racism that is itself a direct creation and result of apartheid policies.

Conclusion and implications

In this analysis, it is apparent that *the Standard* may be an effective document in outlining the role of the school principal, but it is ineffective in so far as addressing racial inequalities is concerned. Its avoidance of race conscious language makes it colour-blind, which makes it an accomplice perpetuating the strategies developed by the apartheid regime to establish and maintain white supremacy in the education system. Indeed, Gillborn (2014) contended that a CRT “perspective on race and education views policy as acting to preserve the status quo and defending as normal a state of white supremacy” (p. 37). *The Standard* policy adopts a non-racial approach and, by so doing, it ignores that racial inequality exists and thereby fosters a colour-blind approach to social justice. A CRT-informed response would suggest a much explicit commitment to confronting and disrupting racism. Race equality should not be a matter left for a dedicated race equality policy alone (at the moment such a policy does not exist), but should permeate all educational policy. Principalship standards should encourage race awareness and empower school leaders to explore race and social justice issues using (where necessary) race disaggregated data that informs practice and intervention. Avoiding race is not helping the anti-racism agenda; rather, it mainly serves to maintain the status quo.

As a final point on the contribution of this paper, CRT was traditionally premised on the notion of racism against blacks by whites (Bell, 1992), but Bonilla-Silva (2015) shows that there is no one version of racism. This analysis has broken new ground, exploring possibilities of analysing school leadership policy through the lens of CRT. Drawing on CRT has strengthened this analysis, making it an important part of educational research in South Africa. Indeed, a potential exists of a new ‘off-shoot’ (Warmington, 2018) of CRT, given South Africa’s racist past and its post-apartheid non-racial stance. As Bonilla-Silva (2015) states, non-racialism is “deadly” as it

reinforces a colour-blind ideology that justifies contemporary forms of racial inequalities. Also, what makes the South African situation even more peculiar is that the state power is now in the hands of majority black policy-makers, which makes institutional racism even more insidious. Indeed, Bonilla-Silva's (2006) notion of "racism without racists" could not be more relevant.

For a quick reflection on limitations, I focused this analysis entirely on the policy-as-document, to the exclusion of other aspects of the policy process. Methodologically, content analysis was sufficient and effective in achieving what I had intended. However, future research could look into other aspects, such as policy actors, particularly at the policy-making stage and the negotiations at the initiation stage, as well as the nature of implementation.

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Notes

1. Ubuntu and Batho-Pele are core values underpinning the South African Constitution, representing the harmonious South African way of life.
2. Black Lives Matter is a movement founded in the USA protesting against racially motivated violence by police against black people. The recent spark in protests was ignited by yet another killing of a black unarmed man, George Floyd, by white US police on 25 May 2020. This time the rest of the world joined the USA in solidarity protests that also raised awareness of their own local racial issues.
3. Coloured is a race category in South Africa denoting people of mixed race. Other racial categories are African (for all Blacks), Indian (for people of Indian and Pakistani origin) and white (for people of European descent). Black has been used to include all non-whites.

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