

The Impact of Cultural Influences on a Rural Learner Transitioning to a Middle-class Boarding School in South Africa

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GRANT - Developing Cultural Responsiveness

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Many rural children in South Africa are exposed to challenges such as poor-quality schooling and social isolation, which negatively impacts their development. Research has shown that boarding schools are a possible solution to these challenges. However, there is a gap in South African research on boarding schools and cultural disparities. Drawing on a qualitative case study and the theoretical framework of cultural-historical perspective, the authors explore the cultural attributes of a rural male learner and its influences on his transition to a middle-class boarding school. Using qualitative content analysis, data is derived from interviews, observations, open-ended questionnaires, and school progress reports. The study findings indicate that the rural male learner benefitted from the transition to the boarding school; however, this resulted in a disparity between his culture and the school culture. The study concludes that there are many hidden challenges identified with the male learner's movement to the boarding school. We discuss the implication of the cultural disparity for the learner and our role as researchers to develop the area of study for rural education and boarding schools both in South Africa and internationally. Despite the valuable findings, the case study draws on one learner, making the findings limited. Further indepth studies of children with greater cultural ranges in South African schools may provide more generalisable lessons for the rural education field.