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### **Title: Transformation in Higher Education through DEI: System-Level Strategies of a South African University**

**Authors:** Hilda Du Plooy <sup>1\*</sup> Riccardo Sartori <sup>1</sup> [riccardo.sartori@univr.it](mailto:riccardo.sartori@univr.it) Andrea Ceschi<sup>1</sup> [andrea.ceschi@univr.it](mailto:andrea.ceschi@univr.it) Francesco Tommasi<sup>1</sup> [francesco.tommasi@univr.it](mailto:francesco.tommasi@univr.it)

**Affiliation:** <sup>1</sup>Department of Human Sciences, University of Verona, Italy

\*Corresponding author: Hilda du Plooy ([hilda.duplooy@univr.it](mailto:hilda.duplooy@univr.it))

#### **Abstract**

In Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) remain pivotal aspects in preparing students and contributing to their well-being. Recent scrutiny from academics and policymakers necessitates a reimagining of DEI in higher education. Notably, the dominance of DEI research by Westernized, Educated, Industrialized Developed countries presents an opportunity for valuable insights from the Global South. South Africa (SA), known as the “Rainbow Nation”, is characterized by its multi-ethnic and cultural groups. With the fall of Apartheid in 1994, the historically dominant white SA universities needed transformation to successfully integrate their diverse, multi-racial, and ethnic student groups. Through the lens of the macropsychology perspective and intergroup contact theory, the present case study aims to identify the system-level strategies employed by a historically white SA University to promote DEI between the different racial and ethnic groups of students. Data included interviews, website documents, organizational documents, visual materials, and field notes. Data analysis adopted the qualitative approach of situational analysis to interpret the context and complexity of the situation reflexively. The strategies identified displayed an interconnectedness across different levels namely; system-level, system-to-individual, group-relational, and group-to-individual. Overall, system-level contact-based practices between diverse groups appear to be the most sustainable strategies when they are deliberate, value-driven, and supported by all the various departments in the institution. The strategies have practical implications for HEI management, emphasizing the importance of institutionally driven practices and diversity-in-action strategies to enhance the interaction and inclusion among culturally diverse students while placing each student’s dignity at the core.

*Keywords:* Diversity, Inclusion, Intergroup contact, Dignity, Macropsychology, Case study, Situational analysis.