Editorial

An assortment of education perspectives: Staying relevant by challenging educational conventions

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Kobus Maree a triple doctorate, is internationally recognised for his research. As the author or co-author of 50+ books and book chapters and 100+ articles in accredited scholarly journals and recipient of a number of awards for his research, he is frequently interviewed on radio and television. He received the Exceptional Academic Achiever Award (UP) for a second term in 2007 and was elected as a member of the South African Academy for Science and Arts in 2003 and of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) in 2006. He is a C1-rated researcher (NRF).

The fourth issue of *PiE* for 2007 is the second general issue of the year. This issue contains an interesting collection of international, national, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions that provide a powerful base for interpreting contemporary socio-educational reality. Crafting their contributions with enthusiasm and diligence, and locating themselves in both qualitative and quantitative research traditions, the authors have produced a wide-ranging portfolio of discourses that collectively succeed in helping us gain new insights into educational processes. As always, this issue contains a broad, multidisciplinary range of texts that serve as a basis for interpreting and evaluating data, both quantitative and qualitative, focusing attention on current research developments across the spectrum of educational inquiry. Building on topics covered in previous issues of *PiE*, one of the contributions deepens the debate on the merits and demerits of an outcomes-based education system, a debate that gains in significance as the current group of Grade 12 learners will be the last to write Grade 12 under the "old" education system. The issues discussed have relevance in educational circles locally and globally.

As always, our contributors have succeeded masterfully in identifying gaps in the literature, and attempted to address these gaps in a scholarly way. Likewise, you will know by now that it is *PiE*'s stated policy not to engage in advocacy writing, but rather to encourage critical voices in an attempt to stimulate debate on crucial issues. For this reason you will note that out contributors have not tried to "answer" all questions; instead, opting to leave them to the discerning reader to make up their own minds on matters. Therefore, we urge you not to expect "clear-cut answers" ; we realise that these discourses were written from authors' own perspectives, which are bound in time and space, and are not intended as a panacea, a cure-all, but, much rather, a sincere attempt to contribute in some small way to debates in the field.

The contributions are diverse in terms of institution, gender and sourcing. The research reported on in this issue has been carried out at different institutions in South Africa and abroad and has wide application. We are confident that the insights presented so articulately will contribute to increased understanding of the issues discussed. However, since the journal

remains committed to the publication of contributions by black scholars, we would like to re-extend our invitation to established and emerging researchers to use *PiE* as a publication forum.

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Because of the importance of selecting students for tertiary study in a way that will yield candidates who stand a reasonable chance of achieving success, and at the same time facilitating a more equitable distribution across the races, it is no surprise that university admission remains high on the agenda of South African academics and educationists. In our lead contribution, *Rethinking university admission for the 21st century*, Robert Sternberg challenges convention by advancing a new think-piece on ways of creating a system for university admission that is equitable, valid and representative of the broad range of abilities that students can bring to university settings. Sternberg argues persuasively that since conventional tests of abilities and achievements are narrow and do not measure the full range of abilities relevant to university and life success, new measures should be developed that will increase academic quality and diversity simultaneously. He discusses a novel way of assessing learners for tertiary study and shows conclusively that the measures involved, based on a (post-)modern theory of abilities, can provide a useful basis for university admission decisions. This seminal analysis of the inclusion of the disempowered and marginalised, specifically at tertiary level, warrants the attention of all assessment stakeholders. The article provides an exciting roadmap for new directions in assessment practices and methodologies in the United States, South Africa and, indeed, all developing countries.

In the second article, *The reliability of evidence contained in the National Qualifications Framework Impact Study: a critical reflection*, Philip Higgs and James Keevy reflect on the reliability of the evidence contained in the National Qualifications Framework Impact Study. They draw on the results of a longitudinal comparative study conducted by the South African Qualifications Authority since 2002 and consider the accuracy of evidence-based research in determining the impact of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on the transformation of education and training in South Africa. They argue that the NQF Impact Study results cannot be divorced from the contestations and power struggles raging in the broader NQF discourses. They make a strong case for the recognition of these power struggles and for the location of the NQF Impact Study within these struggles. In a post-modern, post-apartheid South Africa, an analytic discourse of this nature indeed has a rightful place in an educational journal.

In the third article, *Development and validation of the Self-Regulated Learning Inventory for Teachers*, Koen Lombaerts, Nadine Engels and James Athanasou (academics working on different continents) collectively describe the development and collection of initial psychometric information on the Self-Regulated Learning Inventory for Teachers (SRLIT), a self-report scale with 23 items measuring primary school teachers' realisations of self-regulated learning (SRL) practices. Information on the instrument's factor structure, validity and internal consistency was gathered using a sample of 399 primary school teachers. Delineating the psychometric properties of the instrument meticulously and scientifically, and indicating that a Rasch measurement model of teacher responses showed an excellent fit for the 23 items on the unidimensional continuum model, the authors reveal that SRLIT scores correlated strongly with teachers' self-descriptions of SRL occurrence in their classrooms. The authors conclude that the SRLIT appears to be a useful instrument for examining teacher environments for promoting self-regulated learning practices in primary school settings. This study has particular relevance for South African teachers because of its currency in an outcomes-based education environment.

In the fourth article, *The policy-practice dichotomy: Can we straddle the divide?,* Sylvan Blignaut reviews the literature on why it is so difficult to translate policy into practice. This is a pressing contemporary issue in education generally and curriculum implementation in

particular. He interrogates the issue from a pragmatist perspective by focusing on the question: How can we understand policy and its link(s) to what actually happens inside classrooms? Locating his inquiry within the broader literature on educational change and summarising salient aspects of the literature related to schools, educational change and implementation, Blignaut suggests strategies that could mediate the boundaries between policy and practice. The article provides a fascinating exemplar showing how scholars could engage in interpretive research, and once again focuses attention on the complexity of the teacher's task in constructing best classroom practices against the background of internal and external, professional and personal, and individual and social influences.

In the fifth article, *The utilisation of psychological support services in primary schools in Gauteng*, Jace Pillay and Tanya Wasielewsky elaborate on the results of a qualitative study conducted in four Gauteng public primary schools on the utilisation of psychological support services. Employing individual and focus group interviews with various stakeholders to elicit information, and analysing the data from an interpretivist perspective, the authors conclude that psychological support services are underutilised and that this can be attributed largely to a lack of trained staff within support services, excessive paperwork, high staff turnover and unavailability, and slow response time to requests. The authors identify several difficulties in the schools and conclude that this reflects an urgent need for psychological support services especially with regard to intervention, prevention and staff professional development. They argue that while the current psychological support services are not adequately meeting the needs of the four schools, the demand for such services is likely to increase with the escalating number of learners in child-headed homes as a result of HIV&AIDS. The authors also make a case for promoting an ecosystemic approach in an attempt to persuade and empower schools to make more effective use of psychological services. This matter warrants serious attention from educationists in South Africa where educational support services are still crippled in the wake of the country's chequered past. The deficiencies impact negatively on a wide variety of important issues that range from psychological services provided in primary and secondary schools to entry into higher education and, eventually, to national growth and wellbeing. The article is a must-read for all serious researchers in the field of education and those interested in fairness and merit in South African education.

Conversations

In the lead conversation, *(Re)thinking outcomes-based education: From arborescent to rhizomatic conceptions of outcomes (based-education),* Lesley le Grange reflects on 10 years of outcomes-based education in South Africa up to 2007. He highlights the revisions that OBE has undergone during this period and contends that, despite these revisions, the underlying approach to the national curriculum framework has remained the same. Reflecting on the past ten years, and revisiting the main theoretical arguments that have consistently (and not so consistently!) been levelled against outcomes-based education, he contends that outcomes-based education could be the carrier of alternative constellations of universes, especially if outcomes (-based education) is viewed from a poststructural perspective in terms of **rhizomatically** (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gough, 2004; Sellers, 2006) rather than **arborescently**. While not all may agree with the views expressed here, this contribution nevertheless represents a well-researched, provocative piece of scholarly writing.

South Africa is still struggling to meet the many challenges posed by the country's new democracy. In the second conversation, Gertie Pretorius, in her article *Some thoughts on the search for just and democratic schools in South Africa,* advocates an intervention in the education system to integrate theories of justice as fairness and deliberative democracy, the aim being to honour children's right to learn in freedom and to ensure that every child becomes an

honest and democratic South African citizen. She describes the education system and the schools in that system as a workplace where adults and children can work together as educators and learners to achieve the goal of justice by practising the principles of democracy. She includes her conception of the constructs of *ubuntu*, solidarity and an existential awareness of interrelationships. She explicates her conceptions of justice and democracy and argues that a circular relationship exists between these concepts, something of particular relevance for South Africa.

In the third and final conversation, *Utilising "low tech" analytical frameworks to analyse dyslexic Caribbean students' classroom narratives*, Stacey Blackman explores the cognitive functions of Caribbean students with dyslexia. In an embedded multiple-case study approach to teaching and learning she conducted at two secondary schools on the island of Barbados, she employed "low tech" techniques to analyse what learners had said in interviews by using a Miles and Huberman (1994) analytical framework. The research confirms the usefulness of qualitative methodologies as powerful instruments for informing teachers' pedagogical decisions and also highlights the potential of the learning facilitation environment to meet learners' needs if teachers take the trouble to engage their students in dialogue.

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We are pleased to announce that *PiE* will be accessible online early next year if no hitches occur. We believe that this is a necessary and inevitable step for any publication in the 21st century.

In conclusion we would once again like to encourage you to submit contributions in order to further stimulate debate and advance scholarship on education in South Africa. We ask you to help us expand the existing network between scholars in South Africa, in the SADC region and elsewhere in the world. If you have suggestions for improving the quality of PIE and for making the journal even more useful to our readership, I invite you to contact the *PiE* Office (kobus.maree@up.ac.za). Enjoy reading the current issue and remember to send in your manuscripts!

Lastly: We realise that reviewing manuscripts is a selfless task undertaken by those who have the interests of colleagues, the journal and the scholarly community at large at heart. We would accordingly like to extend a sincere word of thanks to everyone who reviewed articles for *PiE* during the past year.

List of references

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