

Editorial: Reflecting on 16 years of freedom in South African education – from hopeless to hopeful?

KOBUS MAREE

Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

The first issue of *PiE* for 2010 is also the first general issue of the year. As usual, the interested reader will find a captivating collection of national, international, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions. Careful scrutiny, however, will quickly reveal a golden thread running through all these contributions, namely, the education perspective. To a greater or lesser extent, all the contributions deal with matters pertaining to the field of education. Whereas, separately, these contributions represent the fruits of hard work and dedication, together, they provide an imposing collection of perspectives on important issues in the science of education, including the pivotal issues of discovering a pedagogy of hope, mathematics education, inclusion in our classrooms, aspects of religion, as well as developing valid and reliable systems to monitor school and learner achievement. As has been customary for contributors to *PiE* over the years, the authors have positioned their contributions in quantitative and (predominantly) qualitative research traditions in their efforts to shed light and proffer perspective on postmodern educational phenomena. Having identified gaps or silences in the field and literature, they succeed in addressing these silences satisfactorily.

Our contributors are attached to different institutions in South Africa and abroad, and the authorship is therefore diverse in terms of gender, age, institution, and nationality. We are particularly pleased about the number of international contributions, as well as consistent evidence of the rising percentage of younger (and older!) black writers who have selected *PiE* as their publication outlet of choice.

What can the reader expect in this issue?

In the leading contribution, *Searching for a “pedagogy of hope”: teacher education and the social sciences*, Michael Samuel (2010) analyses module outlines within a particular school of social sciences in a faculty of education. Unsurprisingly, he uncovers the evolving systems of teaching social sciences in a teacher education curriculum and reveals that a new language around social sciences is still in the early stages of development. Samuel (2010) contends that the social sciences in teacher education tend to capitulate to external dominant forces and that little evidence exists of engaging with a critical discourse around the potential of teacher education. This results in a perpetuation of an applied science notion of professional growth. In Samuel’s (2010) own words: The paper offers a way to develop a so-called “Creole” or language discourse around the social sciences in general and for teacher education in particular. This is compelling reading for all readers searching for a pedagogy of hope!

In our second contribution, *Implementing a multi-faith religious education curriculum in Botswana junior secondary schools*, Baamphatla Dinama (2010) draws from case studies of four Religious Education (RE) teachers and explores ways in which RE teachers understand and implement a multi-faith Religious Education curriculum in Botswana junior secondary schools. In attempting to gauge the teachers’ understanding and classroom practices, Dinama adopts the concept of the teachers’ professional knowledge landscape as espoused by Clandinin and Connelley (1995). The themes that emerge from the data (pedagogical and content knowledge, assessment, mentoring and collaboration) appear curiously familiar. Readers who deal with multi-faith Religious Education should find the article interesting.

The teaching and learning of mathematics remains high on the agenda of professionals working in the field, be they policy makers, education authorities or mathematics teachers. Our third contribution should therefore be of interest to all these colleagues. Whereas much research has been conducted on the role and importance of visualisation in many fields, little has been done to extend

its role to mathematics education in particular. Likewise, whereas much research has been done on the importance of critical thinking, little has been done to investigate the hypothesis that visualisation is a significant aspect of critical thinking. In *The role of visualisation in developing critical thinking in mathematics*, Antonia Makina (2010) investigates visualisation and examines its role in developing critical thinking for a better understanding of mathematics by Grade 9 learners. Quite expectedly, Makina identifies several visualisation roles and concludes that visualisation encourages critical thinking and, in turn, leads to a better understanding of data handling.

The early reading process can be viewed through a triadic lens, encompassing the child, the parents and the environment, and our next study examines the impact of each of these three components on children's participation in home reading activities as perceived by their parents. Ensa Johnson, Juan Bornman and Erna Alant (2010), in their article entitled *Parents' perceptions of home reading activities: comparing children with and without learning disability*, analyse data obtained from a questionnaire completed by parents of Grade 1 children with and without learning disability. Concluding that children's responses, during story-book reading and their engagement in independent reading, differ, the authors also show that children in their study without learning disability are more involved in the reading process and in independent reading than children with learning disabilities. The authors justifiably deduce that teachers need to encourage parents of Grade 1 children to continue to engage actively in reading activities with their children, even when their children have become independent readers, and should also assist them in the selection of appropriate reading material. Professionals working in the field of inclusive education, in particular, should benefit from reading the results of this study.

In the fifth contribution, *Teacher ratings of academic achievement of children between six and twelve years old from intact and non-intact families*, Lephodisa Molepo, Levison Maunganidze, Pilot Mudhovozi and Tholene Sodi (2010) investigate teacher rating of the impact of parental divorce on the academic achievement of children between 6 and 12 years old for up to 12 months after their parents have divorced. Results reveal that the academic performance of children from non-intact families within the age range of 6 to 9 was inferior to that of their counterparts from intact families. The findings seem to suggest that the experience of parental divorce has a negative impact on children's academic achievement. In an age when divorce rates are ever-increasing, and against the framework of an alarming rise in the number of single-parent families, the findings in this article deserve careful scrutiny and consideration by educators at all levels.

It is common knowledge that the successful implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on educators' dedication and efforts. It is little wonder because inclusive education is based on values such as human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom; values which lie at the very heart of our constitution. In the sixth contribution, *Educators' experiences of inclusive learning contexts: an exploration of competencies*, Ishmael Magare, Ansie Kitching and Vera Roos (2010), while acknowledging the complexity of the interactive relationships between different systems, such as learners, educators, families, schools and the learning context, apply an eco-systemic perspective to an exploration of the experiences of educators in 'ordinary' schools regarding challenges experienced in inclusive learning contexts on the one hand, and identify the competencies they use to deal with some of these challenges, on the other. The results reveal various educator assets, including competencies that enable them to support learners and form collaborative relationships in an inclusive learning environment. This study potentially has implications for departments of education and school management teams and merits study by these professionals.

Contrary to what one might expect, despite the popularity of adventure-based activities in a country such as South Africa, few studies appear to have been conducted on the topic. In the seventh article, *Adolescents' perceptions of an adventure-based programme*, Ronel Bosch and Marietjie Oswald (2010) explore the perceptions of youth regarding their wilderness rites of passage experience and its value in their lives. Operating in an interpretive/constructivist paradigm and employing a qualitative research methodology and content analysis, the authors argue that participation in a wilderness rites of passage programme can contribute to the personal growth and development of youth at risk of experiencing or manifesting emotional or behavioural difficulties in schools and can contribute significantly towards school support for young people.

Numerous authors have argued consistently that reform and improvement are imperative in the current South African education system, and that the monitoring of school and learner achievement is essential for establishing praxis for such improvement. It is, however, a well-known fact that our diversity of culture and the complexity of having 11 official languages make it difficult to develop valid monitoring systems. Developing new monitoring systems for all official languages is being hampered by, among other things, limited resources, time constraints and the need to redress the neglect of large sections of the education infrastructure during the apartheid era. In the eighth article, *Finding the best fit: the adaptation and translation of the Performance Indicators for Primary Schools for the South African context*, Elizabeth Archer, Vanessa Scherman, Robert Coe and Sarah Howie (2010) deal with the adaptation and translation of existing international monitoring instruments as alternative solutions to developing new monitoring systems and investigate how to balance these different processes to create instruments which provide valid data for educational decisions. Speaking from personal experience, I can confirm the crucial importance of the issues debated here.

For various reasons, researchers in the social sciences frequently encounter problems in gleaning information when dealing with topics that are deemed 'sensitive' in and by school management. Principals, for instance, often regard certain issues, e.g. issues of race and religion, as sensitive, and are reluctant to discuss them with researchers. In the last article, *Identifying sensitive issues in education in Limpopo province, South Africa*, Azwidohwi Kutame and Muofhe Mulaudzi (2010) report on an investigation into such sensitive issues in Limpopo province and discuss some of the reasons why principals regard them as sensitive. The authors conclude that certain biographical characteristics are significant mediators in principals' perceptions of sensitive issues in school management and suggest that researchers should consider methodological issues that may influence the investigation so that understanding and giving voice and visibility is not jeopardized when they wish to elicit information on 'sensitive' issues.

As you know by now, after close consultation between the Rector of the University of the Free State, Professor Jonathan Jansen, and the Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Professor Irma Eloff, a decision has been taken to relocate the PiE offices to the Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, from 1 April 2010. This development will facilitate an exciting opportunity for capacity building in the University of the Free State Faculty of Education (*PiE's* new home). The new Editor-in-Chief will be Dennis Francis (Dean of Education, UFS, pie@ufs.ac.za), and the new *PiE* administrator Jaco van der Merwe.

We thank you sincerely for your support over the past ten years and trust that you will continue to support *PiE*. We wish all of you the best in your continued efforts to ensure that *PiE* remains a top-flight scholarly journal in the field of education, not only in Africa but, indeed, globally.

As always, we call on researchers and academics to submit contributions to *PiE* to stimulate debate and advance scholarship on education in South Africa, and to help us expand the existing network of scholars in South Africa, the SADC region, and elsewhere in the world.

We conclude by thanking everybody involved in the editorial and publishing process for their contributions. Our editorial board, our co-editor, Jonathan Jansen, our copy editors, Cecilia du Toit and Carol van der Westhuizen, our publishing editor, Erna Kinsey, our statistics editor, Suria Ellis, our books editor, Everard Weber, and our editorial secretary, Moipone Williams (a special word of appreciation is extended to her predecessor, Renette Keet, who contributed significantly to the journal's growth between 2001 and 2008) deserve a special word of thanks for their help and dedication. We also wish to request colleagues to make themselves available to review articles and to submit their reviews within the time allocated for this pivotal task. We realise that reviewing manuscripts is a selfless task undertaken by those who have the interests of colleagues, the journal and the wider scholarly community at heart. We accordingly extend a sincere word of thanks to everyone who has reviewed articles for *PiE* over the past ten years. Your support is indeed greatly appreciated.

Enjoy reading this issue of PiE.

Kobus Maree

References

- Archer E, Scherman V, Coe R & Howie SJ 2010. Finding the best fit: the adaptation and translation of the Performance Indicators for Primary Schools for the South African context. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:77-88.
- Bosch R & Oswald M 2010. Adolescents' perceptions of an adventure-based programme. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:64-76.
- Clandinin DJ & Connelley FM 1995. *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dinama B 2010. Implementing a multi-faith Religious Education curriculum in Botswana junior secondary schools. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:16-23.
- Johnson E, Bornman J & Alant E 2010. Parents' perceptions of home reading activities: comparing children with and without learning disability. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:34-43.
- Kutame AP & Mulaudzi MP 2010. Identifying sensitive issues in education in Limpopo province, South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:89-97.
- Magare I, Kitching AE & Roos V 2010. Educators' experiences of inclusive learning contexts: an exploration of competencies. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:52-63.
- Makina A 2010. The role of visualisation in developing critical thinking in mathematics. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:24-33.
- Molepo LS, Maunganidze L, Mudhovozi P & Sodi T 2010. Teacher ratings of academic achievement of children between six and twelve years old from intact and non-intact families. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:44-51.
- Samuel M 2010. Searching for a "pedagogy of hope": teacher education and the social sciences. *Perspectives in Education*, 28:5-15.