However in order to get schools working this debate needs to become a siyakhuluma which draws in unions, parents, and the broader community.

In conclusion, one wants to encourage the authors not to take their gaze away from teachers and from education managers. Research needs to listen to their heartbeat. It is important that the system knows its teachers, understands why they are demoralized, and acquires, with some urgency, the means to motivate people in this delicate ecology known as school.

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One of the dilemmas faced by critical scholars since the unbanning of the African National Congress, was what kind of posture to assume in relation to the first democratic government installed in 1994. A craft long refined on the basis of its incisive criticisms of apartheid education, suddenly floundered in the face of what was struggled for: a non-racial government apparatus that (at least so it seemed) took seriously the interests of the black underclasses. To be sure, there were real prizes to be won as desperate comrades scrambled for lucrative positions within the new government; for others it was more simple – a sense of loyalty to a nationalist movement that had suddenly gained power. The question remained: how does one become articulate, as a critical scholar, under the new state? In this respect, the Education Policy Unit (EPU) of the University of the Witwatersrand must be commended for retaining one of those rich traditions from the anti-apartheid struggle viz., an incisive and unrelenting critique of the state and education against the backdrop of growing inequalities and new class formations.

The primary vehicle for this scholarship of criticism was the EPU’s Quarterly Review of Education and Training (Q RET), which appeared in annual volumes of about four issues each since the early 1990s. For regular recipients of the Q RET, the relevance of this bound publication—The South African Education Policy Review—might therefore sound redundant. It contains, after all, the 29 previous issues of Q RET, spread over seven volumes, from September 1993 through December 2000, and covering more than 800 pages of education policy content.
But the value of this bound collection cannot be underestimated. For one, it provides in one place some of the best analytic accounts of education policy from the dawn of our democracy through some of the most turbulent periods in education reconstruction. Second, it offers a compendium of both content and references on education policy for referencing by both postgraduate students and academic researchers in education. And third, it traces the evolution of official thinking and scholarly criticism in the post-1994 period with respect to education policy, planning and practice.

Readers should, however, have modest expectations of this collection. It was always intended primarily as a survey of education policy developments which, in addition to serving as briefing material for its generous donor – the Swedish International Development Agency – applied various kinds of critical analyses to an otherwise descriptive account of new and changing government policies on education. It was never intended, therefore, as original research on education policy, even though the odd issue or article within an issue represented some of the best education scholarship found in any academic journal. In this respect of "the best education scholarship" I would refer readers to Shireen Motala's review of provincial finance and capacity (pp. 385-414), Nazir Carrim and Margaret Tshoane's critique of the values in education movement (pp. 801-834), and Salim Vally's well-phrased position "Between fiscal austerity and 'Getting Learning Right' " (pp. 559-585).

For all the merits of this collection, there are shortcomings. The reliance on mainly young and inexperienced researchers, often writing for the first time, meant that some of the content description was shallow and some of the analyses, well, quite embarrassing. There is a tendency in some issues for personal polemics to overshadow intellectual nuance; for description to overpower analysis; for deadlines to be honoured at the cost of depth. The problem is that EPUs have seldom been able to attract and retain in their ranks senior scholars, given the weak support from their universities and the dependence on external funding – risky contexts for academics trying to build their careers. And this shows in some of the volumes, issues and individual articles. Despite these inevitable shortcomings, I believe that historians, policy analysts and advanced students will find great benefit in this tangible collection of memories, moments and movements in the recent history of South African education.

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