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# Editorial

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## Editorial Committee

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Articles in this edition raise critical issues lying at the heart of knowledge and pedagogy in relation to context, culture and the state. While the context is (South) African, the issues have a far wider theoretical interest.

Our first two articles address issues that in different ways are central to the well-being and transformation of education in South Africa: HIV/AIDS, and social justice.

As the research enterprise gains momentum in South Africa it is perhaps inevitable that empirical, localised case studies will predominate, and that there will be a time lag before broader reviews and overviews become available. Baxen and Breidlid offer a welcome and timely overview of research into HIV/AIDS and education, arguing strongly for a careful interrogation of the dominant discourses underlying HIV/AIDS research within the education sector through due acknowledgement of the social and cultural embeddedness of the pandemic. The authors develop a rigorous critique of various research orientations over the past ten years, and systematically identify gaps in current research. A critical argument the authors make is that although these studies have relevance, they neglect to provide an understanding of the situated context in which knowledge, attitudes, practices and interventions are produced and reproduced. Many of these studies make questionable assumptions about the individual and context, and fail to take into consideration the discursive nature of perceptions and practices regarding the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in particular in schools. Apart from its important implications for intervention practices, Baxen and Breidlid's coherent argument identifies gaps in current research and provides direction for future research.

Pendlebury and Enslin provide a timely review of South Africa's progress towards the achievement of social justice in and through education. Especially useful to the research community is their broad framework, based on the philosophical underpinnings of social justice, for examining the extent to which both society generally, and education more specifically, are or are not achieving social justice. The strengths of the article lie not in empirical research, but in its ability to construct a consistent and thorough structure for

understanding social justice. It works not from the specifics of oppression outwards, but from the philosophical framework inwards, using specific accounts as examples that test the application of principles arrived at. A particular merit of the paper is that it avoids underestimating the number of obstacles to social justice by viewing them with a too narrow focus. Its use of the word 'exclusion', for example, does not get caught in the trap of seeing inclusion or exclusion solely as aspects of institutional life – the broader societal issues by which people are subject to exclusion are fully recognised. Political and educational inclusion are inextricably interwoven. In a specific case, the nature of exclusion may thus be fairly complex.

We move next to the political relationship between the state and higher education. Globally, the impact of changing social, economic and knowledge contexts upon educational systems has caused a move away from the traditional model of autonomous professionalism in which curriculum was the business of teachers. Governments everywhere have sought to ensure that the outcomes of learning and standards of achievement are explicitly the business of the state (Day and Sachs, 2004). The South African government has been no exception. As Jansen (2004) has shown, recent history of higher education has been one of changing meanings with respect to institutional autonomy and accountability, with the latter being strongly asserted by the emergent post-apartheid state. In our third article, Shalem, Allais and Steinberg criticise current 'outcomes based' approaches to assessment as experienced by the researchers themselves in a recent real life situation. Their proposed course was evaluated by the ETDQA (the quality assurance division of the Education, Training and Development Practitioners Sectoral Education and Training Authority). Evaluators of their programme clearly saw their role in terms of clear steps in a linear, technical/bureaucratic process. The difficulty identified by the authors lay in the gap between two discourses: the discourse of disciplinary knowledge on the one hand, and the discourse of specification of outcomes on the other. They defend the integrity of discipline-specific knowledge, arguing persuasively that decisions about academic quality cannot take place through a process that condenses knowledge into outcomes. In arguing for practitioners themselves being entrusted with responsibility for the quality of their service, Shalem et. al. open up important lines of debate with the potential to impact positively on policy and practice. By implication they also open up fundamental questions about the simplistic linear view of causality inherent in the application of an outcome-based system. Although the case is local, the underlying issue is not. At stake is exactly the same tension John Elliott identifies in 'standards-driven educational reform' in the

United Kingdom. In Elliott's view, policy makers view the learning environment as:

a closed and linear system governed by laws of cause and effect. Such a system leaves little space for the 'personal', for the cultivation of the individual learner as a unique centre of consciousness with a distinctive point of view, endowed with particular talents and abilities, and possessing particular characteristics (2004, p.284).

Staying within higher education, we move next to a study of students' research learning. In his very successful *A sociology of educating* text, with editions spanning almost two decades, Meighan has consistently included a perspective on pupils/students as clients, noting that their views and realities are seldom represented in the literature. With learner-centredness being one of the underpinning principles of curriculum policy in South Africa, the dearth of views and perspectives of learners is even more surprising. In our third article, Jansen, Herman and Pillay bring students into the research gaze in an innovative and refreshing study that tracks students' research learning in a PhD programme. Academics with supervisory experience will identify readily with some of the problems, such as candidates approaching research problems with a 'missionary-like' purpose. However, the contribution of this study lies in the categories of analysis that emerge. One of the significant changes was that in seeking to make a difference to the world, the relentless focus on having to formulate and reformulate their research questions ultimately left students with the realization that change and growth had occurred instead at a personal level.

As in the Shalem *et al.* article, here we have another study that points out the limitations of recipe-type knowledge grounded in linear assumptions about causation. In this exploratory study, Jansen and his colleagues thus open up an important and fruitful line of inquiry. An obvious further step would be to track student growth from the proposal development stage through to project completion.

In different ways, our final three articles deal with the issue of knowledge. With disciplinarity in teacher education seemingly on the retreat (e.g. see Harley and Wedekind, 2003; Parker, 2003), Hugo provides a rich theoretical argument that draws on Plato and Bernstein. In a strikingly original juxtaposition, he develops a theory of pedagogic hierarchy that both Plato and Bernstein could reasonably be regarded as ascribing to. From Plato, we follow two different vertical paths. One is for the heart, the other for the mind, but both entail a similar shift from the physical to the abstract. For Plato,

structured guidance up the Ladder of Beauty is what pedagogy is in its essence. The ladder increases in both depth and breadth as it expands upwards and inwards. Following the Cave metaphor, it is argued that the challenge for pedagogy is to turn the learner around to look into what is causing the display. In this way the learner transfers from the instability and momentariness of immediate context towards the more stable force lying behind the production. Hugo's interpretation of Plato is interestingly infused with Bernsteinian terminology, such as in: "The first thing a prisoner sees who is set free from dependence on one classifying device is a higher ordering device that regulates its lower field." From here there is an easy movement to Bernstein's pedagogic device and images of ways to free ourselves from the grip of context-bound understanding in a way that enables movement from the profane to the sacred. Bernstein's distinctive contribution is locating the process within the power and control relationships in which the terrain is embedded.

Although Hugo does not address South African curriculum policy, his position has an interesting resonance with arguments pointing out the shortcomings of policy rooted in strong pedagogy, but weak epistemology (e.g. see Review Committee, 2000; Muller, 2000; Taylor, 2001). However, the distinctive appeal of Hugo's contribution lies in its promise of transformation beyond the cognitive domain. Knowledge, truth, goodness and beauty are all at stake in the journey we undertake.

Our final two articles contributed by Waghid and Le Grange arise from a debate in *Journal of Education* 30. In that issue, Higgs' (2003) quest for a philosophical framework that respects diversity and challenges the hegemony of Western forms of universal knowledge leads to his argument that African philosophy as a system of African knowledge/s can enable communities in South Africa to participate in their own educational development. Higgs argues for the recovery of communalism, ubuntu, and humanism. In the same issue, Parker responds by arguing that Higgs' discourse is disembodied from particular contexts and their histories. Parker himself presents Africana philosophy as a coherent sub-set development within the broad field of African philosophy: it is an umbrella term that covers a range of approaches, at least some of which are explicitly opposed in their orientations. Notwithstanding this apparent difference, Waghid maintains that the Higgs and Parker arguments are in fact closer together than appears to be the case. In particular, he sees Parker's (2003) call for Africana philosophy of education as a kind of activism which could cultivate critical, argumentative reason and

fragility and trust among vulnerable (African) communities as being commensurate with Higgs's notion of an African philosophy of education which has the potential to liberate disempowered communities through critical reasoning and humaneness (*ubuntu*). Waghid argues that since the African continent is central to philosophy (and philosophy of education), the African-Africana philosophy of education distinction is a somewhat misdirected debate. By implication, Waghid prefers the concept of an African-Africana philosophy of education because these two concepts are theoretically intertwined. From this position, he explores the nature of deliberative inquiry with a view to informing ways of shaping university teaching in South Africa.

In our final article, Le Grange identifies gaps in both Higgs's and Parker's arguments, and strives for a more nuanced reading of African(a) philosophy. However, he contends that Parker's categorisation of analytic discourses versus the (neo) Fundamental Pedagogics discourses is cruder than that of Higgs. In this sense, Le Grange suggests that Parker is culpable of precisely that for which he critiques Higgs. Parker's notion of Africana philosophy is said to be nothing more than an extension of the universalist position in African philosophy. Le Grange's main project, nevertheless, is to explore the potential of African(a) philosophy as deconstructive force. Possibly still mindful of the hegemonic status of Fundamental Pedagogics in our recent past, Le Grange argues that hope for education in (South) Africa depends on recounting visions of Africa's history and reconstructing it to the present. He urges the displacement of dominant discourses, including those evident in South African policy documents such as the Norms and Standards for Educators.

As an Editorial Committee, we do not believe that the Higgs/Parker debate has run its course. Contentious and unresolved issues – such as the nature of the relationship between African and Africana philosophy – remain. Because of space constraints and our policy of representing a broad research agenda, and because of the risk of one particular debate dominating the Journal,<sup>1</sup> we encourage further comment on the Higgs/Parker 'indigenous' knowledges debate in the form of 'discussion notes' (as outlined in Notes for Contributors) rather than full articles.

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<sup>1</sup> Although not addressing the Higgs/Parker debate as their main thrust, one notes that in recent issues the journal has also published articles by Moodie (2003) and Horsthemke (2004) on the theme of western/indigenous knowledges.

At the same time, it is timely to outline editorial policy with respect to ‘right of reply’ in response to critiques published in *Journal of Education*. It is perhaps trite to observe that tightly-focused critique of the work of an individual, or a constituted body, is an inherent and inevitable feature of the research terrain. The Editorial Committee has no doubt that well argued critique should be published if it passes the scrutiny of peer review. More contentious is the issue of ‘right of reply’ in a way that is fair to both the critiquing and replying author. Earlier issues of *Journal of Education* published critique and response alongside each other in the same issue. Readers generally appeared to approve of this practice because of its immediacy and convenience, and the practice was feasible when there were relatively long intervals between successive issues of the journal. However, in the light of commitment to publish at least four issues of the journal per year, coupling critique and response would entail either (a) delaying publication of the critique until a suitable response had been negotiated and peer reviewed, or (b) taking short cuts with the peer review process in order to publish both articles concurrently and timeously. Neither option would be acceptable. We have to add that, for the Editorial Committee, a prior difficulty with arranging a response to critique is deciding when such a practice should justifiably be invoked. For example, should automatic ‘right of reply’ be extended to statutory bodies as well as to individual theorists whose work is of sufficient weight to warrant serious enquiry?<sup>2</sup> The Editorial Committee has consequently resolved not to initiate responses to published critiques, but to leave the matter of response to the judgement of our readership and to the views of submitting authors.

Once again, we are indebted to the public-spirited anonymous referees without whose kind services this journal could not begin to function.

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<sup>2</sup> Critique arising from the Shalem *et al.* article in this issue is a case in point in this issue. Should automatic ‘right of reply’ have been extended to the ETDQA? Or to Parker in the light of Le Grange’s article?

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# Researching HIV/AIDS and education in Sub-Saharan Africa: examining the gaps and challenges

Jean Baxen and Anders Breidlid

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## Abstract

In this paper we argue that research in HIV/AIDS within the education sector is largely influenced by dominant discourses within economics, medicine and epidemiology sectors which, by and large, fail to take into consideration the social and cultural embeddedness of the disease. Through a critique of the current research conducted in the last ten years, we trace three major trends of research in HIV/AIDS and education and suggest that these trends, while useful, neglect the situated context in which messages, knowledge, experience and practice are produced, reproduced and expressed. We suggest that new research has to pay close attention to developing an understanding of where and how knowledge is produced and reproduced if this sector is to contribute to enabling teachers and learners to make informed choices about their behavioural practices.

## Introduction

While the health and economic sectors in many countries where HIV/AIDS has been prevalent seem to have recognised and explored the impact of this pandemic on their respective sectors for a while now, sectors such as education and social services have remained peripheral to the debates until very recently (Johnson, 2000). This seems partly due to the relatively low number of people dying of HIV/AIDS in comparison to those infected. The upshot is that even though much has been written about the projected impact of HIV/AIDS on the education sector (Coombe, 2000; Coombe, 2001; Johnson, 2000; Kelly, 2000), the effect of the pandemic on this sector as a whole is only beginning to enter research debates.

There is a growing acceptance that a key strategy in combating the pandemic involves an intersectoral approach which draws on health, education and social welfare systems and structures (Coombe, 2000). Notwithstanding, education, as Kelly suggests, “might be the single most powerful weapon against HIV

transmission” (Kelly, 2000, p.9) since, through it, potential messages that can lead to a change in sexual behaviour are transmitted.

On one level, researchers around the world seem to agree with Kelly since much has been written about the perceived efficacy of education programmes and how education, particularly formal schooling, might be one of the key combatant strategies against the virus (Kelly, 2002; Coombe, 2000). The underlying assumption that these authors make is that schools have a ‘captive’ audience: children, many of whom, it is assumed, may not be sexually active. The assumption too, is that providing children with sufficient knowledge may serve to delay their sexual debut and enable them to make informed decisions regarding their sexual practices and behaviours.

In this article we explore how and in what way current educational research has facilitated a better understanding of schooling, teaching and learning about, and in the context of, HIV/AIDS. In short, we explore what is/has been the educational research agenda, how it is shaped, and what the underlying assumptions are of the research questions posed. Moreover we focus on what has been researched and how the research in education has contributed to and extended the debates about HIV/AIDS. Through an analysis of current research, this article seeks to highlight the gaps in the research by paying attention to the kind of educational research conducted in the last decade nationally and internationally on HIV/AIDS and education.

In particular, this article seeks to use the issues above as the catalyst for a critique of the focus and nature of research carried out within the educational sector. It argues that this research, particularly within a South African context, is limited in scope because the context as a discursive field, (which includes social and cultural practices) is either absent or unaccounted for in many of the studies under scrutiny. Such scrutiny becomes apparent when viewed against two critical considerations; the changing nature of the disease and its increasing prevalence amongst heterosexual populations and its major effect on Third World populations such as Sub-Saharan Africa where prevalence is amongst the highest in the world. Briefly, what makes this pandemic different in these third world contexts, such as the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, is its prevalence amongst heterosexual communities, a phenomenon not as ubiquitous in first world contexts (even though there might be a growing number of reported cases). This shift in prevalence brings with it new challenges of how the disease is perceived, experienced, understood, responded to and researched amongst different groups within and across

communities. What now seems necessary, are different sets of questions that extend the debate beyond *what we know* about the disease to *how we come to know* what we perceive to know. In its argument, this article postulates that one way of refocusing the agenda is by interrogating the underlying assumptions of the research on HIV/AIDS and this by examining *what* research and *how* research is conducted and by *whom*, using *which* methodological lenses.

The field of education, the paper argues, can contribute meaningfully to understanding the discursive fields of practice in which messages and knowledge about the pandemic are articulated, produced, reproduced by not merely reproducing forms of research that respond to *what we come to know* but *how or whether we can come to know*. This includes raising questions regarding the nature and focus of research in educational contexts. A shift in the nature and focus of research needs to pay close attention to *where and how* the production and reproduction of the HIV/AIDS discourse takes place. This discourse should be understood within deeply embedded *situated, discursive spaces* [contexts] where social and cultural practices are negotiated, produced and reproduced. Within such spaces the linearity of knowledge and behavioural practices cannot be assumed. Significant to this discussion is a consideration of these spaces as negotiated and as complex, sometimes contradictory and conflictual, but always in the process of becoming, thereby making messages not always easily reproducible.

Through a brief review of the nature of research on HIV/AIDS in educational settings, the next section of the paper provides a quick glimpse into the current research landscape. In a critical discussion, the final section provides a rationale for considering context and culture as key elements in understanding the discourse of HIV/AIDS and schooling.

## Research in education: where is 'the gaze'?

Within the last decade, the majority of studies within education contexts may be categorised within *three* broad areas of research, namely: *projective, KAP-type (knowledge, attitude and practice), and impact studies*.<sup>1</sup> While the contexts [primarily limited to geographic site], target groups and sites may

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<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Kathleen McDougall for the collection of some of the research material presented here.

have differed, the fundamental research questions posed seemed to be shaped by a need to answer the question ‘what’ is known and perceived by various target groups, with little attention to ‘how’ they come to know and ‘where’ [discursively] the knowledge they have is produced and reproduced. Through a brief analysis of each broad area of research in education, the perceived omissions, gaps and challenges are outlined below.

## Projective studies within sub-saharan contexts

Several studies commissioned in recent years (e.g. Johnson, 2000; The World Bank, 2000) indicate that little is known about the effects of the pandemic on the various components within the education sector, particularly those in third world contexts. This is partly due to the lack of research in this field but also due to policies that, while protecting the rights of the individual on the one hand, serve to disadvantage the very persons they propose to protect. The studies, many of which are based on projections, do, however, provide a broad framework for understanding the projected impact this pandemic will have of the education sector.

One such study is that conducted by Johnson (2000). In this study he suggests that the education sector firstly needs to acknowledge that HIV/AIDS education is not only about ensuring good life skills and other prevention programmes. It has to recognize that a significant percentage of the teaching corps will become ill and die. He warns that learner numbers will at first escalate, but thereafter decline due to either illness or home circumstances. By using customised projections of levels of infection and illness, Johnson intimates that HIV/AIDS will magnify the existing social and health problems experienced within the education sector. Not only will schools have to deal with aspects such as absenteeism by teachers, but they will have to deal with children who are affected, infected and orphaned as a result of the pandemic. According to Johnson (2000), schools will need to be involved in identifying vulnerable children and in finding ways to enable them to cope under severe circumstances.

Cohen (2002) seems to support Johnson by suggesting that the impact of HIV/AIDS in education is primarily related to the decimation of manpower. Nevertheless, it is argued that there is insufficient data to give more or less reliable projections.

HIV/AIDS will affect education through a

reduction in demand and supply, reduction in availability of resources, adjustments in response to the special needs of a rapidly increasing number of orphans, adaptation to new interactions both within schools and between schools and communities, curriculum modifications, altered roles that have to be adopted by teachers and the education system, the ways in which schools and the education system are organised, the planning and management of the system, and the donor support for education (Kelly, 2000, p.1).

Like Kelly (2000), Akoulouze, Rugalema and Khanye (2001) note that due to HIV/AIDS:

- there will be less and less demand for education as orphans (especially girls) leave school
- teachers will also leave the education system due to their own ill-health or the need to look after others
- education departments will not be able to make reliable predictions about future needs. The departments will also suffer personnel losses in administration, management and support areas.

Along a similar vein, Coombe (2000) describes how the education sector in South Africa might manage the impact of HIV/AIDS. Her study cites teachers as one of the population groups especially at risk because they are “educated, mobile and relatively affluent” (Coombe, 2000, p.15). As part of the response strategy, she suggests a multi-sectoral approach to the pandemic, one that moves the focus away from viewing HIV/AIDS as a health problem, to one which acknowledges that it is a social and institutional problem. She proposes that one area of focus should be on enabling teachers to gain a better understanding of the way in which HIV/AIDS will impact on their professional lives. The proposal is that teachers should also be made aware of how other sectors are losing staff that will need to be replaced. Moreover, attention must be paid to developing strategies that will respond to the pandemic in creative ways. These strategies, it is suggested, will need to consider, amongst other things, training replacement personnel (Coombe, 2000).

The accuracy of the projections described above is not under discussion here. Rather, the contribution these studies make is useful in as much as they provide a broad overview of the potential problem that education sectors might experience at the systemic level, in the face of this pandemic. In this regard, they have been invaluable in drawing attention to the need for a

response, some pro-activity or strategic planning within education ministries. Notwithstanding, they have not addressed - and indeed were not intended to address - what is actually happening at the chalk-face, in schools and classrooms. Their contribution has been, by and large, at a policy and advocacy level forcing some recognition for action within the echelons of education ministries on the one hand, and the need to further research [on schools, teachers, learners and such like] on the other hand, which the next category of studies attempts to address.

### Knowledge, attitude and practice studies (KAP-studies) on HIV/AIDS

Within this category, studies (see, e.g. Wood et. al., 1997; Levine and Ross, 2002) have sought to examine and gain some understanding of *what* knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP studies) those participating in the educational endeavour (teachers, youth, and adolescents) carry. Often these studies have as their main outcome recommendations towards the development of 'effective' prevention strategies for those perceived as 'most vulnerable' [in many instances adolescents and youth between 14-24]. This trend of researching through KAP studies is consistent with earlier research carried out within the medical, health and social welfare sectors that have a longer history of researching the pandemic.

In the field of education, what these studies assume is a correlational link between knowledge and behaviour since the primary aim of such studies (and use of results) has been to contribute to the development of 'more effective' prevention programmes. The upshot, as will be evident in the next section, is a delinking of the individual from context and culture; a downplay of the discursive nature of the pandemic and the cultural and social practices in which it is embedded; a presupposition about children in primary schools as asexual and, as such, mostly high school children are the target of research and intervention programmes; an assumption that teachers can, are able to and will teach about deeply private, personal topics in a public space which brings their own sexuality and sexual practices into the spotlight; an assumption that the content (e.g. biological nature of the disease) of research is uncontested; the dislocation of sexual identity from cultural and social discourses; a disembeddedness of sexual identity from larger debates about power and gender and, finally, inferences about the uncontested nature of the research process.

## Youth and HIV/AIDS

The focus in research on youth and HIV/AIDS has by and large been on knowledge about the disease and the relation between knowledge and reproductive health. An emerging body of research concentrating on socio-cultural contexts forms the second strand of research in this section.

### Knowledge on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health

There is very little co-ordinated information on what South African youth know about reproductive health. Judging from some of the studies, some South African youth have a *very* sketchy understanding of reproduction, puberty and sexually transmitted diseases (Wood, Maepa and Jewkes, 1997). This study found that teenagers had very little sexual knowledge prior to and during the first few months of sexual activity, including not being aware that intercourse can result in pregnancy. Similar conclusions were drawn by Harrison, Xaba, Kunene and Ntuli (2001) who found that girls in KwaZulu Natal had poor factual knowledge of sex. Such misinformation included cultural myths which reinforced beliefs that evil spirits would eat one if there was a delayed sexual debut. A further aspect of cultural myth was that boys would experience pain later if they did not have sex while young. Boys who did not have sex while still young would accumulate sperm and be more likely to impregnate a girl later.

Levine and Ross (2002) investigated the knowledge and attitudes towards AIDS of undergraduate university students. They found that although students had knowledge of the sexual transmission of AIDS, they did not report knowledge of vertical transmission.

However, this trend seems to be changing in some communities. In a study commissioned by the Department of Health, Kelly (2000) found that youth had good access to accurate HIV/AIDS information, and were regularly exposed to such information.

### Socio-economic and cultural constraints

As has already been suggested, young people are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, with most HIV infection occurring amongst this group (Rivers and Aggleton, 1999; Le-Clerc-Madlala, 2002). They do, however, face a great many problems in protecting their sexual and reproductive health partly as a

consequence of external pressures (socio-economic and cultural) within the contexts they find themselves, and partly as a result of how adolescence is commonly constructed, that is, as a time of high risk and low responsibility. While in more former traditional societies, sex education was offered by the community, this practice is no longer widespread or common, in part due to rapid urbanisation and migration disrupting community networks (Rivers and Aggleton, 1999). In more recent times, the prevalence is for youth to receive information from peers and from the media (Rivers and Aggleton, 1999) with girls often not being the target of information campaigns. During this period, it seems that adults are less certain of their roles than in the past with teachers feeling particularly vulnerable in this regard. In many countries, teachers have reportedly complained of being embarrassed and ill-prepared to talk about sex with children. Here the very fluidity between the traditional and the modern may leave both adults and young people marooned.

Cohen (2002) describes the context of education programmes including school environments that are not safe or health-affirming, huge gaps between home and school, poverty and concomitant fatalism, disempowered women and images of masculinity that include promiscuity. Other studies confirm that the socio-economic and cultural factors are major constraints in effecting behavioural sexual changes. These factors include the exchange of sex for material compensation (Rivers and Aggleton 1999), alternative strategies for HIV protection, so-called cultural logic systems (Easton 1999; Sobo, 1995) and class, education and religious affiliation as perceived protective mechanisms (Levine and Ross, 2002). Moreover, polygyny (the encouragement of multiple sexual partners), traditional medicine, repressive customary law and culturally defined control over women (Levine and Ross, 2002) all contribute to making efficient HIV protection more difficult.

So, it would seem that even when readily available, 'knowledge' does not necessarily protect teenagers because some South Africans are constructing their sexual identity and their safety from infection in terms of competing knowledge systems (Skinner, 2001) and within contexts that produce, reproduce and send conflicting messages to the youth.

### Teachers and HIV/AIDS

At a systemic or macro level, projections of how teachers are affected were discussed earlier. At a micro level, teachers are affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in a number of ways. On one level they are, of course, affected by

their students' infection, and by the spread of the disease in their communities. On another level, they themselves may be at risk of infection, or they may indeed be living with HIV/AIDS.

Notwithstanding the above, there is a marked lack of studies that focus research at the micro level, in this instance: teachers and schools. In some studies where teachers have been subjects of research (e.g. Akoulouze et. al., 2001), they have been positioned as deliverers of an uncontested, already negotiated body of HIV/AIDS knowledge within spaces (schools and institutions) that are unproblematic. In this regard, teachers have consequently been targets of training programmes that have largely portrayed them as lacking *knowledge and skills* to teach lifeskills or sex education programmes effectively.

Other studies have attempted to describe teachers as more 'vulnerable' than the rest of society, citing reasons such as mobility as a key indicator (Kelly, 2002), this with the view to developing intervention programmes for them. Some (e.g. Bennel, 2003) have sought to negate this assumption by providing evidence that makes the argument of teacher vulnerability unsustainable. Emerging work<sup>2</sup> by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2003) for example, shifts the spotlight back to systemic issues through a large-scale study on demand and supply of teachers within South Africa. While such studies are important, and will indeed move the debate beyond a projection to what is actually happening at the chalk-face, teachers as agents who act within conflicting discursive spaces are absent from the debate.

Studies such as those of Buczekiewicz and Carnegie (2001) suggest that translating HIV knowledge into behaviour change means a change in how teachers teach. But, as they propose, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to reduplicate the conditions of their training, and so difficult to reduplicate the methods they were taught. In addition, they believe teachers need detailed guidance on content.

## Studies on intervention and training programmes

Many studies (suggested earlier in this paper) have confirmed that education is vital in the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS. For example, Kaufman

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<sup>2</sup> This research is currently in progress and the results are not yet available.

(2002) asserts, by describing and assessing the impact of community resources (such as educational levels) on adolescent safe sex practices, that education has a powerful effect on the degree to which young people engage in risky sexual behaviour.

Our findings suggest that schools have ample latitude to promote the knowledge, understanding, and skills to enable young people to make responsible decisions about their sexual behaviour. They also suggest that educational effects may persist after school is completed, because the educational levels of other household members are found to have an important association with risky behaviour (Kaufman, 2002).

Therefore, in finding ways to increase awareness of and suggest preventative measures against the disease, lifeskills and sex education programmes have been developed within the formal school sector. These programmes have been aimed at providing children (in particular, the youth) with accurate information about the disease. Rivers and Aggleton (1999) note that school-based interventions are necessarily limited to youth in school. The emphasis is on secondary schools as the target group. For instance, in South Africa, many sex education programmes are limited, but not exclusive to, secondary school pupils as targets. This is despite research showing that interventions are most successful before the sexual debut (Rivers and Aggleton, 1999) on the one hand, and that primary schools are significant sites for the construction and reproduction of sexual identity among children (Renold, 2000; Wallis and VanEvery, 2000) on the other hand. The omission of such contextual realities viewed against the backdrop of where HIV/AIDS prevalence is highest, namely in developing countries, in which many people, especially girls, leave school after primary school and where the attendance of girl-children is irregular (Rivers and Aggleton, 1999) and in some cases low, brings into sharp focus the limitation of such research foci (interventions at secondary schools).

While there is no question that some intervention programmes have a notable degree of success in increasing knowledge, it cannot be assumed that this knowledge will lead to behaviour change (Grunseit and Aggleton, 1998). Indeed, a substantial literature review conducted by Grunseit and Aggleton (1998) shows that of the 53 studies reviewed, as many as 27 showed no effect on youth sexual practices.

In an attempt to examine ways of increasing the possibility of behavioural change, Wight (1999) finds that learner driven classes do not work as well as teacher driven ones. Wight argues that there are severe limits to the efficacy of

pupil empowerment in sex and HIV/AIDS education. Skinner (2001), however, finds that educators were seen as out of touch with youth. He describes this as another factor distancing youth from scientific information and making them inclined to look to alternative sources of knowledge.

Mirembe (2002) on the other hand, advocates learner involvement as a way of combating 'information fatigue' (see also Levine and Ross (2002)). She hypothesises that programmes would be more successful if learners were involved in devising and running them and suggests that there is a relationship between democratic classroom practice and programme success.

## Context, culture and HIV/AIDS

Prevalent in the research, particularly in South Africa, is the untheorised manner in which constructs such as culture and the associated concept of cultural values are used despite their employment in studies focusing on knowledge, attitude and behaviour regarding HIV/AIDS. There are a number of conceptual issues that arise from the literature on cultural values, and on cultural values and HIV/AIDS. The first, and most important, is that the terms 'culture' or 'traditional culture' are often used to signify an essentialist African culture without careful definition of which African culture is being referred to. It is not clear in the South African research context to what extent the behaviour of Xhosa adolescents (Wood et. al., 1996) can be compared with the behaviour of, for instance, Zulu adolescents (Tillotson and Maharaj, 2001). Of course this is to some extent an indication of the South African problematic, where both the colonial and apartheid governments invested heavily in the idea of distinct cultural groups (Ntshoe, 1999; Fleisch, 1995). There is no discussion in the research reviewed of the fluidity of culture, neither in terms of a continuum of 'traditional' and 'modern' behaviour, nor in terms of relationships between different cultures, language and ethnicity. Often in both apartheid and post-apartheid discourse 'culture' is interpreted as a transcript for racial heritage. As such, researchers in the reviewed literature sometimes conflate language group and culture, explaining that, for example, the sample consists of Zulu-speaking South Africans which may also indicate that the sample may be defined as of the Zulu culture. In some studies, however, it may be inferred that the results are indicative of a specific culture's values (for instance, LeClerc 2001, 2002, Breidlid, 2002). What this brief discussion illustrates is that culture, particularly in the South African context, is a difficult term and this may go some way to explaining the

reluctance of researchers to engage directly with the term in defining their sample or in theorizing their results.

While it is acknowledged that often tradition is subsumed in modern practices and vice-versa, tension can exist where communities are still very traditional and youth are influenced by both tradition and modernity, thereby making difficult the challenge of navigating their way within social and cultural practices that are fluid and sometimes contradictory (Breidlid, 2002).

There are some indications that a more unified approach may be taken to South African values regarding HIV/AIDS. Wood and Jewkes (1997) completed a cross-racial project on the significance of adolescent gift-giving to the dynamics of sexual decision-making. Although their small focus group study found differences between the responses of different races, these may be characterized as mere differences of degree. Smith et. al. (1999) discuss social discourse as a factor in the efficacy of intervention programmes, noting that information about HIV/AIDS tends to be disseminated through rumour and gossip, and recommend that intervention programmes target social networks. This also opens up the possibility that culture should be thought of more broadly as groups associated by ways of communicating as well as (or even rather than) heritage.

Although a number of South African studies acknowledge explicitly or implicitly the importance of cultural context in the efficacy of intervention programmes, few reviewed here have set out to study the influence of cultural belief on sexual negotiation and behaviour. In other words, although a number of studies *describe* South African cultural beliefs that have bearing on sexual behaviour, the impact of cultural beliefs on sexual behaviour, negotiation and change is a matter of conjecture. Specifically, no studies reviewed here are investigations of the intersection between either cultural context or cultural beliefs, and intervention programme efficacy. The reason for this may be the sensitiveness of the issue due to issues of class, ethnicity and gender, and may also be deemed politically incorrect in a nation striving to achieve a national identity across the former differences. One such example, however, is a study by Cohen (2002) who suggests that cultural aspects (besides socio-economic circumstances) present serious constraints in the attempt to fight the pandemic. Similarly, Archie-Booker and Langone (1999) suggest that HIV/AIDS prevention education must be responsive to culture in order to be effective. They examine what prevents an intervention programme from being culturally relevant. Their results are a reminder that the generation and efficacy of

culturally sensitive intervention programmes is not only a matter of understanding the community, but of how the organisation offering the intervention operates.

Few studies actively integrate the political or economic culture of the participants into the discussion, although these are also significant determinants of, for instance, how gender is constructed. Campbell and Mzaidume (2001), and Susser and Stein (2000) are examples of studies where economic and social differences within cultures are factored into the conceptual framework and (especially in the case of Susser and Stein) into the methodology.

At the heart of the matter, however, seems to be the need for interrogating terms like 'culture' and 'cultural values' which are not only fundamental to the integrity of the research, but also to that of the efficacy of intervention programmes.

## Discussion

### Youth and HIV/AIDS

Evidenced in critiquing impact and intervention studies research carried out in Sub-Saharan Africa and internationally, is an emphasis on youth perceived either as vulnerable or sexually active or at the very least, sexually aware and therefore, by implication, a 'natural' target of prevention and intervention programmes. Underpinning these studies is an assumption too that these youth within the formal schooling sector, are located primarily, if not exclusively, in *secondary* schools. These assumptions raise a few key points. Firstly, the emphasis on intervention and prevention programmes (giving youth *more* knowledge) seems to be underpinned by reductionist views of the association between knowledge and behaviour. This view creates a dissociation of the interface between sexual identity, education, and HIV/AIDS. More importantly, what it leaves unattended is the deeply complex nature of the social and cultural discursive fields in which youth receive and interpret the HIV/AIDS messages and how they understand, experience and use this knowledge in the face of or while constructing, performing and playing out their sexual identities. Particularly, *schools* as one such *situated* discursive field that occupies a particular space in time, is unaccounted for within this body of research.

While some studies (e.g. LeClerc-Madlala, 2002; Skinner, 2001) have begun to address this, the majority are still driven by the need to know ‘what’ knowledge youth have with the view to providing them with ‘more’ knowledge even in the face of its ineffectiveness. In addition, these studies do not account for the discursive social and cultural fields of practice where knowledge is not only produced but also contested, negotiated, reproduced and embedded. While there is an emerging body of research that is beginning to consider the above, the fundamental methodological research question still seems to be driven by a medical discourse that does not give ascendancy to issues of gender, power, and sexuality as deeply connected to constructions of safe-sex, negotiation within relationships, and HIV/AIDS knowledge. As LeClerc-Madlala (2002) suggests, what is necessary in research about youth is a shift to understanding their construction of self and sexual identity and how, in the face of HIV/AIDS, their vulnerability is exacerbated.

Following this argument and critical to the discussion, disembedding cultural and social practices from the discursive *sites* in which these sexual identities are produced and reproduced, seems to neglect primary schools as a “key cultural arena for the production of sexuality and sexual identities” (Renold, 2000, p.309).

### Teachers and HIV/AIDS

Stark omissions within this body of research is work that considers teachers as producers, interpreters, reproducers, mediators and purveyors of knowledge and safe sex messages, who work within discursive fields where this knowledge is contested and may be considered secret and/or private. Where such gaps in research have been identified, the suggested response has been to examine ways of providing teachers with more information about HIV/AIDS, more training or more effective programmes to “implement the new proposed curricula” (Akoulouse, et. al., 2001). In some studies, like Rivers and Aggleton (1999), there is a suggestion for a need to consider teachers as sexual beings who themselves might have difficulty teaching sex education. However, their response regarding what is necessary is reductionist and assumes a linearity about the relationship between knowledge and skills that is devoid of context and culture on the one hand, and an underplay of teachers as active agents on the other. Illustrative is the following suggestion:

Policies and programmes are needed to transfer skills teachers need in order for them to feel confident to teach about HIV/AIDS and issues of sexuality. This implies that teacher training address the specific needs and circumstances of teachers in the workplace. We

emphasize that HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue for teachers and there is a need for a comprehensive support system that would enable teachers to perform their duties and yet deal with their own personal situation (Akoulouze et. al., 2001, p.23).

Few studies take account of teachers' lives as a key mediating factor in the teaching (delivery) of HIV/AIDS. It would seem that an assumption is made that if they (teachers) have the necessary knowledge about and skills to teach, they *will, can* and *will want to* teach effectively, notwithstanding how they position themselves (or are positioned) within the HIV/AIDS discourse. Unattended too, is how these teachers are positioned in and out of school and how within such spaces, cultural and social practices shape their experience and understanding of the disease. More importantly, within the current research agenda, is a lack of an interrogation of teachers as active agents working (shaping and being shaped), within contested and contestable discourses where they can, and indeed do, make choices about what knowledge to teach, when, and how.

Therefore, where teachers have been the focus of study, it has been with teachers as objects of a structure and system (deliverers of curricula) rather than of teachers as individuals who work and live in contexts in and to which they themselves are contributors, shapers, negotiators and mediators.

### Context and culture

Sontag (1990) has suggested that the ways in which we understand HIV/AIDS is more indicative of our broader societal discourse of politics and economy than of any salient features of the disease itself. The discourses of tradition and modernity may seem to play an important role here where alternatively modernity in terms of women's behaviour and tradition in terms of male sexuality are played out as culprits of the prevalence of the disease. When HIV/AIDS is blamed on the 'modern' behaviour of women, and when control is reasserted over women's bodies in virginity-testing through the contemporary reinvention of traditional practice, that is the expression of an anxiety over the relationship between tradition and modernity.

The rediscovery of a certain cultural stereotype of black South Africans, and with African culture in general, can be related to early colonial and apartheid definitions of the 'Other' (Steinberg, 2002). On the other hand, while cultural essentialism should be discarded, the interventions in school are almost completely devoid of an acknowledgement of cultural and contextual aspects

which clearly play an important, and sometimes a detrimental role, in the negotiations and decision-making with respect to sex.

What seems obvious is that there is an urgent need to examine deeply held beliefs and practices about sex and everyday sexual practices in such a way that this cultural knowledge can be used in a meaningful way in terms of interventions in the field of education. Moreover, the relationship between sex and the socio-economic situation needs closer examination. The complex relationship between knowledge and behaviour is acknowledged as a problematic and it would seem necessary therefore for research to be located within situated contexts in which the youth and teachers construct their sexual identities and make sense of the HIV/AIDS messages rather than only finding out what they know about the disease.

## Conclusion

From this review, it seems clear that three key elements are left unaccounted in the research on HIV/AIDS and education. The first is the lack of a critical engagement with the concept of culture and how, through this silence, culture is either misinterpreted as fixed and static, essentialised or conflated with ethnicity and language. The second element highlights how, in the research agenda issues of context, culture and the core of the problem, that is, what happens at the chalk-face in schools, have been left largely unattended. Our suspicion is that the failure of many of the educational programmes is at least partly due to the lack of culturally appropriate programmes, but also because developers of programmes dare to question various detrimental cultural and social practices. The final aspect relates to the methodological framework within which educational research on HIV/AIDS has been framed.

Fundamentally, the epistemological questions posed within this sector remain driven by medical, economic and political discourses. These, as we have argued, are primarily driven by a need to know '*the what*' rather than a need to understand the deeply discursive situated contexts where people come to know. In asking different sets of questions, researchers might come to develop deeper understandings of why, in the midst of readily available information about HIV/AIDS, youth still find themselves unable to negotiate safe-sex practices and why teachers are still challenged in teaching about HIV/AIDS.

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# Social justice and inclusion in education and politics: the South African case

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## Abstract

How successful has South Africa been in overcoming injustice in education and the larger social injustices that result from it? And how shall we judge – by assessing justice in outcomes or justice in procedures or both? In this article we propose criteria for judging accomplishments in social justice and evaluate some facets of South Africa's progress towards achieving an ambitious agenda for social justice in and through education in the first decade of democracy. We conclude that social injustice persists despite an impressive suite of policies for a more just education system. We also argue that educational inclusion and political inclusion are interdependent and lie together at the core of social justice. Justice in procedures and the achievement of socially just outcomes are intricately related.

## Introduction

Recognition of past injustice animates South Africa's Constitution, whose Bill of Rights establishes the right to basic education, among a wide range of rights. But how successful has South Africa been in overcoming injustice in education and the larger social injustices that result, in part, from it? And how shall we judge – by assessing justice in outcomes, or justice in procedures, or both?

Social justice is generally understood as largely about distributive justice. From an educational perspective, this raises crucial questions about the distribution and – in the case of post apartheid South Africa – redistribution of educational goods and access to them. However, an account of social justice that focuses narrowly on the distribution of goods may lose sight of the meaning of those goods, and a preoccupation with simple equality (Walzer, 1983) may obscure the real issues at stake in the pursuit of social justice. Also if we treat distributive justice as a strictly formal rather than a substantive

notion, we may neglect the ways in which domination and oppression (Young, 1990) operate to exclude people from the recognition and social goods necessary for human flourishing.

A central purpose of this article is to evaluate some facets of South Africa's progress towards the achievement of an ambitious agenda for social justice in and through education in the first decade of democracy.<sup>1</sup> As we pursue our central purpose, two related others come into play. One is the logically prior purpose of proposing criteria for judging achievement towards social justice in education. In the course of proposing and applying the criteria, we argue that educational inclusion and political inclusion are interdependent and lie together at the core of social justice. While a full and cogent argument for this claim calls for more detail than is possible here, our third purpose is to sketch some lines in its defence. Taking educational and political inclusion as central to the achievement of social justice does not entail forfeiting a distributive conception but enables a richer understanding of the goods at stake when we talk about social justice in and through education.

In pursuing these three purposes we move between abstract, normative theorising and descriptions of real cases and empirical facts. Facts, figures and statutory declarations are all pertinent to an assessment of basic constitutional arrangements for a more just society and of the extent and manner of their implementation. But it is the individual cases, the *petit recits* or little stories (Walker, 2001) that draw attention to those features of people's everyday lives that are salient for an account of justice that is not merely formal. We begin with two *petit recits*,<sup>2</sup> to which we return several times, later adding two more.

'*No Entry.*' Nkululeko completed his primary schooling in 2002, the year his mother died of HIV-AIDS. His father had abandoned them when Nkululeko was a baby. Nkululeko lives in one of Gauteng province's townships with an elderly pensioner who had been a friend of his mother's. Early in 2003 he tried to register first at one township high school and then at another. Both schools

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<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to undertake a comprehensive assessment here. Many of the chapters in Chisholm (2004), although they do not specifically address questions of social justice, indicate how far South Africa still has to go in achieving the kind of educational change needed for a more just society.

<sup>2</sup> Nkululeko's story was reported in the local press. The other stories emerged during a study of out-of-school learners in the Rustenburg district (Kiely and Pendlebury, 2002).

refused to admit him because he arrived without a parent to accompany him. When his story appeared in a local newspaper, one of the schools relented. Generous readers came to his rescue and donated funds for his fees, books and uniform. While Nkululeko's story turned out well, his battle for admission signifies a discriminatory practice commonly built into the institutional procedures for school admission. If other discriminatory practices operate within the school, Nkululeko may find himself excluded from full participation in the activities of learning.

*'Mother-minder.'* Ten-year old Sentle is one of the 20 000 inhabitants of Freedom Park, a sprawling informal settlement near the Rustenburg Platinum Mines in the North West province. Her mother, who is from Lesotho and came to this place 'a long time ago', has six living children, all from different fathers. She is HIV positive and is in the last stages of dying. Sentle doesn't attend school because she is caring for her dying mother. Neighbours help with bread and tea occasionally, and have taken in Sentle's older three siblings. Health care workers from a grassroots community group also provide food and clothing when they can. Two younger siblings are living at a shelter in Rustenburg until foster homes can be found for them.

## Educational inclusion, capability and the demands of justice

While Nkululeko and Sentle both live in a society in which basic education is a constitutionally established right, their access to schooling has been impeded – in Nkululeko's case by school admissions procedures; in Sentle's, by force of tragic circumstance. But are their stories about failures of social justice?

We approach this question through a brief critical sketch of three recent accounts social justice, namely, those of David Miller (1999), Iris Young (1990; 2000), and Martha Nussbaum (2000). Whatever their differences, all three provide normative accounts that avoid the method of abstraction and attempt to specify principles to guide the development of more just social institutions. Also, all three take seriously the conditions necessary for living a fully human life and link these, in one way or another, to social justice.

Miller (1999) proposes three substantive principles of social justice – need, desert and equality – each linked to a mode of human relationship, regarded as an ideal type. In a relationship of 'solidaristic community' the principle of

justice is distribution according to *need*. Each member of such a community (a family or a religious group, for example) is obliged to assist in meeting others' needs, in proportion of ability to do so. Sentle tends her dying mother's needs as best she can and neighbours rally round to share what little they have – food for Sentle and her mother, shelter, food and care for her siblings. In a relationship of instrumental association, *desert* is the principle for just distribution. Typically, Miller argues, the purposes of an organisation set the criteria for desert, and justice is done when each member of the organisation receives a reward equivalent to the contribution s/he makes. While schools and their internal practices may be viewed from this perspective, desert does not come into play in either Sentle's or Nkululeko's story. Desert is also not pertinent to our larger argument in this article, so we set it aside without further comment. *Equality* is the primary principle of just distribution in a relationship of citizenship. This is not to disqualify need as having no bearing on citizens' justice claims. Citizens who lack resources necessary to play their part as full citizens have a just claim on the provision of those resources. Education is surely among those goods necessary for the full exercise of citizenship. Institutional impediments to Nkululeko's access to high school would, on these grounds, constitute an injustice.

Miller's account of *need* as a principle of justice relies on a conception of human capabilities and functioning. For the precept 'to each according to his or her needs' to serve as a justice principle its interpretation must respect two constraints. Miller establishes the scarcity constraint on cue from Hume's observation that "the cautious, jealous virtue of justice would never once have been dreamed of" in an abundant world (1999, p.205). As a principle of justice, need must be able to function under circumstances of relative scarcity, where not every need can be met and where needs will compete with other demands. The interpersonal constraint is necessary for need to serve as a practical principle that a society or group can use to guide its institutions. This requires interpersonal agreement on what constitutes need, as idiosyncratic or partial conceptions can have no currency in a principle of justice.

Intrinsic, as opposed to instrumental, needs are the ones that count from a social justice perspective. Someone has a need in the intrinsic sense, when "it is necessary for that person to have X if he or she is not to be harmed" (Miller, 1999, pp.206-207). Intrinsic need refers to what is minimally necessary to prevent harm to the person. Sources of harm may be related to biological facts, to individual aims and purposes, or to a shared set of social norms concerning a minimally decent human life. In taking the third route to conceptualising

harm, Miller proposes an account of need akin to Sen's (1993) notion of capabilities. Over and above a biological minimum, intrinsic needs include the full range of resources for each person in a community to live a normal human life. Where scarcity prevents people from functioning in the ways necessary to a minimally decent life in their society, anyone so affected may be judged in need. This goes beyond physical or material impediments to proper functioning because if one cannot enter a public space without shame or disgrace, "a whole range of activities from work to recreation to political participation will be inaccessible" (Miller, 1999, p.210). In Sentle's neighbourhood, Freedom Park, many parents of other out-of-school learners said they did not send their children to school because "our poverty is our shame. . . we cannot disgrace our children by sending them without school fees and uniforms".<sup>3</sup>

*Equality* is a principle of social justice only under limited circumstances, according to Miller. Although justice and distributive equality share a logical grammar, justice does not always require equal distribution. What is more, equality is not a singular concept. Unlike *distributive equality*, in Miller's view *social equality* (or equality of status) is not directly connected to justice, for while it identifies an ideal, it does not specify any distribution of rights or resources. Under what conditions, then, does social justice require an equal distribution of goods or advantages? Miller sketches three justice-based arguments for equality, of which only the third is pertinent to present purposes. This is the argument that the members of certain social groups are entitled to equal treatment simply by virtue of their membership. Most crucial from the perspective of social justice is citizens' membership in a political community and by virtue of which they have just claims to equal treatment over a wide range of rights and benefits including, in many societies, equal access to education and health care. Whether Sentle and her family count as members in the relevant sense is a moot point. Her mother is an illegal immigrant and who knows her father's status – dead or alive, South African or unregistered alien? Miller's account appears to bar undocumented migrants from the category of those who can make claims to just treatment on the grounds of membership in our society. Also, his dismissal of social equality as not directly relevant for justice claims is not consistent with the spirit of his arguments about the intrinsic need for the respect which is required for people to be able to appear in public without shame.

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<sup>3</sup> Recorded in field notes for Kiely and Pendlebury (2003).

Equality of status, at least in the deliberative domain, is a crucial feature of Iris Young's account of justice. Whereas just outcomes are the concern of Miller's distributive theory, Young (1990; 2000) is as concerned with just procedures as with just outcomes. For her, a theory of social justice that recognises human agency, and so gives primacy to doing rather than to having, must start with an account of social injustice (Young, 1990). By prioritising *doing* over *having* she casts doubt on distributive accounts and shifts attention to the role of just procedures as a way of achieving more just outcomes under initial conditions of structural inequality in which the social positions of some people constrain their freedom and well-being. Young's more recent work aims to advance principles that "best express ideals of a democratic politics in which citizens try to solve shared problems justly", acknowledging the real world starting point of structural inequality (Young, 2000, p.10).

Ideally, social justice requires the establishment of institutional and other structural conditions for promoting self-determination and self-development of all members of society (Young 2000). These two ideals of social justice are pitted against the two general conditions of injustice, namely, domination and oppression, which are the main impediments to the achievement of genuine agency. Oppression, with its five 'faces',<sup>4</sup> inhibits people's capacity for self-development. Marginalisation and powerlessness, the faces most pertinent to present purposes, are structural forms of oppression resulting from institutional relations that constrain people's material lives by restricting their access to resources and to concrete opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities. Marginalisation occurs when a whole category of people is excluded from meaningful participation in social life and is thus potentially vulnerable to deprivation and even extermination. Marginal groups include old people, single mothers and their children, people with disabilities, and the rural poor. Migrants, like Sentle's mother, are also marginal groups in many societies, as are children – like Nkululeko – orphaned by the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Powerlessness inhibits the development of people's capacities and the scope of their decision-making power, and exposes them to disrespectful treatment because of their status. (Notice that, in contrast to Miller, Young takes social equality to be directly relevant to justice.) Structural inequalities may be built on cultural as well as bodily differences. Social structures and the built environment, for example, may systematically place people with physical

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<sup>4</sup> The five faces of oppression are exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

disabilities in positions of powerlessness.

Oppression results in people's exclusion from participating in deliberation that affects their own lives and the possibilities for their self-development. Political inclusion is thus a touchstone for social justice. In conditions of structural inequality (as continue to exist in the old democracies as well as relatively new ones like South Africa), Young argues, widened and deepened democratic practices provide our best means of promoting social justice. This requires inclusion in public deliberation that affects people's lives and opportunities. Genuine inclusion has to overcome *external* and *internal exclusion*. Externally excluded groups remain outside of both the distributive domains for public goods and the arenas of public deliberation. External exclusion can be variously imposed; for example, through policies like apartheid or social practices such as the domestic confinement of women and severely disabled people. Internal exclusion can be much more insidious. Under pretence of inclusion (or a naïve or insensitive understanding of it), previously excluded groups may be brought into a public deliberative domain but remain on the margins of deliberation, silenced or ignored by dominant terms of discourse and privileged styles of action and expression.

Young (1996; 2000) proposes a communicative model of deliberative democracy precisely to address the injustices that result in, and from, the interplay of external and internal exclusion. In addition to critical argument, she endorses greeting, rhetoric and storytelling as means of expanding democratic discussion. Narrative enhances the possibility of understanding across difference by conveying the experiences, values and cultures of differently situated people. In the deliberative sphere, narrative has an epistemic function, providing access to social knowledge from the points of view of particular social positions. Narrative also plays a role in practical argument, providing a way to demonstrate need or entitlement in debates about policy or action, and shows the likely effects of those policies and actions on groups with different social locations. For example, narratives may help in revealing and correcting the all too common situation in which people with disabilities must contend with the assumption that "their lives are joyless, that they have truncated capabilities to achieve excellence, or have little social and no sex lives" (Young, 2000, p.74). Inclusive democratic communication can enable participants to enlarge their social understanding by learning about the specific experience and meanings of those in other social locations.

Although Young's concern is with political inclusion, and despite her *caveats*

against deploying the notion of inclusion as a catch all, we see her work as having direct bearing on issues of justice and inclusion in education. Inadequate access to education almost invariably reproduces other modes of exclusion, most significantly exclusion from deliberative arenas in the political domain. Genuine political inclusion requires a heterogeneous public that is open to “a plurality of modes of communication” in which attention to social differences aims to achieve “the wisest and most just political judgements for action” (Young, 2000, p.12). Education of the right sort, we would argue, has a role not only in enabling marginalised people to achieve access to public decision-making domains, but also in developing in *all* children personal characteristics, such as openness and reciprocity, that are crucial to deliberative efficacy and democratic inclusion. If so, education has a two-directional role in enabling the kind of political inclusion necessary for deep democracy and a more just society (see Enslin, Pendlebury and Tjiattas, 2001).

Martha Nussbaum’s version of the capabilities approach to development provides a complementary vantage on the interdependence of educational and political inclusion. What is more, her list of capabilities serves as a set of criteria for judging a society’s progress towards achieving social justice. For Nussbaum (2000), capability to function above a certain threshold is a mark of functioning in a fully human way, and a socially just society is one whose public political arrangements provide a basic level of capability among the society’s citizens. Working from a series of cross-cultural discussions, she proposes a universal set of capabilities that together mark what we as human should be able to be and do in order to meet at least the threshold for living in a fully human way. Each of the capabilities is crucial and each is qualitatively different from the rest; yet they are also related to each other, in a variety of complex ways. The capabilities are:

1. Life, living a fully human life of a normal span;
2. Bodily health, adequately nourished, and with shelter;
3. Bodily integrity, including freedom of movement, security from various kinds of assault, and opportunities for sexual expression and reproductive choice;
4. Using one’s senses, imagination and thought, with freedom of expression and conscience;
5. Emotions, in freedom of attachment and association;
6. Practical reason, including forming a conception of the good and a life plan, with liberty of conscience;
7. Affiliation with others in forms of social interaction like friendship and

- work, protected against discrimination;
  - 8. Relating to other species;
  - 9. Play;
  - 10. Control over one's environment, both political and material.
- (Nussbaum, 2000, pp.78-80)

With the right support – educational and material – human beings can acquire all the capabilities. Nussbaum speaks of education in elaborating the fourth capability ('senses, imagination and thought'). But most, possibly all, of the others are more likely to be developed optimally through education. What is more, some capabilities are themselves ingredients of or prerequisites for education. Practical reason, in particular, is especially amenable to fuller development with proper schooling. Literacy, which Nussbaum mentions in relation to 'senses, imagination and thought', promotes political participation and control over one's environment, and can contribute dramatically to bodily health and integrity, especially among girls and women. This is not to say that political participation is not possible for the illiterate. But it is more likely to be exercised effectively where literacy enables wide access to information, effective lobbying and large-scale organization, which are bound to be more effective if agents are literate.

The relationships between capabilities are especially significant when considering education as both a means of promoting some capabilities and also as dependent on a minimum level of others. Without bodily health and integrity, for example, it is less likely that capabilities like practical reason, senses, imagination and thought, and affiliation will develop to the threshold required for living a fully human life.

Governments cannot be expected to deliver all the capabilities. Nonetheless ". . . in the political arena. . . certain human capabilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed" (Nussbaum, 2000, p.83) and, where resources are sufficient, failure to develop central capabilities is a problem of justice. In any case, some governments are constitutionally committed to promoting certain capabilities. South Africa is a case in point – our Constitution places an obligation on the state to provide shelter and education. While governments cannot be expected to ensure that all citizens are educated to a specified level, Nussbaum argues, where resources are sufficient governments can be expected to provide the social basis for all to be least literate, numerate and capable of practical reason at a level necessary for political participation.

Capability rather than functioning should be the political goal, for citizens

should be allowed to exercise choice in the exercise of their capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000). Public policy is also obliged to address those environmental factors that prevent functioning and to ensure that children develop the capabilities they will need to live a full adult life. Often, this will mean requiring certain types of functioning in children so as to produce a mature adult capability. Compulsory primary and secondary education is thus not only legitimate but also required by justice as education fosters the capabilities necessary for adults to choose between types of functioning.

Sentle's story and Nkululeko's are emblematic of failures of social justice. Each is a story of educational exclusion; yet each also reverberates well beyond the domain of education. The stories serve as points of reflection not only in initial evaluation of South Africa's progress towards a more just society, but also in the later arguments we make for placing educational and political inclusion at the centre of a substantive account of social justice.

## Social justice and educational inclusion in the first decade of democracy

The accounts sketched in the previous section suggest that a socially just system of education is one that:

- takes human agency seriously and enables the self-development and self-determination of all citizens;
- provides opportunities and support for all children to exercise the range of functions necessary for developing their mature adult capabilities (and so meets a crucial set of intrinsic needs);
- reduces or, better, abolishes structural forms of oppression that restrict peoples' access to resources and opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities or capabilities for living a decent human life;
- excludes no children from access to schooling (that is, respects the equal right to education for all);
- excludes no children from access to learning within schools (thus guarding against internal exclusion).

Parsimony bids for combining these indicators into one comprehensive standard. Kept separate, they provide a useful checklist for different kinds of changes required for progress towards social justice in and through education.

In its patterns of exclusion, domination and oppression, apartheid South Africa

epitomised a state of social injustice where structural inequalities severely restricted access to resources and opportunities to develop and exercise capabilities for the majority of the people. The continuing challenge of post-apartheid education is “to ensure that South Africans have the knowledge, values, skills, creativity and critical thinking required to build democracy, development, equity, cultural pride, and social justice” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p.9).

The first phase of transforming the education system has rightly focussed on dismantling structures that maintained and policed privileged inclusions and mass exclusions during the apartheid era. Other related tasks have been to create a more equitable system of financing education and to build a policy framework to give ‘concrete expression’ to the democratic values underpinning the post-apartheid state. Achievements have been impressive in the realm of legislation and policy formulation, and in the reconfiguration of the education system. As the official opening move in developing educational policy in a post-apartheid state, the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995) casts the draft Bill of Rights as its moral framework and affirms basic education (including adult education) as universal right. In addition, the state is constitutionally required to take reasonable measures to make further education progressively available and accessible to all. The policy framework for education reflects a substantial commitment to social justice both in and through education (see, for example, Department of Education, 1997; 1998; 2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2002 and Republic of South Africa, 1996; 1998; 2000).

Together these policies protect the principles of non-discrimination and non-repression (Gutmann, 1987) and in so doing go a considerable way towards establishing conditions that discourage both external and internal exclusion. Non-discrimination requires the education of all educable children and prohibits selective repression that excludes groups of children from schooling or denies some children access to the kind of education needed for promoting their deliberative capacities. Non-repression forbids the use of education to constrain rational deliberation about rival conceptions of “the good life and the good society” (Gutmann, 1987, p.44). The principle of non-discrimination has its clearest expression in the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), which makes school compulsory for children between the ages of seven and fourteen, and guarantees learners equal access to education. Other policies establish opportunities for access for out-of-school youth and adults previously excluded from the formal education system.

While education policy across the board accentuates distributive justice, legislation also establishes structures and guidelines for procedural justice. For example, a primary purpose of the South African Schools Act is to ensure just procedures in school governance. From the perspective of more just institutions, this is an important piece of legislation even if the consequent establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) has not enhanced equity and democracy except in resource-rich contexts (Grant Lewis and Motala, 2004). Policy also underscores the role of education as a means to social justice in other spheres, particularly employment and poverty alleviation. Many discriminatory practices have been removed or at least curtailed through systemic restructuring and reform, although in practice much of the school system remains mono-racial (Soudien, 2004). There is now one national curriculum for all schools and there have been moves towards more equal expenditure on school per capita between the provinces.

Policy has enabled some significant achievements in institutional access and related human and material resources, although a varied picture emerges from different sources of information. By 1998, the national Department of Education claimed to have achieved close to universal primary enrolment and 86% enrolment in secondary schooling. But data collected during an inclusive education pilot project between 2001 and 2002 suggests that universal primary enrolment may be something of a chimera (Kiely and Pendlebury, 2002). Poverty, inadequate transport, the devastating effects of the HIV-AIDS pandemic and discriminatory practices against linguistic minorities, migrant families, and people with disability all play a part in keeping children out of school.

The *2000 School Register of Needs* (Department of Education, 2001c) also presents a complex picture of progress and decline in the route towards equal access and a more just resource distribution. For example, although the country had 414 more ordinary schools in 2000 than in 1996, five provinces reported a decrease in the number of schools in 2000, and nationally the number of primary schools decreased from 17 466 in 1996 to 16 816 in 2000. How this uneven pattern of school development and closure affected educational access for different communities is not clear. The number of platoon schools decreased from 1198 in 1996 to 1023 in 2000. Classroom overcrowding also decreased, with an average of five fewer learners per classroom in 2000 than there had been in 1996. Six years after the establishment of the democratic state, facilities and educational equipment at many schools were still far from adequate. By 2000, 78.2% of state schools still had no media centers; over 70% had no computers. Despite some

impressive improvements in access to basic facilities, by 2000 a little over one quarter (27%) of South Africa's state schools still had no water; 43% were still without electricity; and 16.6% (with some 1.9 million learners) had no toilet facilities of any form. Of the 1 201 schools (i.e. 4.4% of schools in the country) that had footpaths as their only access, 451 were schools in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, and were more than a kilometre away from the nearest road and had no telephone.

During the first six years of democracy, South Africa had made substantial progress towards achieving only three of the six targets specified in the *International Guidelines for Implementing the World Declaration of Education for All (EFA)*. Each EFA target relates to a dimension of education considered as crucial for the achievement of social justice (and each can be linked to one or more of Nussbaum's list of capabilities):

DIMENSION 1: Early Childhood Care and Development

*Target:* Expansion of early childhood care and development activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children.

DIMENSION 2: Primary Education

*Target:* Universal access to, and completion of, primary education by the year 2000.

DIMENSION 3: Learner Achievement and Outcomes

*Target:* Improvement of learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e.g. 80% of 14 year olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement.

DIMENSION 4: Adult Literacy

*Target:* Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate, particularly female illiteracy, in order to reduce disparities.

DIMENSION 5: Basic Education and Training in Other Skills

*Target:* Expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults.

DIMENSION 6: Knowledge and Skills for Better Living

*Target:* Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels (Department of Education, 2000, pp.1-2).

In his EFA report, former Education Minister Kader Asmal acknowledged that “. . .we are still far from having made good progress on our own constitutional duty to respect, protect, promote and fulfil everyone’s unqualified right to a basic education” (Department of Education 2000: iii). South Africa’s main achievements towards meeting these targets have been in primary education and in learning achievements, as indicated in improved pass rates in the grade 12 school leaving examinations. Also, learning areas such as Life Orientation and Mathematical Literacy could – if properly taught – go a considerable way in enhancing capabilities for better living. At least at the level of rhetoric, the curriculum attends to the values underpinning a commitment to social justice. The new national curriculum for Grades 10-12 (Department of Education, 2002) follows the democratic vision for curriculum proposed in the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001d). Social justice and equity, equality, democracy, and the rule of law are among the ten fundamental ‘values’ to be promoted in and through education.

But across the system, social justice in educational access, participation and outcomes is far from achieved, especially for rural children, the poor, illiterate and semi-literate youth and adults, and children with disabilities (see Chisholm, 2004). By 2000, fewer than 9% of South African children between birth and six years had access to early childhood development (ECD) facilities. *Education White Paper 5: Early Childhood Development* (Department of Education, 2001a), identifies five-year olds as the focus of provisioning, with minimal attention to services for children below Reception Year. Yet the South African Constitution is perhaps “the most assertive affirmation of the rights of child citizens anywhere in the world” (Porteus, 2004, p.362). At primary and secondary levels, actual participation for children in school remains very unequal. Outcomes are just as problematic, as is evident in analyses of participation rates among different groups, matriculation pass rates and access to further education.

World wide, the now predominant discourse of inclusion assumes a nexus between inclusive education, human rights, democracy and social justice (see, for example, Lipsky and Gartner, 1999). This is why the constitutional commitment to providing basic education for all South Africans has one of its most stringent tests in the extent and type of provision made for children with disabilities. Apartheid practices and local tradition fostered many layers of exclusion, usually with disabled black people cast at the bottom of the heap. Although Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001b) now requires ordinary schools to accommodate learners with disabilities and other barriers to learning, ELSEN (Education for Learners with Special Educational

Needs) schools will still have an important role. Under apartheid, ELSEN provision reflected some of the greatest distributive disparities, with wealthier white communities taking the lead in establishing state-aided and independent schools, often with prohibitively expensive fees. An increase in the number and distribution of public ELSEN schools represents a substantial shift to more equitable provision in the first six years of democracy (Department of Education, 2001c). By 2000, public and state-aided the number of ELSEN schools had increased from 248 to 369. School conditions have also improved. By 2000 most had potable water, all had toilets, only ten 'special' schools were still without electricity and all could be accessed by road, with the exception of two schools in the North West with footpath access only. Crime – including violent crimes such as rape and other forms of physical attack – remains a worry, with ELSEN schools reporting a much higher incidence than ordinary schools.

The idea of inclusive education provides a useful focus for an account of social justice. Inclusive education means overcoming the barriers to participation of all in education, so as to extend to all learners the human right to education and the right to participation in an inclusive polity. Clearly, this right remains unrealised for learners who – by circumstance or choice – remain outside of the school system or other structured opportunities for systematic learning. Even a limited study of out-of-school learners shows how far South Africa still has to go to meet the challenge from the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum to attend to the patterns of educational exclusion arising from poverty, disease, conflict and associated conditions. Over a period of two weeks and through a small sampling of clinics, shelters and households in the vicinity of inclusive education pilot project schools in the Rustenburg district, researchers collected the names of 1178 children of school-going age who were not attending school (North-West Inclusive Education Pilot Project Report, 2002). While poverty is a primary reason for non-attendance, so too is marginalisation on the grounds of physical or cultural characteristics, as two further *petit recits* illustrate:

*'Hidden from view.'* In Ledig, an apartheid resettlement village a few kilometres from the luxury gambling resort of Sun City, severely disabled children are kept from school and hidden from public view. Some were born disabled; others mutilated in the endemic violence that is a feature of life in poor and dislocated communities. They are hidden because their families and communities are ashamed of them. When a local school agreed to admit them, they disappeared. Their caregivers had moved them 'to another place', so as to retain the income earned from looking after them.

*'They do not speak our language.'* Freedom Park, on the outskirts of Rustenburg, has a surprising number of isiXhosa-speaking children and youths not attending school. There is a case of self-exclusion, apparently in response to internal exclusionary practices of local teachers. They do not attend school because the teachers "do not speak our language. . . they explain in their language. . . then they shout when we can't understand".

## Inclusion, human flourishing and social justice

These stories, and those of Sentle and Nkululeko, exemplify how South Africa's children and youth continue to be excluded from social goods associated with education. Each marks the persistence of social injustice despite an impressive suite of policies and the high moral ground of political declaration. All the young people who feature in these stories are likely to suffer multiple failures of capability and of functioning as they become adults and as they age. In two of the stories, HIV/AIDS and the limitations of the state's response to the epidemic through its various departments – Health, Education and Social Welfare – prevents some form of access and participation in schooling and makes capacity-developing outcomes a remote possibility. The internal exclusion of isiXhosa-speaking learners points to failures of justice that reside in the ethnic practices of some communities and the education system's failure to deal with them. Other stories – not included here – point to failures in gender justice. Perhaps most troubling of all, the children hidden from view stand little chance of developing those capabilities that their particular disabilities could allow under the right circumstances.

Young's arguments for self-determination and self-development and Nussbaum's account of the conditions for human flourishing both suggest that promoting the capacity for control over one's political environment is crucial to the achievement of justice. If so, those excluded from schooling – by choice, design or force of circumstance – are less likely, individually and collectively with others similarly placed, to be able to overcome their powerlessness to influence policy and resource allocation so that it addresses their exclusion and the likely consequent exclusion of their children. This poses a conundrum. The somewhat daunting ideals of self-determination and self-development that Young (2000) proposes for social justice are exactly what are required for marginalised people – such as those with disability, for example – to break out of the cycle of oppression and exclusion. As people whose lives and well being are critically affected by public decision-making, marginalised people must have authentic opportunities to influence the

outcomes. Yet educational exclusion – both external and internal – serves as a barrier to genuine political inclusion and participation, as well as to self-development.

Political and educational inclusion are interdependent and lie together at the heart of social justice. Without educational inclusion, groups and individuals are deprived of opportunities for developing those capabilities essential to living a fully human life. But this very condition makes it harder for these people to use political structures, including the electoral system, in order to demand and achieve educational inclusion. Procedural justice and the achievement of social justice in outcomes, it seems, are intricately related.

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# Outcomes-based quality assurance: what do we have to lose?

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## Abstract

This paper explores a deep conceptual flow in the emerging approach to quality assurance in South Africa – that the quality of an academic course can be evaluated through judging it against pre-specified learning outcomes. The central claim in the paper is that the internal coherence and the substance of a learning programme that are produced, in the main, by the logic of the discipline knowledge that informs it, cannot be externally regulated by a quality assurance process that condenses knowledge into learning outcomes. By implication, we question the validity of judgments made about quality that are based on the specifications of outcomes. We argue that this approach inevitably marginalizes discipline content, even when there is a formal assurance to value it, and even when peers are used in the evaluation process. The paper is divided into 4 parts. The first is a discussion on the context and principles that inform the formation of quality assurance systems in South Africa. The second analyses a small case study in quality assurance. The third part elaborates on the logic of a quality assurance process that relies on statements of outcomes rather than on discipline and content related statements. The fourth part analyses recent policy developments in quality assurance in Higher Education and their implications for evaluation of academic work.

## Introduction

*The panel is concerned that your learning programme outcomes are not measurable, e.g. you have used the phrase 'to develop an understanding' 14 times. How does one measure understanding?*

So reads the official form from the panel of evaluators employed by the ETDQA,<sup>1</sup> explaining the rejection of a short course on mentoring run by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The panel of evaluators (henceforth, the evaluators) had rejected our application for accreditation on the basis that the course did not seem to them to comply with the outcomes captured in the two unit standards against which we had attempted to get the course accredited. We had thought that outcomes are a guideline to be interpreted against the needs of a specific course, and the evaluators claimed to agree with this approach. But the language of their evaluation reports and the spirit of the discussions we held with them suggested that the evaluators used the outcomes in the unit standards in a far stronger way. When we challenged them on the rigidity with which they enforced their technical interpretation of the outcomes, they told us on the one hand, that “It’s not us, it’s the law”, and on the other, that we should not call their processes technicalities because “this is what we have been struggling for, for many years”. No matter how we tried to show that the course met all the specific outcomes of the unit standards, albeit through our list of learning programme outcomes that foregrounded content, the communication hit an emotional and conceptual deadlock that we were unable to break through. The evaluators were unable to see what our course consisted of, and unable to hear what we were saying about it. Why?

In this paper we explore the conceptual differences which we believe operate behind this deadlock. Although it draws on our experience of a quality assurance process, we do not offer it as ‘just a bad experience (shame)’. This would be a limited empirical exercise, which would not establish what the problem was really about. Instead, we use our analysis of the experience to demonstrate our central claim in the paper: that the internal coherence and the substance of a learning programme that are produced, in the main, by the logic of the discipline knowledge that informs it, cannot be externally regulated by a quality assurance process that condenses knowledge into learning outcomes. By implication, we question the validity of decisions made about quality that

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<sup>1</sup> The quality assurance division of the Education, Training and Development Practitioners Sectoral Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA).

are based on specified outcomes. We argue that this approach inevitably marginalises discipline content, even when there is a formal assurance to value it, and *even when peers are used in evaluation processes*. We believe that the academic community, including the HEQC, must address itself to the limitations of outcomes-based quality assurance.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first is a discussion on the context and principles that inform the formation of quality assurance systems in South Africa. We then move on to the second part, our experience of quality assurance with the Education, Training and Development Practitioners Sectoral Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA). We show the conceptual deadlock that arose during the process of ‘quality assuring’ our course. We describe our experience from the point of view of the following question: what counts as giving access to the knowledge base of a course, and how can we describe it for the purpose of quality assurance? The third part elaborates on the logic of a quality assurance process that relies on statements of outcomes rather than on discipline and content-related statements. In this section we show that quality assurance which regulates curriculum design and programme evaluation through a content/outcome alignment marginalises discipline knowledge and as a result offers highly superficial regulation. The fourth part of the paper analyses the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) draft document (2003) on ‘Improving Teaching and Learning Resources’. This document acknowledges the importance of discipline knowledge in curriculum design. It also declares its adherence to the complexity of learning. Nevertheless, these two emphases get lost in the HEQC’s attempt to marry two very different discourses: alignment to a specialised field of knowledge, and alignment to outcome statements.

## The emerging quality assurance system in South Africa

Quality assurance became a focus of attention in South Africa with the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) through the SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) Act of 1995. Regulations under this Act passed in 1998 enabled the creation of Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) agencies. Some 25 such bodies were created as part of the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), to (amongst other functions) quality assure programmes designed for their respective sectors of the economy (Departments of Education and Labour, 2002; SAQA, 2000b).

In South Africa, the justifications of quality assurance procedures foreground social values and a political project: many South Africans have been denied access to quality education, and quality assurance has been linked to the project of transforming the apartheid education system and opening up access more broadly to quality education and training. It was feared that in response to the desperate desire for education in South Africa many providers would offer poor quality education, while some would continue to offer high quality education to an elite, and regulation of provision would be difficult. This was in a climate in which formal educational institutions were labelled as unaccountable 'ivory towers', and in which there was also a strong desire to validate informal and non-formal learning (Allais, 2003b). Quality assurance was conceived of as part of the reforms to transform education and training, through the key mechanism of the NQF (SAQA, 2000b). Thus, while quality assurance, and in particular outcomes-based quality assurance, has been vigorously critiqued elsewhere in the world (see Vidovich and Slee, 2001), in South Africa they have tended to be above critique, strongly associated with the democratisation process (Allais, 2003a).

It is important to understand, however, that at the same time as these policies for the democratisation of access to education were being developed, the South African state was also developing a macro-economic framework which called for a greater role for the market in various ways. In South Africa the quality assurance system stems partly from the desire to protect learners and build quality education, and partly from the need of the state to create a regulatory framework for an education system which could then be opened up to the market (Allais, 2003a).

## Outcomes as the basis for quality assurance

The notion of outcomes, located in standards and qualifications developed and located outside of institutions, seemed to meet all of these aims. The idea was that the NQF would provide standards against which institutions could be held 'accountable'; it would specify criteria of outcomes and outputs and thus would protect the public. The criteria to be used for such assurance would be contained in the exit-level outcomes of whole qualifications, as well as unit standards and programme learning outcomes (SAQA, 2000a) (SAQA, 2000b). The original formulation of the NQF conceptualised three processes of quality assurance: the creation of standards, curriculum development and teaching, and quality assurance. Each process would take place in entirely separate

institutions. This was based on the notion that the creation and guardianship of knowledge should not be the exclusive domain of experts (Nkomo, 2001). The argument (which largely remains intact) was that there should be a coherent division of roles: experts should develop and deliver learning programmes against common criteria and specifications of learning outcomes which are developed, monitored, and quality assured by stakeholders' representatives (Nkomo, 2001, p.23; see also Oberholzer, 2001, p.26). This division of roles in fact meant wresting away from educational institutions the power of defining knowledge and skills; they should no longer exclusively control the benchmarks of what was worth knowing, or be the arbiters of what learners had achieved (Allais, 2003b).

In the recent NQF Consultative Document (Departments of Education and Labour, 2003), it is proposed that the creation of standards as well as the quality assurance of programmes against these standards should take place in the same organization, albeit in separate parts of the organisation, but outside of providers. What remains unchallenged, therefore, is the organisational separation between 'provider's role' (conceptual design, teaching, and assessment of learners) and 'state evaluator's role' (creation of standards and quality assurance evaluation against the standards). This view of organisational separation is also advocated by the recent recommendations made by the HEQC draft proposed policy document (2003).<sup>2</sup>

The central conceptual thrust which underpins the current approach to quality assurance is thus the idea that an educational programme, designed and delivered by a provider, can be expressed by a configuration of learning outcomes and that this will enable an outside body to evaluate its quality using transparent procedures. Learning outcomes, and not discipline content, are seen to provide the basis against which a learning programme is to be designed and evaluated. In other words, the essence of a qualification is mapped as a configuration of learning outcomes, which are articulated up front, and which determine the design of the learning programmes that make up the qualification (or of a course in the case of unit standards).

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<sup>2</sup> In the "suggested good practice descriptors for institutional level evaluation" the draft stipulates that there should be an institutional authority "that is *independent* of the programme team" and that its role would be to approve the programme on the basis of "transparent criteria" (p.20).

The argument in support of this ‘design-down logic’ (*Ibid*, p.18) is that it makes the aims of the learning programme transparent to the various parties who have a stake in it, whereas a discipline or content-based logic of design is exclusionist and is only open to peers who are familiar with the content of the programme. It is also argued that the ‘design down logic’ has an advantage for the process of assessment and quality assurance, because outcomes enable the development of clear and transparent criteria. Thus, this approach is thought to enable an independent institutional authority to evaluate whether student learning and the curriculum are aligned with the exit level outcomes. What is not foregrounded is the assumption, which we claim is a false assumption, that outcomes are the type of knowledge that disclose meaning within and across disciplinary boundaries and thus enable the essence of a programme to be understood *similarly enough* by different stakeholders. Armed with this assumption, the idea of judging whether a learning programme meets the stipulated outcomes and enables students to attain them seems a straightforward enough exercise. In the following section we describe how this exercise turns out not to be straightforward at all.

## Seeking accreditation

### Reaching a deadlock

In 2003 the Wits School of Education applied to the ETDP SETA for accreditation of its short course entitled *Becoming a Mentor and Assessor for Educators in Schooling*. The course covers two unit standards registered with SAQA: *Guide and Support Learners* and *Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning Outcomes*.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the course is to provide knowledge and skills for experienced teachers who are allocated to be mentors of student-teachers. The course consists of 15 two-hour sessions. Each session consists of a conceptual lecture as well as group exercises in which mentors reflect on the complexities of their task or practise necessary skills. Many of these tasks are based on videos and transcripts taken from interactions between mentors and student teachers, so they provoke quite deep discussion. The course was running for the third year, and, since the previous year, had been under contract to the ETDP SETA as a component of their Learnership for Educators

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<sup>3</sup> The two unit standards together amount to 27 credits at NQF level 5.

in Schooling at NQF level 6.<sup>4</sup>

In order to fulfil the accreditation requirements, we comprehensively filled in a file describing the course in outcomes-based language and providing some samples of activities and reading materials that we give to course participants. But the application for accreditation was rejected twice. The main criticisms were that:

- There were not enough programme learning outcomes, and many of the existing ones were not measurable;
- The order of the sessions and the programme learning outcomes did not follow the sequence of the unit standard outcomes;
- The programme learning outcomes were not sufficiently designed down from the unit standards.

The evaluators' report insisted that the submission did not demonstrate all the step-by-step outcomes that would scaffold participants' learning to enable them to attain the unit standard outcomes. After much heated discussion and a third submission containing considerable technical revision and far greater detail, the course was finally accredited.

During this process, not once did we discuss the perspective on mentoring which this course takes, its conceptual framework, or even mentors' performance on the course. In addition, it became clear that the context and purpose of the course had been misunderstood, even to the extent that evaluators were not clear about who the learners were.

## A web of knowledge versus measurable outcomes

On reflection, it seemed to us that the difficulty we experienced was a principled one. Our course description (see below) is informed by two key

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<sup>4</sup> The ETDP SETA insisted on accreditation for the course, although it had not been a requirement when the tender contract was originally signed. The reason given was that successful mentors could not be awarded registration status because the ETDP SETA database required a verification number, which in turn required an accreditation number. This particular aspect of the story, best left for another paper, is worth mentioning because it illustrates the unnecessarily complex bureaucracy that has emerged around quality assurance.

curriculum design questions. Firstly, what content knowledge is necessary in teaching the task of mentoring and secondly, what sequence and learning activities could assist our students in learning this content? Yet the description we were required to produce for the ETDP SETA had to follow the language of outcomes. So although our ability to describe the course in terms of outcomes became more 'refined', (as the lists of outcomes we provided became more specific) our description did not capture the conceptual logic of the course nor our pedagogical efforts to create access to its key ideas. In the following section we describe our conceptual difficulty to capture the logic of the course. We trace it to the *gap* between two very different discourses: the discourse of discipline knowledge, and the discourse of specification of outcomes.

### *The course design*

The conceptual framework of the course is drawn from sociology of education and international research into mentoring in schools. Based on Furlong and Maynard's (1995) work on mentoring, the course constructs 'Socialisation and Development of Student Teachers' as the key narrative. This guided us in selecting and sequencing the knowledge about mentoring and assessment. We claim that our selection and sequence are necessary for mentors in order to choose *appropriate* methods of assessment and observe with *discernment*, record *relevant* evidence, provide feedback in a *constructive* and focussed manner, and plan for *improvement*. In our design, the trainee-mentors are introduced to a framework for understanding mentoring which follows the development of student teachers through four phases: 'Beginning Teaching and Personal Survival'; 'Dealing with Difficulties'; 'From Teaching to Learning' and 'Autonomous Teaching'.<sup>5</sup> At specific points we insert conceptual issues pertinent to the practice of mentoring, such as 'dialogue', 'reflective listening', 'the cognitive and affective dimensions of feedback', 'the cultural and social dimensions of classroom lives', 'identity', 'holistic assessment', 'criterion-referenced authentic assessment', and 'empowering the profession through mentoring'. These issues diversify the discourse, thus creating a conceptual web embroiled with more depth. Throughout the course, the trainee-mentors work through tasks that draw on day-to-day mentoring activities. These tasks work with the familiar, but also get trainee-mentors to

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<sup>5</sup> The course is structured so as to examine the specific difficulties that are anticipated in each of the four phases of student-teacher development and the corresponding changes in mentoring roles. **Phase 1:** 'Model'; **Phase 2:** 'Coach'; **Phase 3:** 'Critical friend'; **Phase 4:** 'Co-Researcher'.

rethink that which feels familiar, by recruiting the new conceptual framing. This knowledge web and the attempt to make the familiar strange are a common academic approach to designing a course.

*The evaluators' requirements*

But this kind of design description was not allowed for anywhere in the specific outcomes of the two unit standards against which the course was measured. It was not recognised by any of the evaluation reports either. The quality assurance file requires providers of a short course to supply task specifications. In the case of our course, this referred to showing how our course prepared trainee-mentors for specific outcomes such as 'Identify learners' needs regarding anxiety and barriers to learning'; 'Provide advice to learners'; 'Plan and prepare for assessment'; 'Conduct assessment and document evidence'; 'Provide feedback to relevant parties', and so on.<sup>6</sup> The evaluators told us to demonstrate the specific steps to scaffold the path of attainment of the specific outcomes. These steps (or learning programme outcomes) needed to be described in a specific way: they had to start with an active verb and be specific enough to be measurable.<sup>7</sup>

The evaluators provided us with an example of designed-down learning programme outcomes. The steps were presented as a scaffold to learning the following specific outcome of 'Conduct Assessment and Document Evidence':

1. 'Review the task specifications against which the learner must perform'
2. 'Agree on the standard of performance to achieve'
3. 'Agree on the tools to use when observing the learner'

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<sup>6</sup> Specific outcomes 1 and 3 of the 'Guide and Support Learners' unit standard and specific outcomes 1, 3 and 5 of the 'Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning Outcomes' unit **standard**.

<sup>7</sup> Here is how the evaluators formulated this requirement: "The general rule for programme development is that firstly the programme is aligned to the relevant unit standard/s and that there is evidence of learning programme outcomes that demonstrate the scaffolding steps that the learner will follow towards achieving the necessary competencies." They also stated that "an outcome, whether it is specific or a learning programme outcome [more general or generic outcome] starts with an active verb, e.g. Identify, Plan, Prepare etc. Your learning programmes are stated as objectives. . .", adding "the panel is concerned that your learning programme outcomes are not measurable, e.g. you have used the phrase 'to develop an understanding' 14 times. How does one measure understanding?"

4. 'Observe the learner'
5. 'Give feedback to learner on present competence'
6. 'Give feedback to learner on further development needs'.<sup>8</sup>

The first thing to note about this example is that it conflates outcomes, the supposedly end product of learning, with the steps of learning that are required to attain the outcomes. This means that the process of learning and the content knowledge are backgrounded. The steps above do not describe learning but give only a sequential *specification* of the learning outcomes. Secondly, five of the six learning programme outcomes listed above arguably fit in better with other specific outcomes of the unit standard.<sup>9</sup> This means that the relationship between the steps and the specific outcomes is fairly arbitrary. Thirdly, the steps are presented as a prescription. They are formulated in an official 'policy speak', as 'things' to be followed like a set of binding rules. To use Davis' metaphor (1996), the evaluators present the steps as an 'official map' or 'script'. Fourthly, the core issue of what kind of understanding of mentoring and assessment is necessary in order to choose *appropriate* methods of assessment, observe with *discernment*, and record *relevant* evidence, is completely silenced. What is notably missing is a broader perspective on the practice of mentoring. The discourse of specification of outcomes ignores that the professional judgement required when, for example, observing a learner, can never be totally objective but is always enhanced or limited by the knowledge base of the assessor. Thus, a good description of a course, from an academic point of view, is a description of the knowledge of the course, which is discipline-based and not outcomes-based, and which is presented together with justification of the selection.

This fourth point gives rise to a crucial question: what counts as 'giving access' to the knowledge base of a course, and how do we describe it for the purpose of quality assurance? Surely, a good process of quality assurance should request a description of the means and processes of giving learners

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted verbatim from ETDP SETA evaluators' report.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in our view, 'Review the task specifications against which the learner must perform' fits better with Specific Outcome 1: Plan and prepare for assessment. 'Agree on the standard of performance to achieve' and 'Agree on the tools to use when observing the learner' fit better with the Specific Outcome 2: Prepare candidate for assessment. 'Give feedback to learner on present competence' and 'Give feedback to learner on further development needs' fit better with Specific Outcome 5: Provide feedback to relevant parties.

access to the knowledge base of the course and, by implication, to the practice they are entering? Such a description is a complex endeavour. In the next section, we briefly explore this complexity and draw some implications for quality assurance.

## Can webs of knowledge be aligned to outcome statements?

### Technical effectiveness versus principled judgement

Carr (2000, p.94) makes a distinction between ‘technical effectiveness’ and ‘principled judgement’. Broadly, Carr distinguishes between the actions that persons do as habits of day-to-day events and the more complicated actions that they can do only after a due process of reflective education. So a person can be trained to act with respect in the presence of a higher authority without embedding her/his self in the question of how this authority came to be respected in the first place and whether the claim to being an authority is rationally justifiable. To take an example from mentoring: a common requirement when observing a lesson is to watch out for the student-teacher’s management of discipline in the classroom. The mentor needs to make a judgement about whether or not the student-teacher knows how to maintain discipline within the culture and context of the school. The question for a mentoring course becomes: what is involved in learning to observe a student-teacher maintaining discipline in a classroom? Should a course primarily furnish the trainee-mentors with task specifications (see above) for what to observe regarding classroom management (‘technical effectiveness’), or should a course primarily provide access to the knowledge base of understanding discipline issues (‘principled judgement’)? Learning for ‘technical effectiveness’ is relatively simple, as it generally does not require learners to go beyond what Walzer calls “immediate objectivity” (1993, p.169), i.e. a sense that ways of doing things are familiar and right.

It is quite possible for a group of experienced teachers on a mentor course to agree on some of the pre-specified techniques of control that are listed in a task specification about classroom management because the list invokes a sense of ‘immediate objectivity’. This is the sense with which all teachers interact in their day-to-day school environment. They deal with it through actions and understandings that have been developed over time and which strike them as the right way, the useful way and more than that, as the only

way. Their dealing with the daily school environment is 'immediate' in the sense that they do not need to attune to the density of meanings which inform their actions and understandings in the quick flow of events. This also means that if the reading of 'specifications' and 'standards' elicits ambiguities, trainee-mentors would normally ignore the ambiguities and instead recruit meanings from their practice so as to impress some order on the 'map' with which they can then proceed.

Learning for 'principled knowledge' is far more involved. It requires course designers to create what we would like to call 'cognitive distance', i.e. ways of understanding that disturb or rupture the sense of 'immediate objectivity' by creating new connections and relationships between concepts. So, in the example above, of preparing trainee-mentors to observe and assess the management of classroom discipline, the notion of discipline does not refer to a set of isolated actions that can be technically implemented from a list of specifications. It is embedded in the *idea* of teacher control, which in turn derives its meaning from a web of conceptual relations: between *context* (the culture of authority in the school), *age relations* (the way in which authority is constructed for young or older learners), *subject knowledge* (what kind of regulation is preferred for the content of the lesson) and a *teaching philosophy*. In addition, the *socialisation phase* of the student-teacher (whether s/he is in her first or third phase of development) will influence the emphasis that is placed on discipline. Course designers therefore need to create a cognitive distance between classroom discipline as listed in the task specifications and classroom discipline as constructed through a conceptual web. They cannot rely on what appears to be consensual objects like 'tasks specifications' and 'standards of performance', but must instead initiate them into new ways of seeing. In Beck's and Young's (2003) terms, relying on "task specifications" and "standards of performance" smacks of knowledge authoritarianism, as denying trainees "access to the forms of knowledge which permit alternative possibilities to be thought" will inevitably "negate the possibilities of understanding and criticism".

### Cognitive distance

Understanding the value of cognitive distance has direct implications for the process of quality assurance, as cognitive distance cannot be measured by any degree of specificity, although it can be evaluated by peers who share the "language of specialisation" (Bernstein, 1996). If we take the specific

assessment criteria of: “Assessment planning addresses the need for cost-effectiveness and takes into account the assessment context”,<sup>10</sup> a course designer may claim that thinking about cultural differences, including the meaning of culture and cultural practices, is a relevant learning process. Nevertheless, it is likely that quality assurance evaluators, who want to see specifications of programme learning outcomes, will perceive this kind of preparation as *too distant* from the above assessment criteria. On the other hand, providing trainee-mentors with a cost-effective assessment plan<sup>11</sup> will be perceived (by academic designers) as being *too thin* for developing the discerning judgement required by mentors’ practices. At stake here is that when the cognitive distance between a specific performance and the prescribed learning outcome is perceived as ‘too big’, judgements about claims of quality (of design and of teaching) require inferential thinking, which in turn requires familiarity with the specialised content that supports the link between a performance and an outcome. When the cognitive distance is perceived as ‘very small’, a non-specialised gaze is probably sufficient.

We use the terms ‘too distant’ and ‘too thin’ to suggest that an outcomes-based discourse of quality assurance is saturated with false epistemological assumptions about what kind of performances can show a learning path with reliability. Wolf’s detailed empirical and conceptual critique (1995) has shown the flaws in the assumption that a specification of outcomes can reveal standards of quality. She shows that the desire to reach an agreement on the meaning of learning outcomes and assessment criteria often leads to a level of reduction that is educationally unsound:

The more serious and rigorous the attempts to specify the domain being assessed, the narrower and narrower the domain itself becomes, without, in fact, becoming fully transparent. The attempt to map out free-standing content and standards leads, again and again, to a never-ending spiral of specification (Wolf, 1995, p.55).

Unless the evaluators are very familiar with the field of practice that they evaluate, this madness of spiral specification, Wolf argues, will never end. In our example of the mentoring course, we experienced a lack of congruence between the conceptual webs we tried to create for accessing the knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> Unit standard: *Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning Outcomes*, Specific Outcome 1, Assessment Criteria 1.2

<sup>11</sup> For example, where task specifications that are not relevant to a poor context are cut out and standards, which are not appropriately linked, are adapted.

base of the practice of mentoring on the one hand, and what we were required to describe for quality assurance purposes on the other. Our increasingly detailed attempts to demonstrate specifications of the learning outcomes led to a successful completion of the bureaucratic aspects of quality assurance and thus earned us accreditation by the ETDP SETA. Yet the process did not provide information about whether or not our design and pedagogy successfully generated the access we intended to create.

### Why does an alignment of a course to outcomes marginalise discipline knowledge?

Any quality assurance process must be able to evaluate a course against something. The question becomes: to what is a course aligned? There are two main possibilities: the first is alignment to a specialised field of knowledge (disciplinary content-based alignment) and the second is alignment to outcomes (outcomes-based alignment).

#### *Alignment to disciplinary content*

When the description of a course is aligned to disciplinary content, the line of accountability is to the schemes of perception and appreciation, key procedures, and concepts that together inform the logic of a field of knowledge and the practices it adopts for socialisation of practitioners.<sup>12</sup> In this notion of alignment, content knowledge is *valued in and for itself*. Aims are articulated in relation to specific content; they do not determine the content. Their appropriateness is judged in relation to the specialised demands of the content, as the point of providing a course is primarily to give learners access to this specialised content. In this view one does not discount instrumental goals of using the knowledge for ‘things’ in the everyday or for the workplace. Nevertheless, one would not pretend to have the power to generate direct causal connections to skills that have to be demonstrated in the workplace (neither would one assume that the knowledge relayed is a configuration of absolutely true statements).

Describing a course from a disciplinary perspective foregrounds very different kinds of questions for quality assurance assessment. Firstly, is the content

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<sup>12</sup> The notion of accountability is our adaptation. The ideas with which we describe ‘knowledge field’ content are drawn from Messer-Davidow, et al. 1993; Knorr-Cetina, 1999.

sufficiently representative of the field and its debates? Secondly, does the course give students opportunities to meaningfully account for what they know; using ways of seeing that are specific to the specialised content? Thirdly, does the course provide a sequence of content and modes of representation that could enhance students' "epistemological access" (Morrow, 1993)? Fourthly, does the course help to promote scholarship of work in the institution? A description of a course that attunes to these goals could highlight how the course accommodates the difficulties that students have in coming to understand new conceptual relations and what pedagogical strategies are used to address their misconceptions and gaps. It could also include a description of the course's approach to assessment or even a short analysis of students' performances and the kind of support (criteria of assessment, feedback, opportunities of self and peer assessment, and so on) the course presenters attempted to provide. This kind of description would enable, if desired, an "assessment conversation" (Black and Wiliam, 1998) about how the ideas are combined and which ideas matter most to the specific field of inquiry covered in the course.

#### *Alignment to outcome statements*

When the description of a course is aligned to outcomes which are created independently of the process of course design, the line of accountability is to a list of specifications. In this view, alignment can only be shown by describing how the content of a course and its pedagogy *serve the outcomes*. This gives rise to a false perception that a segment of content selected from a discipline can be causally related to a specific learning outcome, i.e. the segment of content is judged to contribute directly to the attainment of the outcome. This is commonly expressed in South Africa in the phrase 'content is the vehicle through which the outcomes are achieved'. This move makes the schemes of perception and appreciation embedded in content a secondary issue, instead of the primary point of a learning programme. In this sense it instrumentalises knowledge.

#### *The marginalisation of knowledge*

It is important to understand what happens to disciplinary content when it needs to be described as something other than itself. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the knowledge base of the course was drawn from sociological research into mentoring in schooling, foregrounding the four phases of development that student-teachers pass through. Embedded in this selection is a claim that understanding *this* knowledge *enables* a mentor to make nuanced and appropriate judgements about the quality of the student-teacher's

teaching. What happened to this knowledge in the process of description and negotiation that led up the accreditation of the course? Was our (embedded) claim interrogated?

Firstly, the course content became marginalised. There was no question in the accreditation file that asked us to describe it. During discussions, we were told that we should not explain it because “it is just theory, which is less important than what people learned to actually do”. Secondly, when we tried to fit it (align the content) to the specific outcomes of the unit standard for mentoring, we felt that it was crucial for nearly all of them, even though it did not relate to any one outcome in particular; the content was what would enable cognitive distance in relation to all the outcomes. Now, from a point of view of curriculum design, this is not an unfamiliar problem. When the design of a curriculum follows a specialised knowledge base it is common to find a broad contextualisation of content, where content relates to several aims. However, the significant difference between the notion of aim and of outcomes lies in the ‘design down’ requirement that follows from content/outcome alignment – that the content can be derived from outcome statements, instead of keeping them in cognitive distance as allowed by a content/aim alignment. Figuratively the difference between these two notions of alignment resembles the difference between a maze/web relationship and a Russian Doll alignment:

Outcomes-based alignment

Disciplinary content-based alignment

Outcomes

Outcomes

Outcomes

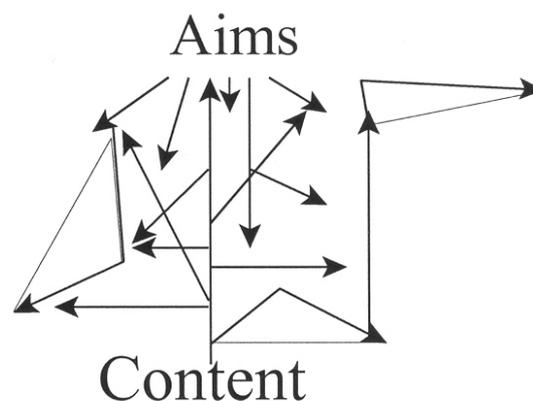
Outcomes

Outcomes

Outcomes

Outcomes

Content



In the quality assurance process, the discussion on the knowledge was completely marginalised. The relationship between the content and the outcomes in the course was left to arbitrary interpretation. Thus, in our opinion, our course was never properly evaluated.

Thirdly, the knowledge lost its value. Because it was not prominently in the centre of the course description, it could not influence or generate a new perspective on mentoring. The content of the course was thus mystified – just the opposite of the transparency that outcomes-based education is aiming to achieve. Taking this argument a step further, if we had designed the course starting from outcomes and had not given content knowledge a prominent place in our design, the process of accreditation would have been short and efficient and yet our course would have lost its power to enable transformative learning, which requires that knowledge is explored deeply enough for learners to discover the multiple ways in which it could be used. Fourthly, it was this knowledge that differentiated our mentoring course from others. The outcomes that all providers must meet are the same – it is the differing inputs they offer that makes for the difference in quality. So if the knowledge input becomes silenced, then on what basis can a comparison actually take place?

In sum, in our interaction with the ETDP SETA it was not possible to have a discussion about the knowledge-base of our mentoring course (or any mentoring course for that matter) because the evaluators were acting in the role of generic assessors who look for causal links between activities and outcomes. Thus the key aspect that makes for different qualities – the selection and sequence of a body of knowledge, its contextualisation and the pedagogy – were left unevaluated.<sup>13</sup>

## Does the CHE offer a better way to use outcomes in quality assurance processes?

### Support for deep learning

Sitting in this darkness, we then turned to the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). In view of our experience of the gap between the outcomes-based discourse of the ETDP SETA and our discipline and learning-based discourse, we decided to

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It is true that many academics, in South Africa and elsewhere, do not work rigorously with the knowledge web as we have described it when designing courses, and the approach could be seen as more an ideal than a reality. However, it is the ideal we should be striving for. Appropriate quality assurance mechanisms would therefore be those likely to encourage and develop this type of approach, as opposed to driving academics away from it, or using declared adherence to an outcomes-based approach to hide weak provision.

investigate the quality assurance approach more broadly. We wanted to understand whether the problem was specific to the ETDP SETA, or whether it was in fact symptomatic of a conceptual problem with the outcomes-based approach to quality assurance. Could the HEQC provide a way of working with outcomes which also worked with content? Or was the ‘genericism’ that we found in the ETDP SETA process in fact somehow internal to an outcomes-based approach?

A key document for quality assurance in Higher Education is a draft document entitled ‘Improving Teaching and Learning Resources’, put out by the HEQC, (2003). In this document, the HEQC attempts to deal with the problem of marginalising knowledge by stressing the role of subject experts in quality assurance: “Judgements about the attainment of learning outcomes and curriculum alignment are difficult to make, and are usually best conducted by suitably qualified and experienced expert peers, familiar with the profession/ discipline(s) and educational practices involved” (HEQC, 2003, p.27). We agree completely, and agree that the purposes of quality assurance, i.e. improved learning and teaching, are more likely to be achieved by an evaluation conducted by peers than by a committee of stakeholders.

The starting point for quality assurance in the HEQC document (pp.6-8) is rooted in a meta-narrative of learning and teaching. The discussion on teaching and learning (p.7) articulates an approach to teaching and learning that foregrounds a well-structured knowledge base and a focus on underlying meanings and conceptual work. The document rightly points out the need for ‘transformative’ learning that must be met by certain forms of good practice in teaching. Among these forms is the need to create powerful learning environments in which students are given opportunities to reflect on their ideas, to recognise the difference between ‘deep’, ‘strategic’ or ‘surface’ learning, and in which teachers attempt to make the epistemic principles of the discipline explicit:

Clearly, it is only a deep approach to learning that results in transformative learning, for it is characterised by a focus on underlying meaning, the use of a well-structured knowledge base, relating new knowledge to old knowledge and working conceptually and relationally as opposed to learning isolated facts (the surface approach) (HEQC, 2003, p.7).

As the HEQC proposes on page 8, a lecturer should try to facilitate transformative learning. This happens through “facilitating the development of cognitive structures by ‘lending’ learners one’s own conceptual anchors,

cognitive structure and strategies to assist their thinking and acting” or by “getting students to make connections with previous knowledge and maximising their awareness of their own knowledge construction”. The HEQC expects academics to “be responsive to the needs of its student body” by integrating “teaching and learning strategies that develop language proficiency, academic skills and academic literacy and enhance linguistic, cognitive and epistemological access to specific academic discourses and their practices” (p.55). We agree, and would argue that in order to meet these laudable goals it is desirable for academics to embark on self-reflection, immersing themselves in the content and debates of the discipline through reading and research, analysing students’ work so as to diagnose what they don’t yet understand, discussing these issues with colleagues, and so on.

Even more promising is that the document acknowledges that a quality assurance strategy for the improvement of learning and teaching should not constrain teaching innovation. The document approvingly quotes Gibbs who warns that “institutional factors that constrain teaching innovations on the ground and that are typically not addressed include time-tabling, the allocation of teaching time for contact hours but not for curriculum development, and *assessment regulations and practices*, et cetera” (quoted on p.9, our emphasis).

Recognising the complexity of learning and the goal for teaching to create the conditions for transformative learning to occur, the HEQC document then declares its purpose to develop a comprehensive teaching and learning strategy at the level of institutions. We were curious to understand how this institutional level policy with its aim to establish systemic assessment of quality assurance would carry forward the conception of teaching and learning described above.

## Constraints of the ‘design down’ discourse of outcomes

On the one hand, the HEQC emphasises that the curriculum design and teaching of a course should reflect developments in a specialised field of knowledge. It requires that a curriculum of a programme offers “sufficient disciplinary content and theoretical depth. . . and that the content and theory taught on the programme are current and up-to-date with recent developments in the discipline/field” (p.22). The HEQC document also admits that:

The nature of teaching is context related, uncertain and non-provable. Effective teaching refuses to take its effect on students for granted. It sees the relation between teaching and learning as problematic, as uncertain and relative. Good teaching is open to change; it involves constantly trying to find out what the effects of instruction are on learning and modifying that instruction in the light of evidence collected (Ramsden, 1992, p.102 quoted in HEQC, 2003, p.7).

This implies that, given the changes and development in the content one teaches and its contextualisation for students' needs, a responsible academic practice is inwardly attuned. On the other hand, the HEQC quality assurance process requires a demonstrated alignment in which content should serve the learning outcomes. The document refers to the 'design down logic and method' of programme development. This 'nationally preferred method' involves using:

Exit level qualification learning outcomes *to determine* the means of the teaching-learning process, e.g. the module or course combinations and their specific learning outcomes, disciplinary content and teaching and assessment methods that are employed to deliver the programme (HEQC, 2003, p.18, our emphasis).

This notion, in which outcomes *determine* the means of the teaching-learning process, suggests a view of causality.<sup>14</sup> The HEQC document, despite its initial statements about teaching and learning, does not provide us with a way of working with content because it is locked into this 'design down' approach.

In addition, we found that the strategy emphasises new administrative and structural interventions, which are rooted in an outcomes-based discourse. The document draws a division of labour between an institution's quality management system, which is responsible for the administrative organisation and evaluation of programmes and those who actually design and implement the programmes, namely the academics. The main 'Resource' is a new management strata that includes a senior manager, a quality committee, quality promotion staff "with expertise and theoretical understanding of higher education and evaluation", programme directors, et cetera (HEQC, 2003, p.30-31). The other 'Resource' consists of many pages of evaluative questions and descriptors of good practice which need to be responded to by a massive data collection about management, administration, statistics, student opinion, curriculum outcomes alignment, and so on.

Clearly what we have here is a conceptual misalignment between problem and solution, whereby epistemological difficulties that affect academic learning are addressed primarily by bureaucratic practices of regulation, and as a result, we argue, get marginalised by the quality assurance process. We believe this is not a simple resurgence of bureaucratic control, but is driven by two conflicting approaches to quality in education.

### Other possible approaches to using outcomes without ‘design down’

It is conceivable, however, to have a ‘soft’ reading of outcomes, in which outcomes, defined by subject experts at a sufficiently general level and interpreted by subject experts from the same professional community of practice, can provide a context for a professional conversation that can improve practice within a discipline, knowledge area, or profession.<sup>15</sup> As such, and as long as the community of professionals understands the inherent limitations of the outcomes discourse and shares an understanding of the field or discipline, outcomes could play a useful role in conversations about quality.<sup>16</sup>

There are two concerns, however. The first is that this approach can be marginalised by the genericism that is inherent in the idea that different learning pathways can be designed and measured by equivalent (broad) sets of outcomes. Genericism is based on an assumption that there is no significant difference between disciplinary, occupational, and everyday knowledge; it highlights ‘skills’ and ‘competencies’ that can be gained through or without immersion in specialised fields of disciplinary content, and it re-invokes the ‘design-down’ approach.<sup>17</sup> The second is that Genericism claims to authorise various stakeholders to have a stake in the design of a curriculum pathway.

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<sup>15</sup> The outcomes for the teacher education qualifications, for example, which were developed by a standards Generating Body external to any course/programme design processes, do integrate knowledge and understanding into outcome statements, and seem to be general enough to provide useful direction to course designers.

<sup>16</sup> See Shalem and Slonimsky (1999).

<sup>17</sup> This genericism is also expressed through the attempt, through the outcomes-based approach of the NQF, to validate formal, non-formal, and informal learning against the same standards, as if essentially they are the same thing.

For evaluation and quality assurance, the idea of multi-voices means a preference to use general ‘experts in outcome-based assessment’ over and above discipline content specialists.

Here are some of the questions that remain unanswered in the ‘soft reading’ of outcomes-based alignment:

- Can we convince multi-voices that outcomes have a role in a description of a course, but they do not form its essence? In other words, will the inherent limitations of statements of outcomes be understood, and, hence, the limitations of multi-voices/stakeholders?
- Will there be a move away from ‘design down’?
- Won’t the bureaucratic mechanisms of accountability and the epistemological limitation of ‘outcomes language’ undermine the specialised knowledge of ‘peers’, so that even if they are appointed to serve on evaluation panels, they will not be able to insist on an inward reading of course content?

A different ‘soft’ approach argues that, when working in a disciplinary form of alignment, it is possible to conceive of useful statements of aim that enable academics to describe their understanding of their field of knowledge. Course designers, and not an external body, design these statements deriving them specifically from what they are trying to teach. This means that instead of starting with outcomes and designing the content down from them, this approach derives the aims from within the logic and emphasis specific to the discipline content of the knowledge field. For example, the statement of aim for a course on assessment could be: “The course aims to help students understand and defend interpretations of validity and reliability in assessment”, or “The course will model assessment methods which attempt to transmit criteria in more explicit ways and to diagnose students’ difficulties”. These kinds of statements would make the relationship between content and aims a descriptive one and would not require speculations on which content best serves which aim. The obvious critique that could be raised by the quality assurers against this (‘soft’) approach is that if course designers decide on the content, methods and aims, there is no way to externalise their decisions or to ensure their quality. This criticism is often accompanied by declarations of

mistrust in academics.<sup>18</sup>

But as we have demonstrated above, outcomes, particularly at a very general level, are essentially self-referential statements. On their own they do not refer to anything. In order for them to refer to something, they need to be specified to such a degree that they destroy the richness of content knowledge. As such, outcomes cannot arbitrate between conceptions of the good, and hence cannot harness judgements of evaluation against possible inconsistencies and unreliability.

## In conclusion

If ‘cognitive distance’ is to remain an important educational goal of academic practice, then the alignment between disciplinary content and learning outcomes needs to be re-negotiated. Currently, the “nationally preferred method of design-down logic” emphasises that outcomes “will *determine* the means of the teaching-learning process” (CHE, 2003, p.18, our emphasis). This suggests a view of causality in the outcomes-based alignment that we hope we have proved to be unsustainable.

The analysis of our experience has illustrated how evaluators of an outcomes-based quality assurance process try very hard to account for learning through a configuration of learning outcomes, yet are unable to make meaningful judgements about the quality of the course. We believe that this problem can no longer be ignored by academics and that instead of compliance with the new regime of regulation, they should engage in a debate on re-centering academic knowledge in accountability processes.

The problem with compliance is that outcomes-based quality assurance processes are not simply an irritation, whether necessary or unnecessary. They are part of what Bernstein argues are processes which are creating

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<sup>18</sup> This is particularly worrying in the light of the low trust in academics’ professionalism displayed by the HEQC document. The HEQC document describes academics’ loyalty to their discipline as causing “anarchic behaviour” (p.9). It suggests that because academics pursue three sets of goals, namely disciplinary, departmental, and individualistic goals, their loyalty to the institution is in conflict. This implies a deep lack of trust in academics’ ability to make discerning judgements, one of the most important conditions of possibility for achieving ‘transformative learning’!

a new concept of knowledge and its relation to those who create and use it. . . Knowledge, after nearly a thousand years, is divorced from inwardness and literally dehumanised. . . what is at stake is the very concept of education itself (2000, p.86, quoted in Beck and Young, 2004, p.2).

Simply wishing that the audit would go away, or filling it in as fast as possible, to be able to ‘get on with our real work’, does not acknowledge that by accepting this approach to measuring quality, we are in fact complicit with the emergence of a new culture of knowledge production, a culture that flattens depth, eradicates the value of tradition, and inculcates serious mistrust in academic practice. There are no short cuts to quality. Genuine ethical responsibility can only develop where the practitioners themselves are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the quality of the service they offer. This requires an intensive socialisation into the values and standards of a professional community (Mintzberg, 1993). Only a meaningful socialisation into academic practice that is respected for its autonomy will cultivate responsible, highly motivated, and highly skilled individuals. As argued by Mintzberg, changes and accountability can only be introduced through the slow process of changing the professionals; changing who can enter the profession, what they learn in its professional schools, and how willing they are to improve their content knowledge.

## Post script

This paper should not be read as an argument that there is no place for external review outside of the peer review mechanism, nor that the peer review mechanism in its current form is adequate. This paper has analysed the problems with a particular approach to quality assurance, and does not have the space to address alternatives. It is clear, however, that the academic community, including the HEQC, must address itself to the development of such alternatives, if we are to avoid the problems inherent with using outcomes as the basis for quality assurance. One possibility worth exploring could be greater control over the peer review process, with, for example, a nationally approved list of peer reviewers, and stipulations that the same reviewers cannot be continually used. Funding should also be channelled into this mechanism, as its current weaknesses are probably at least in part caused by the small amount of money available for peer reviewers.

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# Research learning

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## Abstract

The article maps the process of research learning, that is, that domain of learning which novice researchers (such as doctoral students) experience in the complex process of becoming researchers. This exploratory qualitative study foregrounds the voices of the students and their accounts of *research learning*. The article questions the efficacy of the traditional ‘how to write a doctoral dissertation’ guidebooks and suggests that there are no clear steps to be followed in the writing of the proposal and that the journey each student traverses is filled with obstacles, reversals, breakdowns and, yet, progression. What could be gleaned from this study is that research learning is even more complex than we anticipated, and that making firm statements about ‘the right way’ to prepare doctoral students might in fact be the first error in seeking to improve the learning and support of novice researchers.

## Introduction

How do doctoral students make the move from being work-based practitioners to being researchers? This article maps the initial scholarly growth of individual education doctoral students as they embark on the journey of learning to become researchers. We use the development of their research proposals as the basis for the inquiry. The study seeks to identify and interrogate significant moments in this development process and to understand how doctoral students make the transition from being work-based practitioners to university-based researchers.

We introduce the concept of *research learning* – which we define as that domain of learning which novice researchers (such as postgraduate students) experience in the complex process of learning to become a researcher. *Research learning* therefore encompasses but extends beyond the knowledge of how to complete the specific research project (usually the dissertation). It is the totality of learning events that includes the technical competence to deliver

a research report as well as the emotional, social, political and cognitive experiences that together constitute such learning.

There are relatively few attempts to directly explore the terrain of *research learning*. A project undertaken at the University of Western Sydney probes the emotional and the social implications of writing a PhD (Dinham and Scott, 1999). Kerlin (1995) studied the socialisation of PhD students into the academy and how this experience was influenced by departmental politics. The *Review of Australian Research in Education* (RARE) dedicated a rare volume to exploring student and supervisor accounts and experiences of doctoral supervision. The editors, Holbrook and Johnston (1999), acknowledge the paucity of empirical research dealing with postgraduate studies (especially in education), and view their work as a small step to advancing research in this area. However, the focus of their work is on supervision. Furthermore, in existing studies, student reflections were gained through retrospection (Orton, 1999) or through the recollection of the supervisor (Parry and Hayden, 1999); indeed, the limited research available tends to privilege supervisory accounts of managing doctoral students (see Salmon, 1992; Burgess, 1994). A recent article by Labaree (2003) identifies the difficulties that *teachers-turned-doctoral-students* encounter because of their different perspectives on educational issues (more about this later). Again, the authoritative voice being heard is that of the supervisor. This article aims at extending this limited knowledge base on doctoral student experiences by exploring the complex and unpredictable processes through which working students learn to become researchers. In addition we foreground the voices of the doctoral students and their accounts of *research learning*.

We deploy the metaphor of a *journey* in describing the learning that takes place as students develop the required research proposal, something we consider to be the first significant milestone in research learning. We assume that this journey is neither smooth nor linear and that it likely to have numerous, possibly unpredictable, twists and turns between the points of entry and the destination, i.e. defending the proposal. Such a journey, as Angela Brew contends, is an all encompassing learning experience:

. . . in the *journey variation*. . . research questions go beyond the intellectual issues and are carried over into all aspects of life. Content, issues and processes are viewed as all contributing to the process of critical reflection. In this variation. . . there is frequently the idea of a personal journey and an emphasis on the assimilation of research into the researcher's life and understanding (Brew, 2001, p.132).

With this broad frame in mind, our aim was to investigate how the students

think about, understand and articulate their experiences about research learning.

## Background

We interviewed a group of doctoral students who were occupied with designing and preparing their proposals, with the aim of exploring their understanding of the research process and their own learning within it. Our sample consisted of PhD candidates from the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. The group participated in a seminar-based doctoral programme intended to provide advanced training in education policy for policy practitioners on the theme 'implementing educational policies'. By 'policy practitioners' we mean persons already working within policy environments, such as government departments, statutory policy authorities, agencies or councils, policy research organisations such as non-governmental organisations, teacher unions, and parastatals.

The programme combines theoretical studies of education policy with practical training in resolving problems related to the implementation of educational policies. The programme consists of seven one-week modules (140 training contact hours) with each focusing on a specific policy implementation concern.<sup>1</sup> The seven modules are completed over a two-year period. The module structure seeks to add theoretical and methodological depth to the policy inquiry combined with peer learning among a group of about 30 policy practitioners. Each module comes with an extensive reader of current theoretical and empirical studies on policy implementation in addition to a broader and required policy reading list. The students are required to complete combinations of assignments for each module. The fifth day of each module is reserved for training in research design focussed sharply on the development of each candidate's research proposal. In this way, it is intended that doctoral students will slowly but systematically develop their research proposal which they defend at the end of the first year of doctoral studies. In other words, the research proposal is a major product of study after twelve months and an ideal site for investigating research learning among these

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<sup>1</sup> The seven modules were: Introduction to policy; Quality assurance, evaluation and assessment at system level; The curriculum in a transforming and globalising world; Qualifications-driven educational reform; The emotions of educational change; Education policy implementation: comparative perspectives; Policy consulting.

beginning doctoral students.

Our cohort began the programme early in 2003. At the end of the first module, which took place in March of that year, the candidates were requested to prepare a five-page proposal in which they would focus briefly on the topic of their research, their research questions, the aims of and rationale for the study. The response from the supervisors required them to rewrite, rephrase or refine the initial statement of proposals. The second module, during June, focused on research methodologies and the literature review. The candidates were asked to prepare a relevant literature review for their research. The due date was August, when the third module took place. At the same time, the candidates also had assignments and reading relating to the work done in each of the modules.

The candidates who joined the programme came mainly from South Africa and from neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Kenya and Zimbabwe. While most candidates came as individuals, one group of seven came from a single institution in South Africa. The majority of students were older than 35 years, a trend also observed in Australia (Holbrook and Johnston, 1999) and the United States (Labaree, 2003). Most occupied senior positions in their work environments. Such positions included executive officers, school principals, managers, project coordinators, directors and deputy directors. It followed that these doctoral candidates commanded significant authority in their work environments, and came to their studies with a rich work experience. Even though the majority of the candidates worked in education-related institutions, their previous studies were not necessarily in education.

## Research methodology

This inquiry drew partly on the respective experiences and observations of the three researchers. Jansen is the doctoral programme leader; Herman and Pillay had both passed through the same programme as part of a previous cohort of doctoral students. However, the principal source of data for this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 24 of the PhD candidates in the current (2003) programme. The interviews took place six months after the beginning of the doctoral programme, and during the course of the third module.

A set of core questions was developed that encouraged candidates to reflect on

how they developed their *initial* research questions (the start of the journey), how these questions evolved over the sixth month period (the travel experience), and how close these students were to completion of their proposal (the destination). In other words, the candidates were asked to take us along their journey. The beginning of the journey was explored by asking the students to identify their first thoughts about their research idea and the nature of the initial struggles in their minds. They were asked to recall what their first idea or question was like, and where it had come from. Pursuing the journey metaphor, the students were asked how those initial questions changed, what kind of feedback they received from peers and supervisors, and what various iterations or versions of the research questions they developed based on their initial research ideas. To explore where they were along the route, the students were asked about their latest thinking on their emerging proposals and how it differed from their initial thinking. They were also asked about the challenges or the next level of learning that they anticipated. The students were then asked to reflect on what they had learnt over the course of the journey as a whole. They were asked to consider what they wished they had known before starting this journey, what their high and the low points were in the course of these travels, whether they felt they were prepared for that journey, and what helped them most in the first six months along the route to designing their first academic research proposal. Towards the end of the interviews the students were asked how they had changed personally and professionally as a result of this research journey. Throughout, the guiding concept that framed the interviews was the research learning that occurred in this process.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. We did not approach the data with predetermined hypotheses. Our aim was to explore how candidates articulated and understood their experiences of learning during the first six months of their research journey. In broad terms, we used a grounded theory approach which allowed us to theorise ‘upwards’ drawing on the experiences of the doctoral students. The data were managed and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software ‘Atlas.ti’ which facilitated the recognition of converging trends and emergent themes.

## Findings

The findings are described in terms of the various locations and positions that the candidates found themselves along the journey. We grouped the responses into six categories or stages that replicated the progress of a journey, from *taking off* (1), *refin(d)ing a destination* (2), *navigating* (3) through the six-month journey. We were also interested in what candidates believed were the *necessary provisions* (4) for the journey, in other words – their needs, and how the journey affected those who undertook it. At the point of the *sixth month* (5) we examined the nature of the struggles that students engaged in to get to this point. Finally we describe the *travellers' personal growth* (6) as they reflect on their journey. Throughout, we recognised and indeed demonstrate in the analysis of the data, that the stages of the journey are not always clear, even or distinctive.

In this article we use pseudonyms when referring to our students. We recognise the limitations of using names without substantive biographical identifiers, particularly with our large cohort size. However, for the purpose of style and narrative smoothness, we refrain from referring to them repeatedly as 'students'.

### Taking off: choosing a topic

Three trends are most clearly evident in descriptions of how candidates came to choose a specific topic. The first and perhaps most obvious observation was that the work environment was directly linked to the selected area of study. Since the programme targeted practitioners, this was not surprising. However, a number of factors within the work situation were identified as stimuli for study. Alexa and Marius sought an area of study that would help develop the conceptual skills within their work environment, where much time was spent on research. According to Marius:

It's about the kind of difficulties that is experienced at the moment. . . within this country but also in other countries. How would a different understand[ing], you know, perhaps lead to better implementation and better practices?

While Marius suggested that an improvement within his organisation would have an effect on the work done outside of that organisation, John (a university academic) felt that the programme would directly help him to solve specific problems within his work environment:

I think my journey didn't really begin when I registered for the doctoral studies, but it began in my work situation. . . I started to see the problems. What came to my mind was "Ah, maybe one of the things that one can do is to research. . . the problems that we are being confronted with in the work situation". . . I felt this is the chance maybe to get into the programme . . . to be guided. . .

Similarly, Paul and Carl both identified problems in their work environment that they sought to address through their research. Eric took a slightly more personal approach and said that he saw that he had a "lack of knowledge to deal with work issues".

Dorothy on the other hand had a practical approach to research, thinking she could use data from her work situation in order to conduct the doctoral study. She hoped to enrich this data by "add[ing] a qualitative analysis to quantitative data already gathered in the course of [her] work".

What was common to the above respondents, with the exception of Dorothy, is that they all expected their study to have *practical* value and that it was going to make real difference to their professional outputs and indeed would enhance the impact of their work in the broader community.

A second identifiable trend was that some candidates entered the programme with a vague idea of a possible research area and set about looking for a topic when they began the programme. Kathy said that she did not know what she was going to study until she "came across this decentralisation programme". Others said that they had a general interest in a research area but had not been able to define the focus of their study. For example, Monica said that she had a topic but did not know what her research questions could be. Daphne said that she was looking for a topic worth researching within a broad area of interest. She pointed out that she had done "three little drafts. . . to change from one idea to the other". Despite her apparent confidence in knowing her area of study, Janet, too, did not appear to have a clear idea of what she was going to do. She said that she had a number of research interests but realised that she had to choose something related to policy studies as required by the specific doctoral programme. Kay said that she wanted to translate her emotional ideas to scholarly ones but that her ideas were still "hazy".

A third identifiable trend was that some candidates came into the programme knowing exactly what they wanted to do. Tanya said that she had mulled over her research topic for two years prior to entering the PhD programme.

However, she went on to say that she had discarded her initial commitments when confronted with new knowledge gained in the course of the programme, only to come back to it later. George was clear that he was going to study educational transformation in his country and he had identified the particular reform process that he planned to research. Sibu had an idea of what he wanted to research but found that his idea was too broad. He said that six months after beginning the programme, he was still at the beginning of proposal development.

A common thread running through the responses cited thus far was the sense of emotional commitment to their studies. Labaree (2003) makes a similar point by observing that educational researchers bring into the academia three significant traits: maturity, professional experience and dedication. Admittedly such commitment ranged from the extreme of changing their country through research to the more modest goal of improving their work situation. A related feature was the anticipation of personal growth through the study, either through being able to do one's job better or through a sense of personal fulfilment that doctoral studies was expected to offer.

Given these responses, it is safe to claim that those coming into the programme with a topic and/or research question in mind would not necessarily have a clear idea of their research questions at the end of the six-month period. At the same time, not having a topic after six months was not experienced as an inability to benefit from undertaking the journey. In reflecting on our own experiences (Herman and Pillay), we also realised that we had both entered the programme with no idea of an area of research, and had happened upon our topics quite accidentally, through casual conversation with others in the programme, which in turn prompted us to reflect on our personal experiences.

### Finding and refin(d)ing a destination: formulating the research questions

In this section we look at students' experiences in developing their research questions. In the main, candidates had to refine and reformulate their research questions while, in some exceptional cases, the original research questions were retained. For some, the initial research questions were changed either because they were too broad or their focus was too narrow.

Kathy, Eric and Alf were advised that their topics were too broad. For example Kathy was looking at decentralisation policies without finding a focus area; Alf was looking at “all policies regarding education management post-1994 that have brought about or failed to bring about necessary changes in school reform. . .”. Some of the research questions were so broad that one of the supervisors was led to comment: “there’s actually four or five PhDs in this and you have to decide which one you want to do”.

Elisabeth’s proposal was hugely ambitious in scope:

I wanted to select a few Commonwealth countries. But with time it was like maybe you just need to be practical and say you can’t afford to catch up with the selected Commonwealth countries that you would have liked. Yet I was saying to myself, there are Commonwealth countries that are classified small states, small island states and small desert states, so I knew exactly. . . all the countries. . . I would have ease of access and I would have no problems in terms of getting in there, collecting the data. But it was a question of time. So in the process I thought, let me just take a small state. . .

Thobs and Rani discovered that their questions were too abstract and theoretical, and that they were attempting to investigate a vague philosophical concept and not a social or policy problem.

On the other hand Tanya had reduced her research questions to a needs assessment survey, probably because she was familiar with such surveys:

I thought it would be more exciting. I thought it would be easier. I thought it would be easier because I would analyse the policy, I would go into the field and ask questions about what people think about the policy and what their needs are and whether those needs are reflected in the policy but it should be easier and straightforward, looking at it from a historical perspective. So I sort of put together what I thought would be. . . the initial proposal, the five pages. And I sent it to. . . and it came back with lines all over. . .

A striking problem that some candidates identified was that their research questions had a ‘missionary-like’ purpose. According to Alexa, her research questions implied that she was going “to tell people how they could change their faculties of education”. John also formulated his research question with missionary fervor. He wanted to ensure that a specific policy was being implemented. Closely related to the missionary-like commitment of research questions was the recognition that for some the desire to make the world or the work environment a better place would probably result in non-operational, non-measurable research questions. Kay began by planning to analyze the effectiveness of a particular policy but discovered that it would be difficult to

measure such effectiveness. It was then that she determined to move from an emotional to a scholarly approach to her study.

The necessary shift from the emotional impetus for a study to the recognition of a broader scholarly agenda was probably more difficult for those who believed that their research would result in some form of social and institutional reform. For example, Alexa had anticipated that her study would have an impact on the way in which her organisation would function in the future. However, she found that her research questions had assumed certain outcomes as inevitable. She had to change her questions from being suggestive or 'leading questions' to being more open-ended and exploratory. Moosa too found that his research questions had assumed a preferred conclusion. Interestingly, Kay, Rani and Marius – who all began with a clear idea of what they wanted to study – found that their research questions were not easily operationalised. This may be attributable to the misconception that the research was intended to *change* a social phenomenon while obscuring the need to first *understand* such a social problem. Labaree (2003) refers to this as the cultural clash between the normative character of the teaching profession and its effort to produce valued outcomes, and the analytical perspective of the research and its effort to produce a valid explanation of an educational phenomenon.

The findings show that the candidates had difficulty in understanding the qualities of good research questions and the purpose of a doctoral dissertation. In their attempts to find a focus for their research, they moved between broad and narrow questions; from questions dealing with the practicality of their work, such as "is my [work] project effective?" – to questions imbued with missionary zeal, aiming to make the world a better place; from questions that suggest solutions to questions that seek understanding. Supervisory intervention ranged from refining existing questions to completely rethinking them. The students also assigned importance to the readings and the exposure to new knowledge as instrumental in shifting their focus and broadening the conceptualisation of their research.

### Navigating the highs and the lows

The 'low points' in the research journey of the students could be divided into three categories which are not mutually exclusive. The first category related to practical matters, the second with difficulties in understanding the learning

materials, and the third concerned the disconnectedness between the research, the study programme and the work environments of the students.

The practical concerns were mainly about finding the time to manage their work and study lives. Maureen, for example, said that she was lagging behind in both her work and her studies. Alexa was particularly upset because she personally placed importance on meeting a commitment:

I always pride myself on delivering and if there's a due date I must deliver. . . there's. . . an ethic in there. . . So I really was upset that I came and I didn't do a literature review.

The students identified other practical problems such as difficulty in accessing the material; prioritising and choosing relevant material; and the financial cost of participating in the programme.

The second set of 'lowlights' in the journey was the frustration experienced in trying to understand the prescribed academic material. For some students this was a major learning curve, especially for those who did not speak English as a first language, or for those who came from another discipline.

George felt that he did not fare well in terms of academic work: "I tried to do research using the Internet. I read something about a subject. I was convinced that it was clear for me. But then I scored zero marks on that subject." Tanya appeared to be distressed about how to structure her research proposal and was particularly disturbed that the supervisor had not accepted her first draft proposal:

There were times, I think in the beginning I didn't even know what the sub-headings of the proposal should be. That was a real struggle. . . Even now I still don't think I'm okay with my theoretical and conceptual framework.

Thirdly, students found that there was no clear link between their work, the area of their research endeavors, and the reading material for the programme. Daphne had difficulty in finding information, synthesising it and applying her new knowledge to her work situation. Kathy came to realise that her doctorate would not solve her problems at work. Perhaps what Kathy described as a low point may indeed be viewed as a high point. She went to explain:

I realised that. . . maybe doing research does not solve problems; it's actually to learn something. And I also believe it too, the way I look at life sometimes that one learns even from bad experiences.

Despite being excited about the material he was engaging with in the modules, Eric said that he had a 'low point' when he discovered that the modules did not relate to his specific area of study. Likewise, Kay expressed disappointment with the content of the modules because they did not have an adequate international flavor.

There was greater homogeneity with respect to the 'high points' than with the 'low points' in student experiences. Candidates spoke of an almost traceable path from struggling to 'suddenly clicking' and being able to apply their knowledge. Perhaps Carl's exuberance is especially illustrative:

I have had some good moments one of which was when I was still grappling with the idea of formulating a research topic. It suddenly struck me that I'm engaged in change, change in education, policy studies, policy and change. . . my high point is what I've always had in mind was suddenly clicking with the policy, with me starting to discover more about its implementability.

The sense of finding learning connections was also taken up by others. Billy's high point was "to discover that we can actually put this thing together". Tanya could clearly identify her high point as the day she "understood the questions clearly, what is the problem and what is it that I will be contributing, what new knowledge I will be contributing". Moosa spoke of the highlights not as a single moment but as a "continuing excitement. I wouldn't call it a kind of a euphoric moment – I think there's just a re-engaging with the critical [literature] and that's been very exciting."

The sense of discovery was also identified as a high point in the journey. Janet, Billy, Dorothy and Maureen explicitly identified the exposure to other scholars and to new knowledge as the highlights of their experiences in the programme. It was Thobs who made direct reference to being able to take the moment of excitement a step further by finding ways to apply her new knowledge. She said that she was immediately able to apply the new knowledge into a project she was working on, and she found that "the people were really responding to it and reacting to it in a good way and I've obviously found some of the blind spots".

Compared to the others whose significant moments came from within themselves, Kay, Rani and Daphne identified their high point as the moment when drafts they had submitted were deemed to be acceptable by the supervisor.

While the beginning of the journey, and to a certain extent, the formulating of the research questions were mostly associated with the students' working lives, the high and low points were in the realm of their academic achievements. While the low points for the candidates ranged from low levels of learning, like retrieving information to gaining understanding, the high points were associated with the synthesis and applicability of their research. In other words the 'ah-ah' moment was undoubtedly their high point. What emerged from the students' approaches to formulating and reformulating the research questions was that in seeking to make a difference to the world, they found that change and growth occurred instead at a personal level. In addition, the process helped respondents to develop a sense of *critical* awareness of the issues that had previously been simply understood as areas of interest or areas requiring reform.

### Provisions for the journey: student needs

We understood needs to include elements that both assisted and hindered student progress through the research journey. We sought to identify students' needs by asking them about the problems that they had encountered, what helped them the most during the journey and what they believed they should have known at the outset of their journey. The findings were then grouped in three categories. The first category dealt with practical and technical needs, the second category was the need for more knowledge, and the third category was the need for more interactions with others.

The overwhelming need was to have enough time. The lack of time was particularly challenging for those candidates who prided themselves on keeping to a timetable, mostly their own. Certain students found time by sacrificing their family lives. Rani put it simply, "I don't sleep, I don't have a social life." Daphne also found it hard to divide her time between study, work and family. She hoped to gain time by learning to work and think fast. The words 'quick(ly)' and 'fast' appeared frequently in her response indicating a level of desperation that she probably felt:

I don't have time on my side and that I need to start thinking as fast as possible and of course there's all different kinds of forces that are pulling or pushing from outside and I'm right in the middle. . . My challenge is to actually really, as fast as possible, as quick as possible from now when I leave here to really find much more information and more relevant information and to read as fast because I'm really scared, November [the defence] is coming. . .

In contrast, for Tony, thinking was a slow process which could not be rushed. He therefore found it difficult to find the time to reflect on his research proposal and find coherence and meaning in his writing. He felt that keeping the pace removed the joy from this journey:

The only thing that I would have wished for is. . . more time. . . I just found over this weekend, my head is so full of a whole lot of things and I don't like it for my head to be just full of a lot of things. I need to savor and just distil and make it a part of and fit it in, do it like kind of a mind map. I can't do a mind map over the weekend.

For some students, taking off from work seemed like a solution to the problem of time. It was Thobs who made us aware that there is a price to pay for such a decision as well. She found that the unintended effects were professional isolation and the difficulty of relating the theoretical with the practical. She therefore decided to take on part-time projects in her professional life.

The second category of needs dealt with the perceived lack of knowledge on the part of students. In particular, they spoke of a lack of knowledge and understanding about education, research methodology, and about the doctoral programme itself. Siby, Maureen and Monica, who had no background in education, felt most disadvantaged. Extensive reading in order to fill the gaps was not always beneficial because they argued that there was a lack of focus with such an approach.

Some candidates thought that they should have had more knowledge on the scope, the outcomes, the requirements and the challenges of a PhD programme before they undertook the journey. This finding came as a surprise to the researchers given the extensive information that was made available to candidates at the outset of the programme. It is possible, of course, that the information was overlooked, misunderstood, inadequate, given insufficient attention – or that no amount of detail could have actually prepared the candidates for the enormous task ahead of them. This problem could be seen to resemble a shortcoming of the 'how to' books on doctoral studies since understanding often only comes once you are at a particular point in the research journey. What was evident among our students was that there was a lack of coherence between what the programme co-ordinators expected of them and what the students thought was expected of them. For example, John was overwhelmed by the number of articles he had to read for the literature review, and thought that he should have known about it before so he could have started with the reading earlier. But as Janet pointed out, it is difficult to

find focused and meaningful readings when one does not have a clear idea of the research questions.

In spite of the seminar-based character of the programme, there was expression of a strong need to have more interactions with peers. Alf wished for mentors who would constantly interrogate his understanding of the research process until he got to a point where he could be safely on his way:

You need people to interrogate what you're thinking and how you're thinking. . . and then along the journey interrogate it again. . . because. . . we came wanting to solve the world's problems. But really what it is we want to do is not clear, we know in which area we would like to work, but really that hasn't been interrogated. . .

For most candidates the encounters with the supervisors were paramount. Some found such meetings practically difficult because of the physical distances they had to travel and the need to use electronic communication which was not always reliable for candidates in remote or rural settings.

Although it has long been recognised in the academic community that PhD research is largely an individual venture, the candidates in this cohort seemed to expect a significant level of support from the university and its staff. The need for more supervisor support, for research skills training, for training in accessing information, for understanding better the requirements of the programme appeared to be part of a dependency pattern. At the same time there is evidence that suggests that the articulation of the needs themselves indicates a growing understanding of the process. For example Alf, in calling for more frequent interrogation of his writing from an external person, revealed his own self-interrogation which allowed him to progress from having aspirations of changing the world to writing a solid academic proposal. When candidates independently engaged with the literature and found the time to do this, they were able to make progress with the writing of the proposal.

### After six months

A striking and central thread in the responses of candidates, despite being at different points along this journey at the end of six months, was the sense of struggle that they were engaged in and of being in a state of constant searching. All students had defined particular goals that they were trying to reach and were each occupied with their personal struggle to get there. The

points at which they found themselves in the continuum of this journey ranged from confusion about the choice of topic to refining the research proposal and even to selecting an appropriate research methodology.

While Siby and Janet were still looking for a research topic, most had progressed beyond this point and were occupied with their literature searches. But many struggles were going on at this point. For example, Marius had a problem identifying what was considered to be a research article or document. He found it difficult to distinguish between institutional working documents and research literature. Tony was stuck at the point of trying to make sense of the readings:

I certainly think that I've always read a lot and I've always read widely. . . . But I think what this has made me do is really knuckle down and try and shape something. . . . into a coherent whole. I'm not there yet.

Another common struggle for candidates was to identify the appropriate research questions. Moosa was still grappling with articulating the "question that would cover that broader concern that I was expressing and not become too focused. . . . I'm still not very clear about exactly the question that I'm going to finally ask".

The search for coherence within the proposal, to make things fit, was another arena of struggle for some students. Marius and Billy were trying to find a theoretical framework within which they could locate their research. Kay expressed this as the need to make a connection between the proposal and the end results. Carl was looking for:

. . . that thin line of continuity throughout the proposal from the introduction through the literature review, through the methodology, the design in general. I need to establish that thin line of connectivity, the connection throughout from the introduction right up to the methodology.

For yet others the struggle centred on finding the focus of the study. Alf knew what he wanted to research now but was still looking:

. . . to sharpen the focus now because the field is so broad. And in order for me to get some workable project out of it I'm going to have to narrow it down. . . . I'm. . . trying to focus specifically on how did researchers conduct research on accountability within schools specifically.

A few candidates had moved beyond the point of finding a focus and were thinking about what methodology would be appropriate for their study.

According to Kathy:

What I'm busy doing is now to strengthen my methodology especially to be more clear about sampling, which regions I'm going to focus and which school I'm going to focus on, and which research methodology I'm going to use.

Rani ventured further and was the only one who made specific reference to the problems of reliability and validity in developing her methodology.

Six months into the research journey, students appeared to be involved in an intense process of searching and re-searching. They were searching for a topic, for the appropriate research questions, for coherence, for relevant literature and for a methodology. What the next section shows is the importance of looking inwards as well as outwards in order to find the best route for the journey. In other words, students had to make significant personal shifts in order to achieve a level of success in their study.

### The travellers

The saying 'I travel to seek the world and I discover myself' is illustrative of the changes that these doctoral students reported. The candidates observed changes in their level of confidence, in their knowledge, in their skills and in their approach towards their work and their colleagues.

Kay was pleased that she could "feel good about [herself]". Thobs who was not employed at the time found that her studies "helped [her] to have [her] own life back and to have an aim". Similarly Eric who felt "stuck" at work because of institutional politics stated that the doctorate helped him to feel that he was "worth something again".

While the above students gained confidence and self-esteem, Alexa had a contrary experience:

It's made me feel like a student again. . . you know that fear of not being able to perform. . . to get to the end of it.

Tanya was quite expressive about the battle to overcome her fears and doubts and to gain confidence in her ability to deal with the content, the skills and

“the amount of knowledge and understanding that you require at this level”:

Just in those initial sessions we had, it sort of scared me. I thought to myself: Am I really ready for this? Am I going to make it? But you know, of course the minute you say to yourself “yes, you’ll make it”. . . you know, this whole thing I’m battling with. . . So it was . . . scary but what has happened now. . . with the information that we’ve got, through the sessions that we’re having and the understanding that I have. . . I’m more confident. . . Initially. . . I went through a process of going “wow am I really going to do this thing?”. . . I think I’ve just realised that it’s okay.

The PhD programme and the exposure to knowledge was a humbling experience for students as it exposed many of their weaknesses and struggles. George realised that all his previous studies as well as his work did not prepare him for the doctoral experience:

There are no mathematical answers; you cannot give for each question an answer. There are different viewpoints to interpret, and some viewpoints are contradicted, are opposite and so on. So those kind of issues are extremely important for me, they sensitise me to understand that I need to learn more. I am convinced that I don’t know anything about education. I still need to. . . I thought that I had the experience, I’ve worked in education for more than 20 years but I realised that education is really complex.

Carl who was drawn into the course by the frustration he felt in the shortcomings of his senior colleagues and the systems in his workplace, discovered the weaknesses within himself:

. . . in a sense it has highlighted my weak points. I’ve come to discover that there are certain areas which I need to work on. I am weak in conducting research, in writing proposals. . . I believe that it has changed me. . . I was able to realise that I’m weak there. . . and that I still need to read more. The more you read the more you realise that you know very little.

The acquisition of new knowledge and the critical engagement with it was another important learning point in the journey. Paul and Janet found that the readings gave them another perspective on issues that they had encountered in their professional life. Paul felt that after starting the programme, his work had become more interesting. John found that he started to read more extensively than before, mostly academic literature. He and Monica were the only candidates that acknowledged the help they received from the guides about ‘how to write a research proposal’ and from the sessions dedicated to developing the proposal (that is, the fifth day of each five-day seminar). John explained:

I think that has changed my thinking, my attitude towards the research and also I think the first few weeks with all the explanations and the input of the lectures I think was a very good foundation.

While some felt that they learned to prioritise, sacrifice and discipline themselves, for others, becoming more critical was a significant change. This was most pronounced in the way students began to relate to their work. Kay is a good example:

It has made me very cautious also of my work and what I do. The last assignment I was doing was for UNESCO – writing a manual for their teachers, teacher training for HIV and Aids – I was very cautious on what I say because I was more focussed on the outcome. . .

John reported that he became critical both of himself and his colleagues. He kept questioning his colleagues' and his own thinking. This sometimes had negative consequences for him:

Yes, I think it's changing me; I'm starting to ask more questions and also to be critical. To other people it's not good but I think immediately when I get something at my work situation I start to be critical. . . people don't feel comfortable. . . it's not a major problem but people are saying that before they come to me they need to think of what they are going to say because I may be very critical. Though at times I don't even feel it.

A conspicuous point to emerge from the above responses is that the writing of the proposal is an extremely personal experience. Despite the many requests for extended external support, the intimacy of the writing experience becomes stark at this point. Whether it was a feeling of self-worth or intellectual stimulation gained from intellectual development, or the ability to confront personal weaknesses, or the experience of a sense of triumph, or frustration, the students had established a personal relationship with the scholarly enterprise. For many, the development of their writing was accompanied by a parallel sense of personal growth. Simultaneously there appeared to be a decentering of the import and weight of their professional lives in their scholarly plans.

## Conclusion

The organisation, funding and delivery of doctoral training have in recent times come under severe scrutiny (King and Dobson, 2003; Malfroy and Yates, 2003). Changing the status quo with respect to doctoral student training will be difficult, in part because of the lack of research and insight into an

endeavour in which “the unwritten rules of doctoral study” remain poorly understood (Hawley, 1993). And yet this study on research learning begins to both add conceptual substance to a neglected concept (research learning) but also points to practical insights for those responsible for designing and managing PhD supervision.

Stanley Pogrow’s (1997) point made in his paper on the effects of age on the performance of doctoral students at Stanford University, that older candidates often seek a more practical orientation to their study, is borne out among the students that we interviewed. In choosing their area of study and developing their research questions, students showed a strong leaning towards the importance of the practical value of their study to themselves, to their work environments and to their country. While students did not necessarily forsake this commitment, the commitment had begun to be redefined after the six-months in their personal and collective journeys. From an almost activist fervour to change an aspect of their external environment, students began to identify a need for and indeed to experience a sense of personal growth that began to assume a level of priority in their thinking. It is likely that given the compelling history of the South African struggle against apartheid, experienced by many of these students, the compulsion to reform and improve the environment were quite understandable. However, the question of interest here is what factors intervened to reshape this activist zeal into scholarly commitment?

Dorn and Papalewis (1995) argue that students have a better chance of staying with their study if their external needs like social interaction and fostering a sense of collegiality are met. Admittedly, our study does not look at what factors contribute to the completion of doctoral studies as does theirs, but it is feasible to argue here that it was not the external factors that drove students in their endeavour to complete and improve their proposals. Indeed the external needs that students identified were largely unmet needs and in the main, at the end of six months, such needs were still unfulfilled. While the fulfilment of external needs like improved search skills on the Internet are likely to facilitate student progress, they cannot account for the student’s personal growth and development in the writing of the research proposal.

In describing the point at which they found themselves at the end of six months, students made repeated reference to their personal growth and none had attributed this growth to having an external need met. Instead there was reference to their engagement with the literature, that such engagement was a

struggle and that, even if they did not have a final proposal at this point, they had made progress in understanding themselves and what was expected of them in order to write an acceptable proposal. That the journey had been a humbling one for these senior professionals is telling. What it suggests is that students had moved from the point of seeking answers to crafting problems, from searching for solutions to understandings of the research problem.

That doctoral students in education are more likely to seek to reform an institution or solve a problem and, therefore, more likely to experience difficulty in developing the appropriate skills necessary for the writing of a PhD, is a view taken up by Labaree (2003, p.13). He argues that:

Students and professors in researcher training programmes often encounter a cultural clash between the world-views of the teacher and researcher. Students may feel they are being asked to transform their cultural orientation from normative to analytical, from personal to intellectual, from particular to universal, and experiential to theoretical. They often resist.

There is evidence to suggest that students in our study experienced a similar ‘jarring’ that Labaree (2003) describes as the clash or divide between conflicting cultures. Students had expressed difficulty in reading the appropriate academic literature that was necessary for the writing of a proposal, they had begun with somewhat grandiose plans to correct the wrongs in their work environment, they were angry about social injustice and sought a way to right such wrongs, and they found that their writing often required significant rewriting and improvement. Students were often deeply disappointed when their work was returned ‘with lines all over’. But significant shifts began to occur when students began to redefine their project. George realised that there were no answers to be found and Billy, Carl and others eventually recognised the need for an intellectual focus for their study. What was notable was that their professional lives began to occupy the margins of their thinking about their proposal, and were no longer at the centre of their research endeavours; in short, they were able to stand back from the immediacy of the work environment.

It is probably significant that the students in our study were mainly older, more mature learners. It is possible that such maturity allowed them to be dedicated to their study and to persevere despite the setbacks. Labaree (2003) argues that older students are more likely to “take charge of their doctoral program and make it serve their own needs instead of waiting for the program to shape them” (p.16). We suggest that in addition, translating the passion for

change and reform into a passion for scholarly work is a crucial element in enhancing the probability of success in the writing of the dissertation. We differ therefore with Bell's (1993) simple guide that writing a doctoral thesis is really a matter of mastering the techniques of doctoral study and that there are identifiable steps to achieving this; we found that there were no clear steps to be followed in the writing of the proposal and that the journey that each student traversed was filled with obstacles, reversals, breakdowns and, yet, progression. What could be gleaned from this study is that research learning is even more complex than we had anticipated, and that making firm statements about 'the right way' to prepare doctoral students might in fact be the first error in seeking to improve the learning and support of novice researchers.

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# Pedagogic hierarchies: Plato and Bernstein

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## Abstract

‘Wherever there is pedagogy there is hierarchy. . . , the language of description should attempt to sharpen its possibility of appearance’ (Bernstein, 2001, p.375).

This paper compares the pedagogic hierarchies of Plato and Bernstein and develops a basic theory of pedagogic hierarchy that both could reasonably be seen as ascribing to. It begins with a brief description of two images that convey Plato’s understanding of pedagogic hierarchy: the ladder of beauty and the cave metaphor. This is then juxtaposed to Bernstein’s pedagogic device, his use of classification and frame, and his theory of horizontal and vertical discourse. Finally, the respective shift upwards of both Plato and Bernstein into the most sacred areas of the unthought is tracked and it is concluded that both Plato and Bernstein can be seen as travellers between the two worlds of materiality and immateriality, although Bernstein provided clearer means to chart the power and control relationships this terrain is always embedded within. Yet in the last instance Plato’s great work falls over Bernstein in its ability to self-sufficiently perform what Bernstein can only theorize and research.

Let us begin in a place where student and teacher meet, a place that holds in a disciplined middle ground Bacchalian excess and Apollonian principle – a Symposium where friends and lovers gather to deliver edifying speeches, eat good food, drink some wine, and have a good time. It is in this setting that Plato contrives to provide an account of hierarchy within pedagogy through the speech of Socrates. The medium of love is the device used to travel up the ladder of beauty from its most concrete and physical manifestation to its purest and most abstract form. Love is precisely the power to straddle the various levels of ascent in an integrating spiral. Socrates points to Eros as a desire that has a notion of height and a smack of depth but strives in that liminal space between full knowing and ignorance. It occupies middle ground, a ground that has tasted but not reached. It is the great facilitator between the divine and the worldly, between wisdom and unawareness, between the gods

and man, between the sacred and the profane.<sup>1</sup> In this intermediate world Eros is *both* and *neither*. It is a great spirit, a *daemon*, able to allow communication in the opening between the heights and the depths that otherwise would not touch each other (*Symp.* 202d–204b). It is this force that Socrates uses to climb from the individual, concrete, and temporal to the universal, abstract and timeless. For Plato, structured guidance up and down this Ladder of Beauty is what pedagogy is in its essence.

Socrates' account of how to go about this repeats what he heard at the feet of his own teacher, the high priestess Diotima. It begins with the love of a single body and quickly expands outwards to all bodies before suffering exhaustion and boredom in excess. The more subtle and interior qualities of mind then become increasingly attractive and this expands outwards to a fascination with the socio/cultural institutions and frameworks that encourage and produce good minds as well as the knowledge fashioned from this unity.

Now he has beauty before his eyes in abundance, no longer a single instance of it; now the slavish love of isolated cases of youthful beauty or human beauty of any kind is a thing of the past, as is his love of some single activity. No longer a paltry and small-minded slave, he faces instead the vast sea of beauty, and in gazing upon it his boundless love of knowledge becomes the medium in which he gives birth to plenty of beautiful, expansive reasoning and thinking (*Symp.* 210a–d).

A hierarchy emerges that includes a previous stage and then transcends it, a hierarchy that expands to gracefully include more and more within its ambit, slowly imparting beauty to everything that crosses its inclusive spiral

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<sup>1</sup> Socrates tells the story of the birth of Love as follows – ‘The gods were celebrating the birth of Aphrodite, and among them was Plenty, whose mother was Cunning. After the feast . . . Poverty turned up to beg, so there she was by the gate. Now, Plenty had got drunk on nectar. . . and he'd gone into Zeus' garden, collapsed and fallen asleep. Prompted by her lack of means, Poverty came up with the idea of having a child by Plenty, so she lay with him and became pregnant with Love. . . He takes after his mother in having need as a constant companion. From his father, however, he gets his ingenuity in going after things of beauty and values, his courage, impetuosity, and energy, his skill at hunting. . . , his desire for knowledge, his resourcefulness, his lifelong pursuit of education, and his skills with magic, herbs, and words. He isn't essentially either immortal or mortal. Sometimes within a single day he starts by being full of life in abundance, when things are going his way, but then he dies away. . . only. . . to come back to life again' (*Symp.* 203b–e). There we have it, poverty gaining access to plenty and giving birth to love. A shorter description of the pedagogic enterprise would be hard to find. It frames the whole analysis.

upwards.<sup>2</sup> The ladder increases in both depth and breadth as it expands upwards and inwards. The individual beauty of a single lover is not forgotten, only properly placed in a mind and cultural milieu that is also beautiful. To focus in on individual beauty in a mortal world is to enter suffering, not only because the magnificence of the rest of existence pales, but because that particular manifestation of beauty is destined to wither. Diotima points away from this immersion in particularity towards a structured hierarchy that works from physical individuality to abstract knowledge. It is the taking of a more interior and intensional view. This is the danger of encountering beauty in a specific form, it kisses and wounds, it seduces you with its charm, makes you focus on it to the exclusion of everything else, convinces you that ‘this’ is the most exquisite and complete experience one can have, and cuts you off from the wine dark sea of beauty all around. Still, it holds a manifestation of beauty and encourages profound thoughts, but it must be placed in the ocean of beauty it swims within, seen as Beauty’s child. Hold onto the individual expression of beauty, but see its charm in relation to the radiance that flows all around it and scaffold a path from the one to the other – such is the teaching of Diotima.

A further consequence of the ladder is that the *autonomy* of the lover increases with ascent while degrees of *commitment* expand. As higher levels are reached, the lover is able to work in ways that increasingly release from previous bonds. Seeing that many are beautiful releases the lover from exclusive dependence on one body. Seeing that minds, institutions and principles are beautiful, releases the lover from dependence on bodies. Each release brings with it an expanding area of commitment, until, with the final vision of The Beautiful, the lover is freed from all particular bonds yet committed to all, as we will see again with the Cave Metaphor. For now, let us return to the heights of Beauty.

‘Try as hard as you can to pay attention now,’ she said, ‘because anyone who has been guided and trained in the ways of love up to this point, who has viewed things of beauty in the proper order and manner, will now approach the culmination of love’s ways and will suddenly catch sight of something of unbelievable beauty – something, Socrates, which gives meaning to all his previous efforts. What he’ll see is, in the first place, eternal; it

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<sup>2</sup> Hierarchy comes from two greek words: *hieros* meaning sacred; *archein* meaning rules/order. Sacred order. Its first full articulation derives from Pseudo Dionysius and his negative dialectical path that directly uses and theorizes hierarchy as a pedagogic device. A good start is his *Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter 3. We are working with the direct lineage behind his writing – Proclus back to Plotinus back to Plato and his ladder of beauty.

doesn't come to be or cease to be, and it doesn't increase or diminish. In the second place, it isn't attractive in one respect and repulsive in another, or attractive at one time but not at another. . . depending on how people find it. Then again, he won't perceive beauty as a face or hands or any other physical feature, or as a piece of reasoning or knowledge, and he won't perceive it as being elsewhere either – in something like a creature or the earth or the heavens. No, he'll perceive it in itself and by itself, constant and eternal, and he'll see that every other beautiful object somehow partakes of it, but in such a way that their coming to be and ceasing to be don't increase or diminish it at all, and it remains entirely unaffected' (*Symp.* 210e–211b).

The art of pedagogy is to take the student on a path that expands the love of beauty until it touches pure form. It is a hierarchical path that reveals beauty in its most abstract clarity at its highest point, and this imparts meaning to everything else below it.<sup>3</sup>

This is the shimmering vision of Diotima that the older Socrates remembered hearing when sitting at her feet as a young man. She revealed to him the nature of pedagogy – the art of understanding the necessary stages to go through on a path that facilitates seeing the Still Main of Beauty. It is a course that Socrates in his younger years had not fully worked through. As her pupil then, he was still caught up in the earlier stages, as Diotima had wisely pointed out to him (*Symp.* 211d). The young Socrates still got overly excited by the sight of an attractive boy, was immersed in the particular and the sexual, the concrete and the physical, and had not yet glimpsed beauty itself, immaculate and pure. It is

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<sup>3</sup> The ladder of beauty works with both extensional and intensional types of hierarchy. The shift from one to many bodies is an increase in extension (scalar), the shift from body to mind an increase in intension (complexity). The first works from smallest to biggest, the second works from outermost (simple) to innermost (complex). In both the ladder of beauty and the cave metaphor it is the intensional hierarchy that dominates, although both types of hierarchy work together. So it is that the Forms are the most intensional (at the heart of all that unfolds) with extensional consequence (from their single principle all else flows), but the size and reach of influence does not come from the *size* of the Form, but from its abstract generating power that reaches out from its intensional height to explain extensional range. Bigger does not necessarily mean higher within a hierarchy. It is within the body that one finds the mind and within the mind that one contemplates the Forms. Here actual size does not count. Biology occurs within the parameters of Physics and Chemistry, and Psychology occurs within the realms of Biology – [physical [chemical [biological [psychological]]]]. Within each of these intensional subsets it is possible to have levels of scale that work with components, and wholes nested in each other. For example within the physical we have electrons nested in atoms nested in molecules. The outermost levels are fundamental as all depends on its initial conditions. The innermost levels are the most significant, as these are both the most complex (needing all the other levels to exist) and the most directive (constrain the lower levels within its own systemic functioning).

with these qualifications in mind that we meet Alcibiades, the most beautiful, controversial and desirable of Socrates' students, and it is in this pedagogic relationship that we see the art of pedagogy working with the nature of hierarchy.

Alcibiades arrives at the Symposium already wasted, and pandemonium erupts. He is encouraged to also give a speech on love, but insists that the only person he will deliver a eulogy on is Socrates. He is so drunk that what comes out is the most honest, affecting, searing, and heartfelt description of what Socrates meant to him as a teacher and who Socrates is as a person. Yet it is also a test case for everything Socrates has said about the nature of pedagogy and love. At the feet of Diotima he craved the beauty of young boys, and now here, in full flesh and sexual splendour is the most gorgeous of Athenian men. What effect has the teaching of Diotima had on her student Socrates, will he be able to transcend the Dionysian beauty of Alcibiades? This is the dramatic impetus that drives the second half of the Symposium.

To understand the nature of Socrates, Alcibiades maintains, one must open him up and look inside and there you will find an image of the gods. He is able to reveal this divinity through mere words, words that are so powerful that even when repeated in differing contexts they still have the power to spellbind listeners (*Symp.* 215d). Alcibiades, when hearing the words of Socrates, found himself wrapped in ecstasy – heart pounding, tears flooding – while at the same time feeling deep within himself the inadequacy of how he was conducting his life. Yet Alcibiades was not a compliant victim to the context liberating words of Socrates, he was a robust and stubborn student, refusing to give up a life of ambition, fame and indulgence for eternal beauty. He might have liked the idea of pure form and felt its force, but he preferred to wander around in the quicker pleasures of sex and power with the refrain 'not yet, not yet' easing his way. Such a student would be a worthwhile type for a wise man to educate in exchange for bodily favours. Alcibiades suffered under no illusions and was happy to effect just such a deal with Socrates – body for mind. To this end he undertook the seduction of Socrates, a task that should not have been too difficult, given Socrates' proclivity for handsome young boys and the good looks of Alcibiades. He contrived to get Socrates alone in his house and gymnasium so that a space could be created for the bold declarations of lovers. Yet Socrates' actions in private were no different from that in public. A determined seducer, Alcibiades finally decided on a direct assault, invited him to dinner and got him to stay the night (*Symp.* 217c–e). Socrates greeted his seducer's advances with the following epigram – '[I]t's

only when your eyesight goes into decline that your mental vision begins to see clearly. . .’ (*Symp.* 219a).<sup>4</sup>

It is obvious that Socrates had learnt well from Diotima – the physical beauty of Alcibiades could not stand ground with pure Beauty. As the circle of beauty widens from the individual to the ocean of beauty that is existence, true beauty is seen within, in a glimpse that does not look to any outward manifestation, but in a moment of total concentration catches something abstracted from all physicality, shining within one’s own mind in an unchanging way. Alcibiades still had his mind fixed on externals and had not turned his mind around into itself, and thus had not begun to walk the inward and abstract path upwards. By brutally demonstrating to his student the paleness of the exterior beauty he held so dear, Socrates attempted to break the hold that physicality had on Alcibiades. Socrates wanted to turn Alcibiades around, stop him pouring his energy into the seething world of time and change, and channel that energy hierarchically upwards into the still point that offers a glimpse of immortality and widens beauty outwards from an individual point towards all of existence.

If the *Symposium* offers us a first take on the hierarchical complexity of the pedagogical task facing the teacher using the modality of love, it is the *Republic* that develops a similar but different pedagogic hierarchy using the modality of intellect. Just as at the heart of the *Symposium* lies the diamond of Diotima’s wisdom so does the *Republic* open out to reveal at its centre an image of pedagogic hierarchy in the Cave Metaphor (*Rep.* 514a–517a).<sup>5</sup> Two different vertical paths, one for the heart, the other for the mind.

For the learner to begin a hierarchical journey towards increasing abstraction

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<sup>4</sup> As in most situations this charged, Alcibiades has not really been listening to Socrates that carefully, and confident in his own beauty, he takes the bold step of taking off his warm winter coat and placing it over Socrates, before climbing into bed with him. It is with a pained voice that Alcibiades continues the tale.

I put my arms around this remarkable, wonderful man – he is, you know – and lay there with him all night long. . . And after all that, he spurned and disdained and scorned my charms so thoroughly, and treated me so brutally. . . that I got up the next morning, after having spent the night with Socrates, and for all the naughtiness we’d got up to, I might as well have been sleeping with my father or an elder brother (*Symp.* 219b–d).

<sup>5</sup> A detailed and nuanced account of the metaphor can be found in Strang (1986).

we need to know the initial conditions. Plato describes this as being tied down by chains and forced to look in one direction only, towards the dark end of a cave where shadows play on the wall, cast from a fire behind. All the captives have ever experienced is the dance of shadows, so naturally it is their reality. There is no questioning of what is going on behind them to cause such a display, for it has never been seen. We are in this state in our everyday consciousness; it is our normal taken-for-granted existence at its most elementary level. We are bound tight and then driven by a single context and the manifestations it displays. We chase after its representations, pouring ourselves into them, investing what we are in it, naming it, interpreting it, valuing it, twisting it and criticizing it to suit our desires.

The key point is that there is no recognition of being a prisoner in this state. It is experienced as freedom, and indeed, the captives are free to make what they will of the display in front of them, free to shift the discourses horizontally depending on what their current state demands. It is a freedom held in chains by the inability to work on another level apart from the located one in front of them. It is a freedom that allows for any and all attempts so long as they segment and saturate themselves against the same flat wall.<sup>6</sup> This allows for a sense of *complexification* and ‘busy-ness’ but not of *complexity* and order. Complexity needs one level ordering or emerging from another, complexification is all about various activities happening on the same level without an ordering device. Put paradoxically, complexity involves simplification. The prisoner suddenly recognizes that all the various shadows have higher ordering devices that simplify the various shadows into stabilizing categories that are hierarchically organized.

Only with the ability to work on another level that places and organizes the first does a pedagogic relationship appear. The only way to understand the nature of shadow is to understand the form that causes it, otherwise all one is doing is playing with more shadow. What the learner must do is turn around and look into what is causing the display. It is a wheeling around of the whole person from being focused on the instability and momentariness of existence towards a more stable force that lies behind the production. As the learner turns from the outside world of display to the inner and more abstract world producing it, a journey out of the cave begins that echoes the *Symposium*’s Ladder of Beauty and its shift from the physical to the abstract.

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<sup>6</sup> See Bernstein, 1996, p.170-171 for a comparative account in terms of horizontal and vertical discourses, well elaborated on by Moore and Muller (2002).

The first thing seen by a prisoner who is set free from dependence on horizontal shadows is a higher ordering device that regulates its lower field. What regulates this higher field is still not clear, this will only become comprehensible as the learner moves vertically up the ladder and it is this logic that is repeated continuously in the Cave Metaphor. Clearly, the 'more real' object is itself a copy of something 'more real' outside the cave but the cave dweller does not know this yet, he is still struggling to make out what this new world and its objects are. Even the firelight is dazzling and obscures his attempt to see the models responsible for the shadows. Yet slowly this new reality stabilizes, with training and discipline the shadow lover is able to identify the new objects seen although she or he does not yet know that these new objects are things made in imitation of the world outside the cave. A Hierarchy of Being slowly emerges and it is a deeper and more complex world that the cave dweller now moves within.

The world beyond the cave is not a physical world that can be touched, tasted and smelt. It is an abstract, immaterial world, but for Plato it is the most real of worlds, a world that contains truth, beauty, goodness as its very Being, a world that never flickers or sways, an eternal world of Being beyond this timeful world of becoming. The pressing pedagogical question that arises is how to introduce the learner to its vertical delights, of how to take the cave dweller to the mouth of the cave so he can emerge into the sea of beauty out there in the 'real' world of Being. It is a question of how to shift a student's interest from the visible towards the intelligible, from physical objects and their models to an increasing hierarchy of abstract forms. It is an education of hierarchical abstraction that Plato is *enacting* for us in words. This journey is a difficult task, for students still desire the satisfactions offered by the cave with its models and shadows, as we saw with Alcibiades. Besides this, looking into the higher reality that opens out at the cave mouth is a blinding activity, especially when it is only the physical world of becoming that a learner is used to contemplating. The student would still feel that this new world outside the cave is actually the imitation of the 'real' world of the cave. S/he has only a shaky grasp of its movements and forms, and this unfamiliarity makes this new world appear ghostly and vague in comparison to his own locale. Much practice would be needed before the student was capable of contemplating the Forms in themselves. Initially the cave will continually pull the student back with its brunette attractions. Slowly, with diligence and discipline, abstract ideals and principles will begin to emerge as worthy of emulation and honour.

A hierarchical process takes place, with the student continually searching for a deeper reality that underlies the object contemplated, continually questioning assumptions and abstracting until the deepest reality is attained. An integral vision will begin to unfold that holds gradients of reality in perspective until the student is finally able to turn his eyes heavenwards and contemplate the generating source of light that illuminates everything – The Good – that which sits at the heart of existence in the purest, most abstract state. Once this utmost level of abstract contemplation has been reached the student will, for the first time, understand the full nature of existence in all of its complex depth and height, and understand how it fits together. He will have come to an understanding of The Good, the Beautiful, and the True as well as the murkiness of the Cave. The levels of existence will hold together in a graded Ladder that includes and places all in a hierarchy that ranges from darkness to light, concrete to abstract, image to reality, becoming to Being.<sup>7</sup>

Only once pedagogy has taken the student from the depths to the heights can the true nature of this world of becoming be seen. He would rather be a serf in this glorious sphere than king of the shadows. In this newly illuminated world he will see grades of abstraction, running from the purest of forms to its various dependent realizations contained within. Yet an obligation awaits all who have ascended to the heights, it is the call to return to their fellows still chained below and assist them on the journey upwards. It is the call to teach, a call to return from the monad to plenitude, from principle to application, from contemplation to praxis. It is the call to *recontextualize*. Firstly, the teacher mostly has no desire to return to the cave, preferring a world that is close to the production of things rather than having to enter the world of reproduction once again. Secondly, his fellows have no desire to leave their located context. It will sound like a madman's talk to them. Thirdly, as the teacher enters the cave of becoming again, he will be blinded anew, unable to even see the shadows so easily worked with before. He will seem idiotic to the shadow lovers, even more stupid than before he left their company, or be seduced by the shadows again, recalled by the attractions of the flesh. As Propertius

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<sup>7</sup> This vision has its equivalent in Plato's conception of the Universe, mapped out in the *Timaeus*. In it we meet a Pythagorean astronomer who tells the story of the universe. He tells of a creator who made this world of becoming. 'He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be' (*Tim* 29e). It is this key passage that informs the Great Chain of Being (Lovejoy, 1936) that sits at the heart of pedagogic hierarchy from Plotinus to Dante. For Bernstein the Good can be very jealous indeed.

intones –

How she let her long hair down over her shoulders,  
Making a love cave around her face.  
Return and return again.<sup>8</sup>

The Cave is a beautiful place, it is only in a widening and deepening reality that it becomes shallow, its diversity segmented and exhausted on the cave wall.

The task of education is to devise the simplest and most effective manner of turning the mind away from its fascination with the world of becoming and make it capable of bearing the sight of real Abstraction. Education becomes the art of correct alignment, of proper orientation, of turning the mind around (*Rep.* 518d–e). But the mind does not come alone into the world. We have to eat, drink and procreate to survive, and these pleasures tend to pull our vision downwards into the flux of unnecessary desires, breaking our wings. Education thus has to begin at an early age, hammering at the chains of desire and indulgence until the mind is freed to turn around and begin the upward ascent to the light with the desires in harness (*Rep.* 519b). Initially this is the task of Music and Gymnastics and that is why it is crucial to be structured regarding what children read. It is pointless using an unaligned text to orientate a child's mind. It falls to primary education to produce a healthy person who is well balanced and in harmony with him /herself and the world. All resources must be sifted through to ensure that they encourage this effect. It is an education in character building, in enabling a person to function effectively and virtuously in this everyday world. It is an education within the Cave. It enables the darkling to increase depth by one, to gain control of desire

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<sup>8</sup> The opening lines of his poem *O best of all nights, return and return again* (Washburn and Major, 1998, p.164).

and wander around in a useful way throughout the world of becoming.<sup>9</sup> The question remains as to what kind of education would enable a leaving of the Cave and an entering of the Light, of how to close the route of everyday common sense, and open up the road to the Invisible.

Plato's famous recommendation is that of Mathematics. It is an education in abstraction, a shifting of focus from the visible to the intelligible, from becoming to Being. It awakens reason and provides tools for its strengthening until eventually the soul can make a leap towards a level of reality beyond Mathematics – Goodness. In working with numbers it deals with a phenomenon not encountered in the physical world, for there is nothing in the world that has every single unit exactly equal without any remainder (*Rep.* 526a). It thus forces the mind to rely on intellectual rather than physical processes. The lifting of the learner into the heights entails a purging, a complete separation from the physical world, so that a pure contemplation of essence can occur.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As the learner increases his depth, a simplification of the earlier state occurs as it is placed within a more encompassing vision. For example, the desires of the released prisoner contain necessary and unnecessary components. As he moves upwards, he simplifies his desires by keeping the necessary ones and purifying himself of the unnecessary ones. The same process happens when honour and then reason become the uniting principle, until all that is necessary has been kept and ordered within an increasingly deeper system. It is not a losing of desire but its correct training and placing so that higher desires can be reached. Certain texts like the *Phaedo* point to a more austere vision of the body and the need to transcend it. It is just a living corpse causing difficulty in the reaching upwards of the Intellect towards the Divine. It points to an insistent tension in the Platonic corpus, but as the *Republic* contains Plato's most developed psychology, I keep to its suggestion that all have a place if they perform their correct functions within a hierarchy.

<sup>10</sup> Mathematics also proceeds in stages. Slowly mathematics is able to build up an intelligible world, beginning with a single stream of numbers, expanding this into two-dimensional geometry, then the volumes of three-dimensional space, and finally the nature of solidity in motion (Astronomy) (*Rep.* 526a–528d). In the same way that a cave leaver has to slowly acquaint himself with the new world opening out in front of his eyes – building up from shadows to reflections to objects to contemplating the heavens – so must the student of mathematics build up the dimensionality of the intelligible world he is being introduced to. Even the mathematician must be on guard against his vision spiralling downwards into the physical realm. For example, what tends to happen in Astronomy is the beauty and regularity of the stars takes the mind away from the greater abstract beauty of pure number and form (*Rep.* 529b–d).

Once this is achieved, a sea of knowledge opens out to the learner. If s/he manages to work in a totally abstracted world, everything unwraps itself to measurement. Whether it is Music, Astronomy or Geometry, total abstraction allows a great sameness to descend. An affinity between all subjects reveals itself, uncluttering the student's mind and enabling it to see the relation of everything to all. The vertical ascent leads to an integral vision developing that is able to take in local and generic levels of reality as well as having a tool to work across these levels. Yet all of this is only a prelude to the final great leap of learning, it is all only preparation for the best part of the mind to reach out for the best part of reality (*Rep.* 532c). This is the great discipline of Dialectic whereby 'without relying on anything perceptible, a person perseveres in using rational argument to approach the true reality of things until he has grasped with his Intellect the reality of goodness itself' (*Rep.* 532a–b). It is a process of actively questioning assumptions until a point is reached beyond abstraction. Even Mathematics, the technique that turns the mind from the physical to the abstract, has to work with definitions and assumptions that it does not question. The nature of a point, of a number, or of a line is defined but how they came about is left unanswered. 'There is no chance of their having a conscious glimpse of reality as long as they refuse to disturb the things they take for granted and remain incapable of explaining them. For if your starting-point is unknown, and your end-point and intermediate stages are woven together out of unknown material, there may be coherence, but knowledge is completely out of the question' (*Rep.* 533c). Mathematics can only dream about true reality, it is Dialectic that enables the final lifting upwards into The Good. In a radical doubting of all assumptions, in a searching for the context behind the context, in a quest to find the mother of all abstractions, a sudden flash of insight comes with pure mental clarity. A limit point of the thinkable is reached, and as the mind attempts to work at this end point of scepticism it is abruptly pitched into a world beyond assumptions, a first world, a world that makes assumptions possible. The ladder is thrown. It is a peculiar process. On the one hand thought expands outwards, including more and more within its grasp. At the same time it radically simplifies and abstracts as more and more contexts are held within generating principles. Its end result is more than a founding assumption, it is what makes founding an assumption possible and enables an analysis of the founding principles of knowledge structures.

It is an arduous curriculum that entails a good basic education and a thorough grounding in the mathematical sciences, beginning the shift from the tangible to the conceptual. Dialectic is then actively practised to sceptically eliminate

all assumptions and direct the student to the First Principle that informs all. Only then is a student ready to begin the descent back into the Cave as a teacher of others and there he must work until he is able to teach in the cave in an adroit and illuminating way. The blindness of light entering darkness becomes a ‘blind’ filtering the light within the shadows for those needing to see.<sup>11</sup> At this stage, the teacher is equally comfortable in the world of becoming and Being, skilled in polymorphically working on the interface between the two, unblinded by the continual shifts of perspective needed. Now the ascetic path upwards and the creative pouring downwards hold equally for the adept. Only then can they be guided to the climax of their lives. ‘You must make them open up the beam of their minds and look at the all-embracing source of light, which is goodness itself. Once they have seen it, they must use it as a reference-point and spend the rest of their lives ordering the community, its members, and themselves’ (*Rep.* 540a–b).<sup>12</sup>

How does the Bernsteinian corpus square up to this archetypal vision of hierarchy and pedagogy? The easiest place to begin is with Bernstein’s description of the sacred and the profane and the space that opens between them. Within any society there is a distinction between sacred, esoteric, unthinkable otherness of knowledge and profane, mundane, thinkable knowledge of the other (Bernstein, 1996, p.43). It is a splitting up of the world into immaterial transcendence and everyday mundane materiality. What interests Bernstein is the force that relates these two to each other, a force that

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<sup>11</sup> Thank you to Derek Mahon for this conceit, found in his poem ‘First Love’ (*Selected poems*, 2000). The line is ‘This is a blind with sunlight filtering through’.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Each of you must, when your time comes, descend to where the rest of the community lives, and get used to looking at things in the dark. The point is that once you have become acclimatized, you’ll see infinitely better than the others there; your experience of genuine right, morality, and goodness will enable you to identify everyone of the images and recognise what it is an image of. And then the administration of our community will be in the hands of people who are awake’ (*Rep.* 520c). We see here an intimate mixing of individual and social levels of analysis that is sustained throughout the *Republic*, indeed, what happens on a social level provides a bigger picture of what happens inside of us according to Plato.

Plato described as Eros in his ladder of beauty.<sup>13</sup> This force must break through meanings that are directly tied to a material base, that are wholly consumed by and embedded within context without hope of uniting with anything but themselves, much like the state Plato described his prisoners being in within the cave (1996, p.44). For Bernstein, it is the pedagogic device that plays the specific role of breaking this grip of materiality and uniting context bound meaning with other contexts and abstracting concepts. To enable this release there must be a prising open of the context in such a way that the direct relationship becomes indirect by introducing a higher level of abstraction that depends on the context but works differently to it, shifting meaning by degrees from the material and concrete to the immaterial and transcendent. This is what pedagogic *enhancement* is – experiencing boundaries in a way that breaks its chains through the *discipline* of hierarchy, for it is through hierarchy that one is able to step onto the other side of the boundary, able to walk up and down the ladder into new worlds of possibility and probability (1996, p.6). As this gap opens it creates the space for change, for it has released possibility from necessity and this is where we see the first crucial difference between Plato and Bernstein. Both understood the nature of this gap between the sacred and the profane, but Plato wished to regulate this gap with specific political, economic, social, educational and personal practices that ensured a specific distribution of power. Hence his tying of the personal model of the shift from the shadows to the light with the Republic and its philosopher kings. Bernstein, on the other hand, wished to think through the way *power and control relations distribute the sacred and the profane* (1996, pp.18, 45). It provided Bernstein with a certain kind of critical edge different to Plato. He is able not only to describe the nature of the divide between the sacred and the profane and how to bridge the two, but also the variations /possibilities opened up in this gap and the power and control relations that attempt to regulate its functioning. Plato's ladder attempted to set up a pure Euclidian space in which Philosopher kings ruled within a mythology of gold; Bernstein's ladder recognized a topology twisted in space

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There have been many thinkers in the Western Tradition who have attempted to develop their own pedagogic device to work this terrain. Dante is the master of the pedagogic device with his *Divine Comedy* not only encompassing the greatest depth with the greatest height, but also all the levels in between. Other great attempts can be found in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Descartes' *Meditations* and *Rules*, Augustine's *Confessions* and Plotinus' *Enneads*.

and time by the gravity of power and the reproduction of inequality.<sup>14</sup>

This does not mean that there was no movement in the Platonic hierarchy or a questioning of its functioning.<sup>15</sup> We did see two essential movements in the cave metaphor and the ladder of beauty: a movement upwards from the profane to the sacred and then a movement downwards from the light back into the shadows. The task of the sun gazer is to return into the cave and recontextualize what he has experienced for those still bound in a specific, limiting, context. It is a descent down the hierarchy and this is also how Bernstein describes the pedagogic device, beginning with how it *distributes* the sacred forms of knowledge, then how it *recontextualizes* it downwards into the shadows as thinkable knowledge, and finally how within the profane this recontextualization is received and *evaluated*, of how it impinges on the consciousness of the prisoner. It is the hierarchical shift downwards from creation to transmission to acquisition, from inspired production to reflective simplification to reproductive acquirement. It is a movement from abstract design to repetitive copy.<sup>16</sup> The prophet seer on the top of the mount is recontextualized by the priest who makes what he saw understandable to the laity in the foothills still worshipping concrete images. One founding Type produces type/token trees below it that increasingly make explicit and specific

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<sup>14</sup> This is a broad generalization. Plato does think through the implications of power and justice being intimately connected through the articulations of Thrasymachus (*Rep.* 338c), a position he gives full attention to in his *Gorgias*. See Burnett (1964) for an introduction to this vexed area. Furthermore, Plato was fully aware of power as an ordering device both in its corruptions and positivity, his *Republic* is precisely a description of how to free both individual and group from the deformations of power through the use of power. His is a vision of a new order, Bernstein is about the analysis of inequality not the creation of a new ranking, although current Bernsteinians are very quickly pushing towards this kind of vision. It is not going to take them long to build their own *Republic* (or Republics). But to do this they are going to have to negotiate and elaborate on how the regulative and instructional dimensions of education work as *activity systems*. This involves the current holy trinity of Bernstein, Halliday and Vygotsky being synthesized. See Daniels (2004), Webster, Matthiessen & Hasan (in press) and Bourne (2003) for very useful beginnings. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article for pushing me on this point and for the many other recommendations that have improved this paper.

<sup>15</sup> Plato worked through the critical implications of his own hierarchy in the *Parmenides*.

<sup>16</sup> We see a similar logic in Bernstein's distinction between internal and external languages of description, where the first works in the light and the second asks how these concepts can be made more material for the cave. Morias and Neves (2001), Ensor and Hoadley (2004) provide useful guidance in how to work from the light into the shadows.

what was contained in its abstract glory. But it is also the story of return from the many to the one, of what the reproductive acquirers make of this downward flow of light into the cave and here again the similarities between Bernstein and Plato becomes apparent. Bernstein continually points to how this device is not deterministic in both its flow downwards and clambering upwards, in both efflux and return. There is always space for this device to work differently, for in making the sacred accessible to those who it wishes to acquire it, paths are created that others can follow and exploit. The sacred vow unlocks to profane articulation (1996, p.52). But it also finds in its successful charting of a path between the sacred and the profane that others begin to challenge for its ownership, redefinition and use (1996, p.64-81). In Bernstein's explicit pointing to how power and control relationships can be understood in terms of classification and framing relationships he encompassed not only a similar height and depth of vision to Plato, but enabled a clearer placing of its majesty within the power and control relationships it was always already a part of.

Yet this placing of hierarchy within the fields of power and control should not make us ignore the nature of hierarchy in its own right and its intimate relationship to pedagogy. There is a deep educational logic to hierarchy that works its specific claim, and the easy mistake is to critique hierarchy wherever it is found as if hierarchy itself is responsible for inequality and not a device that can both address and cause inequality in education, depending on its use. With both Plato and Bernstein we saw a use of hierarchy to liberate not enchain and it is incumbent on us to point explicitly to how this is the case.

The first point already made is that any 'pedagogy' that works without any hierarchy results in complexification, not complexity. Each unit works on its own and is exhausted within itself as its own type. It does not relate to any other unit for to do so would assume some higher abstraction that related the two to each other. It is a wasteland pedagogy of immense variation and multiplicity without an ordering or emergent device to hold the diversity together. It is a horizontal plane where each feature holds separate and pure, a deflationist account where each unit holds in its own right and has nothing to do with the truth of the other. There is an illusion of growth in the diversity but these form a horizontal chain that bind the learner to whatever the specific context is without providing the tools to move beyond. Those who already have such an ordering tool can begin to build from the elements and climb the ladder; those who don't can only rearrange the types into different patterns on

the same cave wall.<sup>17</sup>

As soon as there is another level then hierarchy appears and the pedagogic relationship takes on one of three possibilities. Firstly, it can explore how a new level *emerges* from the elements below, of how the many become one and are increased by one, of how types become tokens for a new type. This is a pedagogy that works with hierarchy from the bottom up. Secondly, it can reveal how the higher level (type) *constrains* or provides boundary conditions on the elements (tokens) below, of how the one makes of the many below it a specific order necessary for itself to appear. Either pedagogy works from the fundamental to the significant or from the significant to the fundamental. The third pedagogic option is to work *horizontally* within this hierarchy, building up fundamental components so that possibilities can be created for significance or creative play. This allows for the possibility of pedagogy working with three levels: an upper level that constrains the middle level with its boundary conditions, and a lower level that enables the middle level to emerge from its components. At this level of working with a pedagogic hierarchy a unit would hold within itself both its own conditions of *possibility* from below and its higher levels of *probability*. It would not only have been built up from elements below but also have been formed by constraints above it that are pulling it towards itself as an attractor.

To summarize the nature of pedagogic hierarchy working from one to three levels we either have:

- segmented units with no previous tokens needed, and no regulating principle guiding it;
- either a type guiding what tokens are used (top down) or a building of various tokens into a type (bottom up), but not both;
- both tokens being worked upwards into types, and these types becoming tokens for another type above it in such a way that level 3 constrains level 2 *and* level one provides the possibilities for level 2.

An educational relationship that is working on at least three levels of hierarchy contains within itself the basic model of what pedagogic hierarchy is, for it not

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<sup>17</sup> See Holland (1981) for experimental confirmation of this vision in terms of elaborated and restricted codes, where middle class learners are free to move through conceptual and contextual hierarchies, while working class learners are condemned to repeat the same everyday patterns again and again.

only works with founding conditions but also with future possibilities. If we take the second level as our unit of analysis (with both constraints from above and components from below) then we notice four basic energies working, all of which have pedagogic drive. Firstly, there is a tendency for the unit to *preserve* itself through strong classification at the level it is already on. Preservation can harden into a radical icy imperviousness to the other three forces or become a flexible independent unit open to these forces from within itself. Secondly, the unit can soften its classification and *adapt* itself to the level it is working on. Adaptation can result in the horizontal boundary dissolving completely in entropic heat or result in a creative receptiveness to the world around it. Thirdly, the unit could *break itself downwards* into its respective components. This can result in a radical dissolution where the higher unity is lost or it could provide clarity as to how the higher unit came about. Fourthly, it could *transcend* its own location by becoming a token to a type above it and shift up a level.<sup>18</sup> This can result in the upward path becoming dictatorial command or it can reveal the possible emergences that were contained within its own functioning.

These are the simplest components of a model of hierarchy and pedagogy placed together, and both Plato and Bernstein work its logic for the enhancement of educability. The next question I want to deal with is whether the higher levels are *bigger* or more *abstract* and the danger of equating the two kinds. Within Hierarchy theory<sup>19</sup> (as already discussed in footnote 3) there are two basic kinds of hierarchies: scalar/extensional and intensional. The first works with increasing levels of scale (from classroom to school to district to province to country); the second with increasing levels of complexity (from the concrete to the abstract) where there are greater levels of generalization,

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<sup>18</sup> Piaget describes these forces very clearly in his levels of development: assimilation (the self preserves itself from the world); accommodation (the self opens itself out to structuration from the world); disequilibrium where the self finds the level it is working on under question, and a new state of equilibrium where the self shifts hierarchically upwards into a new level of development.

<sup>19</sup> Koestler (1967); White, Wilson and Wilson., eds (1969); Pattee (1973); Allen and Starr (1982); Salthe (1985); O'Neill *et. al.* (1986); Ahl and Allen (1996); Wilber (1995). Set theory and computer programming, especially object-oriented programming with its concepts of inheritance, polymorphic resonance, yo yo effects etc. etc. provide rich resources to elaborate on this field. The latest fashionable French theorist to be thinking through the implications of set theory for the human sciences is the neo Platonist (sic) Badiou.

structuration and organization as one moves up the hierarchy. Plato works with both types in his two guiding images of pedagogic hierarchy. There is a shift from one body to many bodies (scalar/extensional) and then from bodies to mind (intensional/conceptual). Then there is the extension of minds working together in cultural institutions, before the intensification of knowledge produced into *formal* principles that finally lead to the great attractor of all – the Good. But the highest point of an intensional hierarchy is not the largest, indeed in Plato’s case the Form has no extension at all for it is immaterial. It might have great extensional *implication* in that it contains within itself these fundamental constituents as its earlier levels, but its higher levels go beyond these more concrete units by having included what is necessary from them and then having introduced new and more abstract levels on its foundation.

We see a similar logic operating in Bernstein’s pedagogic device. It is an intensional hierarchy in that its highest point is what is most sacred and abstract, and then it recontextualizes downwards and outwards into increasingly more concrete and specific formulations that reach right down into the trenches of the classroom. But it can also appear as an extensional hierarchy with the national department providing the highest/largest level of organization that increasingly breaks itself down into smaller units until we again reach the classroom. Both kinds of hierarchies are needed to think through its implications for pedagogy.<sup>20</sup> The danger is getting the two mixed up and maintaining that the biggest has to be the most abstract, or the abstract has to be the largest. Anyone who has worked with national departments will recognize the absurdity and danger of this link being absolute. Bernstein’s strength was that he was not only able to think through the implications of both hierarchies separately and together within the educational field but was also able to provide a language of how these all held together. This enabled an analysis that can function on different levels but still work with each other. His language enables a translation device that works across both macro/micro and abstract/concrete, as well as their cross fertilizations.

The danger with a translation device is that it tends to work with exterior form and not interior intricacy and density. What is needed as well as an internal

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<sup>20</sup> Ensor provides a particularly good example of how the pedagogic device works in her paper for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bernstein Symposium – *Legitimizing school knowledge: the pedagogic device and the remaking of the South African school-leaving certificate 1994–2004* – especially its location within poverty and plenty.

conceptual language and external objectifying language of description is a language of *interiority* and *exteriority*. A language of interiority works from inside the unit of analyses' own framework and shows how from within its own conditions it maintains its boundaries. Classic exemplars for this kind of language can be found in phenomenology and auto-poiesis. These have *internal conceptual* languages but they are also *interior* languages in that the concepts arise immanently from within their own domain and are not externally derived. Bernstein attempted to provide an internal language of description that is conceptually worked out in its abstract glory, an external language that shows how to operationalize and research the concept, but he also attempted to work on an interior language for education in its own terms, refusing to treat it as a relay switch for power relationships beyond it, or abstract terms imported from other disciplines. It is this focussing on the interiority of education with internal and external languages of description that give Bernstein's writings such weight within educational research. It is one of Bernstein's major contributions to our thinking and research within the educational field and it rides on his initial breakthrough into how to work with the basic abstract forms of education: classification and frame.

'Classification' (what boundaries are drawn in space) and 'Frame' (how relationships interact in time) work in and between these respective hierarchical arenas and enable a furthering of what Plato described happening at the highest but one level of his ladder of beauty where the ladder becomes a sea that can be explored in all its depth and breadth, where all unwraps to measurement. From a painstaking working through many variations of classification and framing relationships Bernstein was finally able to come up with a simple formula that provided the translating device between the various levels of the pedagogic device as well as a foundational analysis of the forces of power and control operating within and between levels.

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Classification and Framing work on a spectrum from strong to weak (±) in ways that are either interior to the unit of analysis or refer to how the unit of analysis relates externally to what is outside of it. It is with this simple analytical tool that Bernstein is able to travel as far as Plato did both into the depths and heights of the cave and ladder in its extensional and intensional variations, only now he has a universal translating device that picks up the manner these hierarchies work within a world seething with poverty and plenty. Dante had Virgil to guide him through the wastes of the inferno and

the climbing up the mount of purgatory; so too does Bernstein have at his side this fair equation. I exaggerate, but only just.

Stepping back for a moment we can see the bare bones of an adequate theory of pedagogic hierarchy showing itself – of working on preferably three levels with four tendencies that vary in classification and framing strengths and extensional and intensional types.<sup>21</sup> Such a theory needs elaboration both in terms of its internal and external language of description and in terms of languages of interiority and exteriority.

Yet this fair equation would seem to falter at a certain point, at precisely the place that Plato points out as the pinnacle of his pedagogic hierarchy. It is the point where dialectic throws the traveller into a world beyond principles, into a place where first assumptions are made and formed. It is precisely these founding forms that initially make classification and framing possible, that provide the initial impetus to its working. These original forms make classification and framing possible by providing the primary divisions the world operates within. To assume that power and control relationships make what they will of this world and carve it up to suit their ends is to miss how the world is already formed at its joints, a reality that will confront us with its own primary logic, a logic that makes classification and framing possible and speaks to it from the other side of space and time.

Bernstein did not go quietly into the night. In one of his last papers, *From pedagogies to knowledges* (Bernstein, 2001), he pointed to precisely that sacred terrain where assumptions and principles of knowledge are generated and again asked a question of it different to Plato. He wished to find out from this place of great height and abstraction not who its first mover was, but how there are “changes in knowledge forms and displacement of and replacement by new forms, creating a new field of knowledge positions, sponsors, designers and transmitters” (2001, p.368). It is from this great height that Bernstein peered down with intelligent love into the classroom in the hope of making the climb upwards recognizable and realizable. We have already seen Plato describe what should happen to someone privileged enough to reach this point. After contemplating the nature of The Good he should

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<sup>21</sup> See my paper *Hierarchies and Education* presented at the Kenton Conference, 2004.

use it as a reference-point and spend the rest of their lives ordering the community, its members, and themselves' (*Rep.* 540 a–b).

What Bernstein used as his reference point was not the nature of the Good itself, but how the Good has been structured within poverty and plenty. The pedagogic love that is born from this union is the need to structure a path towards *justice* that works with broken ladders. But it is not only broken ladders that Bernstein worked with but the grammars of different ladders (Bernstein, 1999) and the various recontextualizing effects this has as the pedagogic device shatters downwards. Perhaps now we can see why Plato not only wrote of a ladder of beauty that worked with the verticality of love but also of a cave of shadows that worked with the differing verticality of intellect. Yet Plato did not only provide us with differing paths through that complex middle ground of the profanely sacred, he *performed* the journey for us through his writing. His writing is precisely the principles of hierarchical pedagogy enacted before us in such a way that it still takes us on the journey in all its phenomenological richness and complexity. It is this performance that warms the first half of this paper and makes of us all bloody footnotes.

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# Revisiting the African-Africana philosophy of education debate: implications for university teaching

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## Abstract

This article explores conceptual links between African and Africana philosophy and its implications for university teaching in South Africa. My argument in defence of an African-Africana philosophy of education emanates from the response of Ben Parker (2003) to Philip Higgs's (2003) call for introducing an African discourse based on African philosophy into the conversation surrounding the re-vision of philosophy of education in South Africa. The Higgs-Parker debate brings into sharper focus the need to reconceptualise university teaching in South Africa along the lines of African-Africana thought. Whereas this debate has much to offer for reconceptualising university teaching in relation to African values, it falls short of engaging with what constitutes a deliberative African-Africana teacher because it fails to acknowledge/recognise that deliberative inquiry is central to what makes African philosophy what it is. This article is an attempt to bridge some of the gaps in the African-Africana debate in terms of what it means for teachers both to be deliberative and to cultivate deliberation.

## Introduction

This article explores two salient and interrelated matters: Firstly, I explore the notions of an African and Africana philosophy of education. My contention is that an African and Africana philosophy of education are closer to each other than Parker wants us to believe. In fact these two approaches to philosophy of education seem to be two sides of the same coin, which suggests that Parker's critique of Higgs is not necessarily justified. Secondly, I agree with Higgs (2003, p.6) and Parker (2003, p.37) that university teaching ought to be framed within an "activist African philosophy of education" and "a 'positive' Africana philosophy of education . . . that appropriates values such as freedom, autonomy and human rights, truth and scientific knowledge, justice

and fairness . . .”, respectively. However, both Higgs and Parker fail to explore what it means to be a deliberative university teacher in relation to African-Africana thought. Of course, Higgs’s argument in defence of communalism, *ubuntu* and humanism does suggest that university teachers ought to become much more deliberative. Similarly, Parker’s call for a (university) teaching community which is both critical and argumentative, on the one hand, and practically active and sensitive to the African context, on the other hand, does go some way to accentuate the need for university teachers to engage deliberatively. Yet, very little, if anything, is said of what it means for a university teacher to be deliberative. My contention is that university teachers ought to be or become deliberative if they are to appropriate more adequately the ‘values’ of an African-Africana philosophy, and thus respond to the needs and circumstances of African students (learners). Hence, this article attempts to explore deliberative inquiry more adequately in relation to African-Africana thought and its implications for university teaching in South Africa.

### African-Africana philosophy of education: different entities or two sides of the same coin?

This section, firstly, explores African-Africana philosophy of education as understood by Higgs and Parker. Secondly, I draw on two theoretical statements with reference to the monumental works of Paulin Hountondji (2002) and Kwame Gyekye (1997) on what constitutes an African-Africana philosophy with the intention to show that Higgs and Parker are closer in their expositions of the concept than Parker contends. Thereafter, I shall move on to a discussion on some of the implications of an African-Africana philosophy of education for university teaching in South Africa.

According to Higgs (2003, pp.16-17), African philosophy can contribute to the transformation of educational discourse in South Africa, in particular empowering communities to participate in their own educational development, since it “. . . respects diversity, acknowledges lived experience and challenges the hegemony of Western Eurocentric forms of universal knowledge”. His articulation of an African philosophy of education is framed in line with the sentiments of Oladipo (1992, p.24), who suggests that the empowerment of communities, as well as their educational development, could be achieved through the use of “whatever intellectual skills they possess to eliminate the various dimensions of the African predicament (that is, the amelioration of the human condition as a consequence of poverty, hunger, famine, unemployment,

political oppression, civil wars, colonialism (imperialism) and economic exploitation)". This notion of an African philosophy of education grows out of two earlier views expounded by Hountondji (1985) and others such as Appiah (1989) and Wiredu (1996), on the one hand, and Gyekye (1997) and others such as Kaphagawani (1998) and Kwame (1992), on the other hand. Hountondji (1985) posits that African philosophy is a rational, critical activity which happens independently of traditional African world views, whereas Gyekye (1997) contends that the rationalist approach to philosophy ought to be extended to traditional African world views through the practice of ethnophilosophy. Moreover, central to Higgs's argument in defence of a form of human activism which could ameliorate the disempowered African condition is the notion of *ubuntu* or humaneness. *Ubuntu* is a form of humanism which could engender "communal embeddedness and connectedness of a person to other persons" (Higgs 2003, p.13). Such an understanding of *ubuntu* could orientate an African philosophy of education towards the cultivation of "virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy and respect and concern for others" (Higgs 2003, p.14).

Is Higgs's elucidation of African philosophy of education different from Parker's suggestion that Africana ought be connected to philosophy of education? For Parker (2003, p.31), who draws on the ideas of Outlaw (1998), "Africana philosophy draws on oral traditions, early writings (for example, Frederick Douglass) and cultural artefacts such as music as well as the rigorous techniques of reason and analytic philosophy to construct African philosophy as a distinct discourse". Similarly, Higgs depicts an African philosophy of education as a particular kind of discourse which draws upon "whatever intellectual skills" people possess in order that they may eliminate "the various dimensions of the African predicament". Firstly, the phrase "whatever intellectual skills" has a clear connection with analytical reasoning and intellectual rigour, that is, the Hountondjian view on which Higgs draws. Secondly, "whatever intellectual skills people possess", following Higgs, does not exclude oral tradition or sagacity (that is, the wisdom of sages) nor African cultural discourses such as music and drama. In this way Higgs and Parker are not exclusively different in the exposition of African and Africana philosophy of education, since they both develop an understanding of African thought and practice inextricably related to rigorous analytical, critical and rational inquiry, on the one hand, and ethnophilosophy (oral traditions, sagacity and cultural discourse), on the other hand. Consequently, African and Africana expositions of philosophical thought, following the Higgs-Parker debate, seem to be two sides of the same coin. In addition, Parker's (2003, pp.32-33) analysis of

Africana philosophy of education as being a “disciplined articulation” of African culture, which “locates human rights, historically and contextually, in the real life experiences of Africans”, is not far from Higgs’s explanation of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a practical discourse which Africans could experience in the context of Africa and its historical legacy of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism so that they (Africans) may “move beyond” what Higgs refers to as Eurocentric hegemony, and what Parker (2003, p.34) refers to as “a desire (for Africana philosophy of education) to challenge a false universal humanism”. In this way Higgs and Parker have much more in common than Parker claims. In fact, Parker’s (2003) call for Africana philosophy of education as a kind of activism which could cultivate critical, argumentative reason and fragility and trust among vulnerable (African) communities is commensurate with Higgs’s notion of an African philosophy of education which has the potential to liberate disempowered communities through critical reasoning and humaneness (*ubuntu*). This brings me to a discussion of two theoretical statements of African-Africana philosophy in order to show that the Higgs-Parker debate about what constitutes an African philosophy that is different from an Africana philosophy of education seems to be making a misplaced distinction.

The first theoretical statement comes from Hountondji (2002, p.84), who is most famous for his critique of ethnophilosophy. For him, philosophy cannot be considered as oral narratives that repeat stories that were heard, but rather a “strict science” aimed at “challenging, explaining, interpreting with a view to transforming (Hountondji 2002, p.91). He argues that ethnophilosophy does not enable one to learn to think creatively but, rather, entails “lazily seeking refuge . . . behind the thought of the ancestors” (Hountondji 2002, p.128). He warns against “the temptation of a reductive, unilateral and overly simplifying reading of cultures and, especially, of the world views of the African continent” (Hountondji 2002, p.81). His valorisation of ‘science’ seeks to locate African philosophy as a legitimate form of methodological inquiry with the same aims as those of any other philosophy in the world in the geographical origin of its authors (Hountondji 2002). In short, African philosophy is that form of methodological inquiry which relies on rational justification and interpretive argumentation with the intent to bring about a critical transformation of African thought and practice. In the main, his task, as he puts it, is to establish the legitimacy of an intellectual project that was both authentically African and authentically philosophical (Appiah in Hountondji, 2002).

Now, if one considers that Africana philosophy, following Parker, has become a movement that embraces the African continent, then Africana philosophy does not seem to be different from African philosophy, since Africa is also the latter's concern. However, Parker also claims that Africana philosophy is a discipline which draws on oral traditions and writings about African culture, together with rigorous analytical reasoning. In this sense Parker seemingly explains Africana philosophy as ethnophilosophy – what Hountondji critiques as not in consonance with 'strict science' or methodological inquiry. Nevertheless, although Parker seemingly describes Africana philosophy as ethnophilosophy, it still remains a form of African philosophy, despite Hountondji's critique of it. If this argument is plausible, then one can justifiably conclude that Africana philosophy is (or is linked to) ethnophilosophy, which in turn is a form of African philosophy not necessarily supported by Hountondji. Yet, Parker's Africana philosophy as analytical reasoning does seem to be connected to Hountondji's notion of African philosophy as methodological inquiry, since analysis and methodology are interrelated instances of inquiry. This is where Higgs, who is not averse to the idea that an African philosophy also contains constitutive elements of critical, rational inquiry, seems to be much closer to Parker than the latter wants us to believe. The point I am making is that Higgs's African philosophy of education, Parker's Africana philosophy of education and Hountondji's valorisation of 'science' in African philosophy have one common thread: the African continent is central to philosophy (and philosophy of education). Consequently, the African-Africana philosophy of education distinction seems to be a somewhat misdirected debate.

For me, the weaknesses in the expositions of Higgs and Parker lie in their failure to relate African-Africana philosophy of education to what Hountondji posits as progressive "structures of dialogue and argument without which no science (that is, African philosophy) is possible" (Hountondji 2002, p.73). In my view, these "structures of dialogue and argument" are constitutive of what an African-Africana philosophy of education is about. Any lack of discussion about "structures of dialogue and argumentation" does not do justice to what constitutes an African-Africana philosophy of education. The point I am making is that Higgs's idea of human activism and Parker's notion of Africana philosophy cannot begin to manifest themselves in African practices (life experiences and other modes of critical engagement amongst people of Africa) with the aim of either challenging and undermining forms of Western hegemony or to reconstitute the priority of 'Africanness' through a reliance on oral tradition and cultural activity. This would be difficult to achieve if not

subjected to “structures of dialogue and argumentation”, or what I would refer to as modes of deliberative inquiry. Deliberative inquiry ought to be considered as a necessary (although not sufficient) instance of African-Africana philosophy of education, which neither Higgs nor Parker seem to pick up on. But before I explore some of the constitutive meanings of (African-Africana) deliberative inquiry, I first need to take issue with Hountondji, whose call for African philosophy to be connected to “structures of dialogue and argument” seems to be paradoxical in his critique of ethnophilosophy.

Now if one considers that ethnophilosophy, which seems to be closely linked to Africana philosophy, takes into account the narratives and life experiences of Africans, and that “structures of dialogue and argumentation” invariably involve listening to the voices of others (no matter how ill-informed), then it follows that “structures of dialogue and argumentation” cannot simply dismiss oral tradition and cultural narratives – unless, Hountondji assumes that “structures of dialogue and argumentation” relate only to offering persuasive arguments through a rational articulation of points of view. But rational argumentation and persuasion are not necessarily related to eloquence and philosophical justification alone. To my mind, listening to what the other has to say, even if it is unimportant or inarticulate justification, brings to the fore the voices of people which would otherwise have been muted or marginalised.

For instance, listening to the views of an African sage or his followers in conversation should not necessarily imply that, because such a view is perhaps not eloquently expressed, it ought to be dismissed as irrelevant to the dialogue. What makes dialogue a conversation is that people are willing to listen to what they have to say to one another without putting them down or dismissing their subjective views as not worthy of consideration. A dialogue becomes a legitimate conversation when points of view are expressed in a way that allows the other to offer his or her rejoinder, no matter how ill-informed. In view of this, Hountondji’s critique of ethnophilosophy does not hold water, since this critique reflects the moral standpoints and cultural justifications of people whose exclusion from the dialogue would nullify it as legitimate conversation amongst people. Hountondji himself values the importance of listening to others as an “advantage of facilitating dialogue and moderating, on occasion, the excessive passion of the most aggressive opponents” (Hountondji 2002, p.81). This is perhaps why he claims that his critique of ethnophilosophy and rejection of collective thought through dialogue were “a bit excessive” (Hountondji 2002, p.128).

Similarly, listening to the stories of others does not mean that one uncritically accepts everything they have to say. Dialogue also means that one challenges and questions the points of view of others, if these points of view appear to lie outside of the matrix of one's own understanding or if one has not been convinced of the legitimacy of the articulation of the other person. Hountondji (2002, p.139) acknowledges the importance of criticising the views of others in the sense that "higher-level formulation" requires that one does not passively accept the viewpoints of others or "the questions that others ask themselves or ask us from their own preoccupations" – a practice he refers to as conscious rationality (Hountondji 2002, p.255). His contention is that rationality is not given in advance. Instead it needs to be developed "in a spirit of solidarity and sharing. . . so that the germs of ignorance and poverty will be eliminated forever from planet earth" (Hountondji 2002, p.258). To my mind, Hountondji paradoxically advocates a notion of dialogue and argumentation which does not necessarily have to exclude the stories of others – that is to say, he is making a claim for ethnophilosophy which he seemingly finds irrelevant to the discourse of African philosophy.

The second theoretical statement on African-Africana philosophy I shall now explore relates to the work of Kwame Gyekye (1997). Gyekye's (1997, pp.5, 24) main argument in defence of African philosophy incorporating African thought – that is, African-Africana philosophy – is twofold: firstly, (African) philosophy or the philosophy practised by Africans ought to be essentially a critical and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas or principles underlying human thought, conduct, and experience involving a clarification of concepts (conceptual analysis); and secondly, (African) philosophy should interact with the African experience, in particular with the way in which understanding, interpretation and reflection ought to be used not only to respond to the basic issues and problems generated by that experience, but also by suggesting new or alternative ways of thought and action. The idea that African philosophical inquiry relates to actively analysing the African experience seems to be connected to rationally and humanely examining the values, beliefs, practices and institutions of African communities – a notion which finds expression in Higgs's explanations of *ubuntu* and human activism, and Parker's thinking on Africana, which suggests that philosophical inquiry examines the life experiences, cultural traditions and oral narratives of Africa's peoples. Likewise, philosophical inquiry as critical and systematic conceptual inquiry could be linked to Parker's idea of critical and argumentative reasoning as touchstones of Africana philosophy of education. This suggests that there seems to be sufficient justification to relate Parker's

Africana philosophy of education and Higgs's African philosophy of education to Gyekye's ideas. By implication it seems feasible to talk about an African-Africana philosophy of education, since both concepts can be considered as theoretically intertwined. This also suggests that Higgs and Parker are not necessarily adversaries as far as an exposition of African-Africana philosophy of education is concerned.

As far as deliberative inquiry is concerned, Gyekye (1997) makes the point that African-Africana philosophical discourse embeds two interrelated processes: rational discourse and the application of a minimalist logic in ordinary conversations without being conversant with its formal rules. Although Gyekye recognises the importance of rationality and logic in deliberative inquiry, he does not go far in explaining what these processes entail, besides claiming that rationality is a culture-dependent concept and that less formal rules are required if people want to engage deliberatively in conversation (Gyekye 1997).

By claiming that rationality is a culture-dependent concept, Gyekye means to convey that the way rationality is understood, for instance, in Western culture may not necessarily apply to the way that it is understood in African cultures. In other words, it would be quite possible, he contends, to find within the African past itself a rational ethos, such as in African traditional folktales, which embodies critical thought that might be understood differently to the notion of rationality as understood in Western culture (Gyekye 1997). Gyekye's notion of a culture-dependent rationality can be related to a critical re-evaluation of received ideas and to intellectual enterprises related to practical problems and concerns in African societies. In other words, African rationality is a critical, re-evaluative response to the basic human problems that arise in any African society (Gyekye 1997). By critical re-evaluation Gyekye (1997) means the offering of insights, arguments and conclusions relevant to the African experience by suggesting new ways or alternative ways of thought and action. If I understand Gyekye (1997) correctly, he also relates the articulation of insights, arguments and conclusions to being critical of political authority and well as to self-reflection and the cultivation of an innovative spirit. If I consider criticism, self-reflection and innovation (creativity and imagination) as touchstones of rationality, then it follows that the insights, arguments and conclusions one offers cannot be unrelated to being critical, creative and reflexive. If I relate Gyekye's thoughts on African rationality to deliberative inquiry, then, logically speaking, deliberation ought to create space for critically questioning one another's perspectives, allowing

for a reflexive re-evaluation of the position one holds in a spirit of openness and non-dogmatism, and the re-evaluation of one's earlier position in the light of new information in quite an imaginative way. These are important aspects of an African-Africana philosophy of education which would go some way towards making conversations (dialogues) justifiably deliberative.

Gyekye seems to suggest that Africa's peoples – taking into account their history and cultures – ought to be less formal in deliberative conversations. If my reading of Gyekye is correct, then the implication is that conversations should not be confined only to articulating points of view in a logically defensible way through rigorous argumentation and debate whereby points of view are challenged and undermined, nor to situations where persuasion and the quest for the better argument become necessary conditions for deliberative inquiry to unfold. I agree with this view, since illiteracy and the lack of eloquence amongst ordinary citizens would otherwise exclude them from the deliberative conversation. Gyekye (1997) contends that the African colonial and postcolonial experience has had enduring effects on the mentality developed by many Africans – a colonial mentality which engenders 'apism', i.e. the notion that people should look for answers to Africa's problems outside of Africa, and more specifically in European culture. It is this same 'apist' attitude on the part of most of Africa's people that leads to their suppressing their own opinions in preference to the wisdom of sages.

I do not think that Gyekye would dismiss the need for sagacity in deliberative discourse, since the individual's inclinations, orientations, intuitions and outlooks are important to philosophical inquiry (Gyekye, 1997). However, Gyekye's view suggests that ways should be found to enable the less eloquent, illiterate and seemingly inarticulate person to express his or her thoughts. For this reason his call for the application of fewer formal rules in deliberative conversation seems to be valid. In this regard, I suspect that Gyekye's emphasis on the application of a minimalist logic in deliberative conversation has some connection with allowing Africa's people to articulate their oral narratives about their beliefs, values, folktales, drama and cultural traditions without having to convince others entirely of their orientations. This makes sense because many of Africa's peoples do not necessarily know the logical reasons for their beliefs and the sources of the values bequeathed to them by their ancestral past. So, the idea of asking for a minimalist logic would establish conditions that would include rather than exclude people from the deliberative conversation. In fact, including them in the conversation might open up possibilities for them to begin to challenge and question their own

positions self-reflexively.

Of course, my potential critic might claim that Africana philosophy is a subset of African philosophy and not a synonym or an equivalent for it. DuBois' idea of philosophy suggests we talk about African American philosophy (DuBois in Moseley, 1995). Senghor's notion of philosophy could be explained as cultivating dialogues amongst all Africa's people (Senghor in Crawford, 2002). In this sense one could legitimately refer to African philosophy which would then exclude the ideas of those who might be African American or 'Africanists' who contribute to the efforts of the African experience. Therefore, Outlaw's African(a) philosophy seems to be a 'gathering' term which best explains philosophy done by those who are geographically located on the African continent, others who are not based on the African continent but who explore and study the African experience (Africans and their political, economic, cultural and social contributions) (Outlaw, 1992). In this way it does not help us much to refer to an Africana philosophy as a subset of African philosophy because the former could be said to be the 'gathering' notion which perhaps subsumes what is characterised as African philosophy. However, this is not the line of argument I wish to explore.

To summarise this section: what seems to emanate from the discussion on deliberative inquiry is that African-Africana philosophy consists of three aspects: recognising and listening to the stories of others, culture-dependent rationality, and non-formal conversations infused with a minimalist logic. The question arises: how could these touchstones of deliberative inquiry in relation to an African-Africana philosophy of education shape university teaching in South Africa? It is to this discussion that I now turn.

## Deliberative inquiry as an unexamined instance of African-Africana philosophy of education and its implications for university teaching

In 1994 the Department of Education (DoE) requested the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) to initiate a National Audit on Teacher Education. This audit was driven by two objectives: to develop an analysis of teacher demand, supply and utilisation; and to evaluate institutions offering teacher education together with their staff profiles, their governance structures and the quality of their teacher education programmes, both pre-service education and training (PRESET) and in-service education and

training (INSET) (Sedibe, 1998). The audit made the DoE aware of the quality of teacher education programmes, the classroom backlog, and the shortage and turnover of teachers in scarce subjects (Sedibe, 1998). The audit revealed how deeply apartheid had divided and undermined teacher preparation. Another audit revelation was the concentration of disadvantaged student teachers (more than 80% African) at institutions least well equipped to prepare them for their work as teachers, for example, at dysfunctional rural and 'township' colleges and 'correspondence' universities (Pendlebury, 1998). In addition to the audit, the Committee on Teacher Education Policy (COTEP) was charged with two other tasks: firstly, to develop a national qualification framework for teachers; and secondly, to propose national governance structures for teacher education (Pendlebury, 1998). This resulted in the Norms and Standards for Teacher Education gazetted as national policy in 1995. In this new teacher education document apartheid's discourse of duty and obedience to authority had been displaced by a discourse of rights and professional autonomy (Pendlebury, 1998). Teacher education should enhance the capabilities of prospective teachers to deal with human rights issues and to become autonomous, flexible, creative and responsible agents for change in response to the educational challenges of the day. In this regard, teachers are seen as makers of democratic citizens, and not so much as purveyors of knowledge (Pendlebury, 1998).

In 1997 the DoE released a discussion document, *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development*, which aimed to bring teacher education 'competences' into line with the new outcomes-based education system (OBE). This DoE initiative eventually resulted in the Norms and Standards for Educators policy of 2000. A central feature of the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) is the seven roles that educators (teachers) are supposed to perform and also the competences that educators have to display for assessment and qualification purposes. The seven roles are: learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessor; and learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist. Each of these seven roles is constituted by the following three competences: practical competence, foundational competence and reflexive competence (DoE, 2000). For purposes of this article, I shall focus only on what it could mean, following an African-Africana philosophy of education of deliberative inquiry, for a teacher to become a 'learning mediator'. In other words, I shall explore what university teachers ought to do in order to prepare pre-service teachers for the world of work.

Thus far, by following an African-Africana philosophy of education, I have argued for three logically necessary conditions which underscore deliberative inquiry: firstly, critical, reflexive engagement with the positions of oneself and the other; secondly, listening to what the other has to say, no matter how ill-informed or unwise the other's evaluative judgement is or might be; and thirdly, less structured formality and the application of a minimalist logic in conversations. To my mind, these logically necessary conditions of deliberative inquiry in relation to the African experience offer much potential to enhance the role of the educator (teacher) as a learning mediator. But this in turn means that the university teacher ought to 'perform' a particular role of cultivating deliberative discourse in his or her class or through engagement with in-service or pre-service teachers.

Firstly, a learning mediator's task (for instance, the role that a university teacher such as I ought to assume) does not only involve socialising learners (students) in an African university classroom by inculcating an inherited body of facts and knowledge constructs about society, human values and traditions of people, but also initiating them into a discourse of critical questioning in order that they (in my instance, pre-service teachers in their final year of a university education that would qualify them as teachers) challenge what they have been taught. Mediating learning requires that university teachers afford students with opportunities to systematically make university texts 'controversial', that is to say, to engage critically and reflexively with such texts. In this way deliberative inquiry becomes a mode of philosophical activity which requires that one engages carefully with the other so as to arrive at independent interpretive (rational) judgements, while at the same time one enters into controversy with other rival standpoints or articulations (MacIntyre, 1990). On the one hand, engaging carefully involves advancing inquiry from within a particular point of view, preserving and transforming the initial agreements with those who share the same point of view. On the other hand, entering into controversy with other rival standpoints involves both exhibiting what is mistaken in a rival standpoint in the light of one's understanding, and to conceive and reconceive one's own point of view against the strongest possible objections to them offered by one's opponents. By implication, deliberative inquiry firstly demands that a text be read in a way whereby one sets out the range of possible interpretations of the text and identifies and evaluates the presuppositions of this or that particular argument in the text; and secondly, a text should be read in a such way that the reader places himself or herself in a position to question the text as much as the reader being questioned by the text, that is to say, to engage in systematic

controversy. And the importance of reading a text in this way is that the outcome of one's reading is not a final (conclusive) answer, but rather a rational (interpretive) judgement which itself must be subjected to critical scrutiny by others who engage in similar intellectual debate free from the imperatives of constrained or unconstrained agreement.

Secondly, being or becoming a learning mediator involves in some way the capacity of one (the university teacher) to cultivate in others (students) the ability to listen to what others have to say (fellow-students and teachers), no matter how ill-informed or unimportant the points of view seem to be. The point about listening to others has some connection to understand others' reasons. Without listening to others we cannot begin to comprehend the kind of reasons for their actions that might be intelligible to us and that would enable us to respond to them in ways that they too might find intelligible (MacIntyre, 1999). In other words, we can only understand others and respond to them in ways which could be intelligible if we could justify to others why we find their reasons 'reasonable' or not. In this way, listening to others could contribute towards deliberative action. The point I am making is that listening to others involves 'standing back' or detaching oneself from one's own reasons and asking if others' reasons are in fact justifiable or not. Here one moves away from merely listening to others towards being able to evaluate others' reasons. And when one evaluates others' reasons (through listening) one would invariably set out to revise one's own or abandon them or replace them with other reasons (MacIntyre, 1999). In this way, one not only becomes a good listener, but also deliberative in the sense that one detaches oneself from one's own reasons to revise or abandon them in the light of what others (to whom one listens and with whom one engages) have to offer. MacIntyre (1999, p.96) argues that we come to know when we are able not just to evaluate our reasons as better or worse, but also when we detach ourselves from the immediacy of our own desires in order to "imagine alternative realistic futures" through engaging collegially (deliberatively) – I would say, by listening to what others have to say.

Thirdly, less structured formality and a minimalist logic in conversations do not mean that structure and logic ought to be dismissed in deliberative discourse, but rather that an excessive emphasis on the formal rules of dialogue and logical reasoning should not in any way exclude people from engaging with one another's point of view. The point about non-excessive

structure is aimed in the first instance at minimising the possibilities of eloquent and articulate voices of marginalising or silencing the legitimate voices of all people engaged in deliberative inquiry. In other words, (African) students should be able to tell their stories about what constitutes the good life whether along the lines of myth, religion and genealogy. Dialogical conversations are usually of the kind whereby one listens to the other and, after having been persuaded or not, offers a response either in defence of another point of view or simply dismisses (usually argumentatively) what the other had to say. Allowing others to tell their stories should not be subjected to a formal, structured response only, since often structure and formality bring into question the stories others want to reveal. I remember a Masters student whom I happened to be supervising reminding me once that, whatever he had to reveal about his tribal orientations (he belonged to the Ovambese ethnic group in Namibia) in seminar presentations should not always be subjected to formal and structured critical scrutiny, since the excessive use of these modes of rational activity in many ways mute the self-understandings of the person. The corollary is that the story is not told the way it might have been.

The point about an emphasis on a minimalist amount of logical reasoning in deliberative discourse is primarily related to listening to, comprehending and constructing a more justifiable story. Often in my Masters seminars, students - who come mostly from Southern African countries such as Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe - remind me that excessive logical reasoning does not always fit well with their articulations of a variety of religious, genealogical, mythic and proverbial arguments and claims. This means that subjecting their philosophical positions to excessive logical reasoning would in many ways undermine what stories (sometimes through folklore and ritualistic practices) they have to tell. In others words, simply subjecting the stories (African) students tell to excessive logical reasoning, which in many ways evaluates the stories, would do very little in defence of letting the story be told, that is to say, would do very little to mediate learning in the university classroom. In essence, deliberative inquiry framed within an African-Africana philosophy of education allows scope for critical and reflexive reasoning, listening, and less formality and logic in conversations, which hold much promise for mediating learning in university classes involving (African) students.

In conclusion, university teaching in South Africa along the lines of African-Africana thought has a better chance of addressing the 'African experience' if enacted along the lines of deliberative inquiry. I have argued that central to the

African-Africana philosophy of education debate is the notion of deliberative inquiry – an issue to which the Higgs-Parker debate fails to devote justifiable attention to.

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# (South) African(a) philosophy of education: a reply to Higgs and Parker

Lesley le Grange

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## Abstract

There is a growing interest in African philosophy in South Africa following the dismantling of legal apartheid. In recently published works we also witnessed arguments presented for/against African philosophy's centrality in a new vision for philosophy of education in South Africa. In this paper I respond to these debates by raising some of the difficulties with the term African philosophy and the potential danger of a single philosophy dominating education theory and practice in South Africa.

## Introduction

In 2003 the *Journal of Education* 30 published two articles on African(a) philosophy and its potential influence on educational discourse in South Africa. In the first article, Higgs (2003) points out that philosophical discourse in South Africa about the nature of education has always been fragmented. Traditionally, he argues, some educationists have worked within (neo)Marxist paradigms; others' work could be located within what might be loosely termed 'democratic liberalism'; and there were also those who worked within the analytic tradition emanating from the Institute of Education at the University of London, and so on. During the apartheid years, Higgs (2003) notes, Fundamental Pedagogics dominated philosophical discourse in South Africa. He suggests that with the dismantling of apartheid and the abandoning of a system of Christian National Education there now is a need to re-vision philosophy of education in South Africa – in his words, a need for “a new philosophical discourse in education” (Higgs 2003, p.6). Higgs (2003) argues for the centrality of an African discourse in the re-visioning of philosophy of education in South Africa, and locates his argument within the call for an African Renaissance.

In presenting his argument Higgs provides a useful overview of African philosophy, particularly to those not familiar with the field. Two main arguments pervade Higgs's article. Firstly, he argues that, even though an array of philosophies constitutes African philosophy, the diverse discourses of African philosophy have a common set of values: communalism, *ubuntu* and humanism. These values are not separate, but interwoven. His second argument is that these values should be the basis of a new education discourse in South Africa.

Parker (2003) authors the second article, which is a response to Higgs's article. He finds Higgs's arguments unconvincing on the grounds that the arguments are ahistorical and decontextualised. Parker (2003, p.24) uses what he terms "glimpses of history and context" to support his critique of Higgs's article and then goes on to explore a particular strand of African philosophy, called Africana philosophy. Although I support the general thrust of Parker's critique, I find aspects of his arguments unconvincing. In this article, I point out some gaps in both Higgs's and Parker's arguments and provide a more nuanced reading of African(a) philosophy.

## Philosophy of education in South Africa

Parker critiques the typology Higgs uses to describe discourses of South African philosophy of education. First he points out that, although Higgs employs a useful analytical tool, he uses it only at a 'conceptual level' and does not examine the power relations operating between and within these discourses. Secondly, he claims that Higgs's typology is too brief and that it is not mapped onto a social reality: "there is a lack of reference to people, institutions and texts, to their histories and to their relations to political and economic contexts" (2003, p.26). Parker then goes on to map Higgs's typology onto social reality. For example, he refers to vigorous debates that the proponents of democratic liberalism and analytic philosophy (often inseparable) had with Marxists as evidenced in proceedings of conferences of the Kenton Education Association and the journal *Perspectives in Education*. He argues that the democratic liberalists, Marxists and analytic philosophers had in common one characteristic, opposition to Fundamental Pedagogics (a philosophy of education characteristic of the Afrikaans-speaking institutions and those ethnic institutions that were controlled by the apartheid state). Parker conflates the discourses oppositional to Fundamental Pedagogics (FP) and refers to them as the analytic discourses, which he says were in the main

confined to White English-speaking universities. He notes that, given the struggle against apartheid of the 1970s and 1980s and the election of the democratically led ANC government in 1994, it might have been expected that the analytic discourses would increase their influence and that the FP discourses would dissipate. However, the analytic philosophies only increased their presence in major policy initiatives (see Parker, 2003, p.25). He argues that “most teacher education institutions in South Africa remained within discourses descended from FP – albeit stripped of the racist and Afrikaner nationalist language and imagery that characterised FP” (Parker, 2003, p.25). Furthermore, Parker notes the nation-wide restructuring that teacher education underwent in the 1990s, leaving only 17 public higher education institutions to provide teacher education. He writes:

Of the 17 institutions, perhaps 5 could be regarded as having traditions of philosophy of education characterised by analytic discourses and the remainder, in the erstwhile Afrikaans and ‘homeland’ universities, by FP. Given a predominantly liberal democratic form of analytic discourse. . . and an FP that has disintegrated into a variety of neo-FPs, there would appear to be no existing discourse that provides a suitable breeding-ground for a new philosophy of education (Parker, 2003, p.26).

After mapping Higgs’s typology onto ‘social reality’, Parker ends up with a cruder categorisation than that of Higgs, namely, the analytic discourses versus the (neo)FP discourses, a typology problematic in several senses and shows Parker culpable of what he accuses Higgs of doing. I can understand why Parker uses a single category for discourses that were oppositional to FP, but invoking the term ‘analytic’ for this category is problematic. In Western philosophy, analytic philosophy is a distinct tradition from continental philosophy and North American pragmatism. Analytic philosophers tend to be largely (though not exclusively) English-speaking, the intellectual heirs of Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein and concerned mainly with concepts and propositions (Audi, 1995). In philosophy of education those who use conceptual analysis, that is, the intellectual heirs of Richard Peters and Paul Hirst, would fit the category. However, the ideas of Marx together with other individuals and movements shaped one of the trends in Continental philosophy, *structuralism*, which reached its high point between 1950 and 1970 (Audi, 1995). South African philosophers of education who drew on (neo)Marxism during the 1970s and 1980s therefore used ideas emanating from Continental philosophy which were notably different to those of various forms of analytic philosophy. Parker’s conflation of ideas derived from two disparate traditions of philosophy (analytic and Continental) and labelling the combined category ‘analytic discourses’ is, to say the least, problematic.

When providing his grouping of the 17 remaining teacher education institutions (above), it is interesting that Parker does not tell us which are the five institutions (presumably he is referring to traditionally English-speaking institutions) characterised by analytic discourses, nor does he provide us with any sense of what are the ‘variety of neo-FPs’ that he refers to – what constitutes a neo-FP and what does it look like? Where, in his terms, is the “reference to people, institutions and texts” (Parker, 2003, p.26), and so on? Moreover, Parker appears to underestimate the changes that have occurred within institutions that may traditionally have been characterised by a philosophy of education called FP. The University of the Western Cape, for example, was established as an ethnic university by the apartheid state for so-called Coloureds. At the time of its establishment the medium of instruction at the institution was Afrikaans and it would be fair to claim that its philosophy of education was characterised by FP. In fact, in the 1970s, Philosophy of Education courses were called Fundamental Pedagogics. However, UWC became a site of resistance and struggle in the 1970s and 1980s, which provided space for other influences. Philosophy of education, in the 1980s and 1990s was greatly influenced by neo-Marxist and more particularly analytic discourses under the leadership of, among others, Wally Morrow and Nelleke Bak. It would be problematic to categorise UWC as (neo)FP. At Stellenbosch University Yusef Waghid (trained in analytic philosophy) is currently chair of philosophy of education. Many of his PhD and Master’s students are conducting research within the analytic traditions and some within African philosophical traditions. It would be problematic to characterise philosophy of education at Stellenbosch University as (neo)FP. I can go on to speak of Philip Higgs’s work at Unisa and other instances as well, all pointing to Parker’s mapping of typologies onto social reality as being fundamentally flawed.

However, I agree with Parker that current discourses on philosophy of education in South Africa might not provide a suitable breeding-ground for a new philosophy of education and that at present philosophers of education may be more concerned about survival (given institutional mergers and radical restructuring within institutions), than with becoming activists for a new discourse. But let me turn now to a discussion of African(a) philosophy.

## African(a) philosophy

As mentioned, Higgs provides a useful overview of different strands in African philosophy. He then goes on to argue that, despite the disparate

perspectives within African philosophy, there are what he refers to as ‘general themes’ in African philosophy. These general themes for Higgs are African communalism, the notion of *ubuntu* and humanism. These themes, Higgs argues, are commonalities in African experience that are indicative of a way of thinking, of knowing and of acting that is peculiar to the African experience. There are two points of critique that I wish to raise concerning Higgs’s argument. Firstly, the notions of communalism and *ubuntu* may be distinct from Eurocentric values that have suppressed traditional African customs and ways of knowing, but they may not be peculiar to Africa. As Parker correctly (2003, p.30) notes:

It is not clear how one distinguishes African humanism from European humanism, or African communalism from Chinese communalism. Although designated by an African word ‘ubuntu’, the notions that we are human through our relations with other humans, that our individual identity is embedded in social relations within the fabrics of multiple communities, has a long history in European, Chinese and Indian philosophy.

Secondly, Higgs does not examine how different strands within African philosophy engage African communalism and the notion of *ubuntu* so as to conceptually link his overview of African philosophy with his discussion on general themes in African philosophy. It is my contention that different strands of African philosophy engage African communalism and *ubuntu* differently. To illustrate my point I shall invoke Oruka’s famous four trends of African philosophy. I use them for the sake of my argument and am aware that there are more than four strands in African philosophy and that Oruka himself later expanded his four to six trends (see Gratton, 2003). Oruka (2002) identifies the following four trends: ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, national-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy.

Ethno-philosophy is exemplified in the work of Placide Tempels on the ontology of the Bantu. Tempels was probably the first person to use the term ‘philosophy’ with regard to the thoughts of African people. Gratton (2003) points out that for the ethno-philosopher, “philosophy is latent within the everyday actions of a people; philosophy, as such, is also the worldviews that guide and maintain a culture”. He notes that ethno-philosophers reproduce both the latent and the explicit philosophical doctrines in the hope of providing future African philosophers with an indigenous ‘intellectual matrix’. Ethno-philosophy has been subjected to various criticisms. For example, Hountondji argues that ethno-philosophy is not African because it is addressed to Western audiences and in so doing reinforces stereotypes of African thought as being pseudo-philosophy or pre-scientific. Bodunrin also

argues that it provides a false sense of 'tradition' as devoid of the problems and struggles which characterise all societies. Oruka's second trend, philosophic sagacity, is based on his research on wise Kenyan men and women. For Oruka (1990, p.28) philosophic sagacity is the "thoughts of wisemen and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom and didactic wisdom". He argues that "one way of looking for the traces of African philosophy is to wear the uniform of anthropological field work and use dialogical techniques to pass through the anthropological fogs to the philosophical ground" (Oruka, 1990, p.xxi). Oruka views philosophic sagacity as distinct from ethno-philosophy, since sages do not simply transmit the thoughts of communities, but rather critically evaluate what might be unquestioningly accepted by members of communities. One of the difficulties with philosophic sagacity is that one cannot easily distinguish the source of the field reports when the researcher is a trained philosopher – are the field reports a record of the philosophic ideas of the sages or a reconstruction of them by a trained philosopher (as was the case with Oruka) after engagement with the ideas of the sages (Gratton, 2003, p.68)? Bodunrin (1984) has sympathy with Oruka's notion of philosophic sagacity, but argues that, together with ethno-philosophy, it comes perilously close to non-philosophy because it is based on the views of everyday people. The third trend in African philosophy that Oruka identifies is the nationalist ideologies produced by Africa's first post-colonial leaders, including Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah. These leaders sought not only to decolonise the nations they led, but also their people's minds (Gratton, 2003, p.69). Although they were strongly Pan-Africanist, they were influenced by Western ideas ranging from Existentialism to Marxism. Bodunrin (1984) argues that these national leaders took up ethno-philosophy "to glorify an African past in order to forecast an almost utopian non-colonial future". However, Bodunrin argues that the ideas of these nationalists lacked rigour and systemisation, and therefore cannot be regarded as philosophy. The rigour and systemisation that Bodunrin refers to is provided by Oruka's fourth trend, professional philosophy. Bodunrin (1984, p.2) describes this trend as the

work of trained philosophers. Many of them reject the assumptions of ethno-philosophy and take a universalist point of view. Philosophy, many of them argue, must have the same meaning in all cultures although the subjects that receive priority, and perhaps the method of dealing with them, may be dictated by cultural biases and the existential situation in the society within which the philosophers operate. According to this school, African philosophy is the philosophy done by African philosophers whether it be in the area of logic, metaphysics, ethics, or history of philosophy.

Gratton (2003) points out that this trend identifies strongly with the analytic tradition of Western philosophy as evidenced by the fact that universalists such as Wiredu, Hountondji and others have referred to themselves as the Vienna circle of African philosophy. It is this association of universalists with the analytic tradition that has been a source of critique. For example, Ikuenobe (1997) refers to the universalist position as parochial because it uses Western analytic philosophy as the yardstick by which to measure whether the other trends in African philosophy qualify to be called ‘philosophy’. He argues that there is an array of traditions and approaches within Western philosophy that universalists do not account for.

The four trends in African philosophy provide a continuum with extreme positions of a narrow particularism characteristic of ethno-philosophy at the one end, and a narrow universalism of professional philosophy on the other. But these four positions can also be used as a heuristic for mapping the positions of the four trends in regard to notions such as communalism and *ubuntu* – a mapping that Higgs neglects to provide. For particularists, philosophy and culture are tightly intertwined – so much so that cultural values/expressions are commensurate to philosophy. For particularists, *ubuntu* is not only a cultural value but a philosophy. For universalists, the notion of *ubuntu* may be the object/subject of philosophical inquiry, but cannot simply be referred to as philosophy – it has to pass the test of rigour and systematisation. At this juncture I critically review the strand of African philosophy that Parker refers to as Africana philosophy.

Whilst Higgs locates his argument for the centrality of an African discourse in the re-visioning of philosophy of education in South Africa within a recent call for an African Renaissance, Parker traces the discourse of Africana philosophy in South Africa to influences of the 1960s. Parker argues that the dominance and pervasiveness of FP had at least one unintended outcome: it prepared “the ground for an intellectual tradition of resistance nurtured by those most brutalised by FP and Apartheid” (2003, p.30). He notes that during the late 1960s a cadre of intellectuals (from the universities of the North and Fort Hare as well as the medical school at the University of Natal) emerged who had read major theorists of the Western canon (Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Husserl, Sartre) alongside African authors such as Malcolm X, Cabral, Fanon, Nyerere, Nkrumah, etc. Parker states that in the early 1970s this emerging discourse of Black Consciousness found expression in the writings of Steve Biko. He goes on to argue that in post-apartheid South Africa “this ‘indigenised’ discourse has become part of a broader international movement

known broadly as Africana philosophy” (Parker, 2003, p.31). Parker writes:

Africana philosophy has become a movement that embraces the African continent and the African Diaspora and draws on a long tradition of African philosophy that foregrounds the everyday life experiences of Africans as slaves, colonised subjects, poor and oppressed. As a discipline, Africana philosophy draws on oral traditions, early writings. . . and cultural artefacts such as music as well the rigorous techniques of reason and analytic philosophy to construct African philosophy as a distinct discourse (2003, p.31).

Parker goes on to argue that there is therefore an existing discourse that gives substance to the label ‘African philosophy’. This discourse draws on different discourses in African philosophy; “a combination of sagacity grounded in common life experiences of Africans with Hegelian tradition and existentialism” (Parker, 2003, p.31). Parker argues that Africana philosophy is not a synthetic discourse, but appropriates what it takes from other discourses. It negates Eurocentrism, but it is not a simple negation because it can also “contest the dominance of Eurocentric philosophy by engaging and contesting it – even using its own tools such as rigorous rational analysis – to challenge the power relations that underpin and are expressed through Eurocentric discourses” Parker (2003, p.32). In his article Parker elaborates on the idea of Africana philosophy and points out that it shares with postmodernism “a desire to challenge a false universal humanism, but without losing those values – liberty, equality, dignity – so extolled by that very humanism” (2003, p.34).

Parker ends his exploration of Africana philosophy by examining what it might look like in practice. In doing so he refers to a debate in political philosophy published in *Journal of Education* 28. The debate is between Dieltiens and Enslin (2002), arguing against participatory democracy, and Piper (2002), arguing for participatory democracy. I shall not elaborate on the debate in detail (for details see Dieltiens and Enslin, 2002; Piper, 2002; Parker, 2003); suffice it to say that Parker’s use of this debate as Africana philosophy in practice is unconvincing. Parker does not show us how this debate is located in what he describes as the “intellectual tradition of resistance nurtured by those most brutalised by FP and Apartheid”. In what sense does the debate between Dieltiens and Enslin (2002) and Piper (2002) embrace the African continent and the African Diaspora, and in what sense does it draw “on a long tradition of African philosophy that foregrounds the everyday life experiences of Africans as slaves, colonised subjects, poor and oppressed” (Parker, 2003, p.31)? Parker provides no evidence of this. Although the debates make reference to the South African schooling system, I

argue that the debate between Dieltiens and Enslin (2002) and Piper (2002) is firmly located within two traditions in Western Political Philosophy, more particularly, Rawlsian liberalism and Habermasian critical theory. It certainly is not an instance of the Africana philosophy that Parker describes in his earlier description of Africana philosophy. One can see evidence of philosophic sagacity and elements of ethno-philosophy in the earlier part of his exploration of Africana philosophy, but as his exploration develops and particularly where he ends – the debate in political philosophy – it becomes clear that his notion of Africana philosophy appears to be nothing more than an extension of the universalist position in African philosophy. I think that Parker’s notion of an African(a) philosophy can be strengthened by invoking what Outlaw (2002) refers to as the deconstructive and reconstructive challenges. These challenges might be read into Parker’s exploration of African(a) philosophy but they are, perhaps, not explicitly articulated.

The future of an African(a) philosophy lies in the recognition that the post-colonial present is hybridised and that a transcendental synthesis (of traditional and Western) is unworkable (Gratton, 2003). However, the hybridised post-colonial presence does not mean the conservation of two competing identities, but rather invokes “the important ways in which post-structuralists use the language of the dominant structure in order to re-organize it from within” (Gratton, 2003, p.73). As Bhabha (1985, p.2) writes:

A contingent borderline experience opens up in-between colonizer and colonized. This space of cultural and interpretive indecidability produced in the ‘present’ of the colonial moment. . . The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch. . . resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups.

Recognising the reconstructive/deconstructive force of African philosophy negates the idea of African philosophical practice being “reduced to that which is at worst an a-historical (universalist) or relativist (particularist) enterprise” (Gratton, 2003, p.65). Gratton argues that by working on the margins of the dominant colonial and metaphysical discourses, African philosophy “is able to render their (i.e. Eurocentric philosophy) blind spots and fissures in order to displace them”(2003, p.65). African(a) philosophy is at best a recounting/reconstruction of the African lived experience, but when it is invoked the consequence is the deconstruction of (Western) philosophy. As Gratton (2003, p.65) writes:

‘African[a] philosophy’ is a performative signifier that by its very name brings together and calls into question an endless number of oppositions: past/future, universalist/particularist, African thought/philosophy, etc.

Although I share Parker's concern that the erosion of discipline-based approaches in South African teacher-education policies and international trends in favour of more occupationally relevant forms of training augurs badly for African(a) philosophy of education, its reconstructive/deconstructive potential has to be explored by the growing number of academics and post-graduate African(a) philosophers of education so that the very policies (and the philosophies which underpin them) currently produced on teacher education in South Africa can be deconstructed.

## Conclusion

Higgs (2003) initiates an important discussion on the re-visioning of philosophy of education in South Africa by arguing for the centrality of African philosophy in a new discourse of philosophy of education. Parker (2003) replies to Higgs by pointing out gaps in Higgs's argument, his main critique being that Higgs does not map his arguments onto a 'social reality'. Parker importantly points out that the idea of an African(a) philosophy of education in South Africa may be thwarted for two reasons: philosophers of education are more concerned about their own survival than in being activists for a new philosophy of education; the erosion of discipline-based approaches in new policies on teacher education. In this article I show some contradictions in Parker's critique of Higgs's article and attempt to strengthen Parker's exploration of African(a) philosophy by briefly exploring African(a) philosophy as deconstructive force. In (South) Africa, where indigenous knowledge systems reside among the majority of its people and Western philosophies remain dominant through new forms of colonisation latent in processes such as globalisation, an African(a) philosophy of education is vital. Hope for education in (South) Africa depends on recounting visions of Africa's history and reconstructing it to the present, but also in displacing dominant discourses, including those evident in South African policy documents such as the Norms and Standards for Educators. African(a) philosophy (of education) as a reconstructive/deconstructive force might offer hope for education in (South) Africa. It will also avert the danger of a single African philosophy (of education) from becoming dominant in the way that Fundamental Pedagogics did under apartheid. African(a) philosophy (of education) as a reconstructive/deconstructive force is singular-plural.

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Yes. Our goal is for articles to be refereed by three experts in the field.

*What is the waiting period after submission?*

Referees provide their crucially important service for no reward, and are sometimes unable to oblige on time but we endeavour to respond within three months.

*Can I send my submission by e-mail?*

Only if you live in a place where submission of three hard copies is inordinately difficult or expensive, please. The norm is three hard copies sent to our office. The electronic version of the article may be sent as an email attachment, or on a disk included with the hard copies.

*To what extent should an article being submitted be presented in ‘the style’ of the journal?*

Citation and referencing should be in the style of the journal (see the previous section ‘Notes for Contributors’). Authors are not expected to reproduce the particular fonts and font sizes used in the journal, but the levels of headings and subheading should be clear on the hard copies submitted. With regard to the electronic version of the article, we prefer as little formatting as possible.

*Does the journal have a policy to encourage and support budding novice researchers?*

Unfortunately not – this is simply beyond our capacity. While we welcome extended comment that referees may be able to offer, we cannot impose on their good services beyond the expectation of an overall judgement on the article, together with brief justification of that judgement.

*What is the rate of acceptance/ rejection?*

The following statistics for 2002 and 2003 provide an indication of the pattern of acceptance/ non acceptance:

Year	Accepted with no or minor revisions	Accepted after revisions	Not accepted
2002	9	7	41
2003	15	9	47

Even an increase in the number of issues each year will not keep pace with the ever-increasing number of submissions. We can do little to mitigate the competition engendered by state funding policy and the kinds of incentive schemes that have become a feature of the higher education landscape.

*Is there an appeal mechanism should my article not be accepted?*

Beyond summarizing reasons for rejection – where applicable - we regret that we are unable to enter into detailed discussion on decisions reached by the Editorial Committee on the basis of referee reports.

*The journal describes itself as providing “a forum for scholarly understanding of the field of education”. What does this really mean?*

We understand this as implying that articles should represent a rigorous enquiry (conducted through argumentation or empirically) into the understanding of educational issues. Such inquiry originates in a problem rather than a solution, and it is rare for such enquiry to have no reference to, or engagement with, a broader literature and theory. Advocacy in the form of prescriptions or ‘how to do it’ recipe knowledge for practitioners seldom finds favour with referees. The question of audience is key. The assumed audience is the collective body of researchers rather than those more narrowly concerned with the effective implementation of specific policies.

Recent non-acceptances include a high proportion of undeveloped research reports, summaries of dissertations, and even sound but small-scale case studies that are purely context specific and unconnected with broader issues, literature or theory. Similarly, even a successful conference paper is usually in need of further development before it merits publication.