Editorial

Editorial Committee

This issue of *Journal of Education* did not have its origins in line with the current trend towards 'Special Issues' following formal announcement of a 'Call for Papers' on a topic of particular current interest or significance. It is a 'normal' issue, compromised of articles submitted in line with the broad focus of the journal, and approved through the usual process of anonymous refereeing. The collection of articles could well, however, have arisen through a specific 'Call for Papers', such is the clarity of theme running through it. The thread binding the articles is the status and legitimacy of educational knowledge and the effectiveness of its transmission. Policy, epistemology and pedagogy are the interlinked issues.

All of the articles, in different ways, represent a conjunction of theoretical interest and practical concern about the state of education in South Africa, and its future. This does not imply a set of parochial interests – far from it, as the first article tellingly makes clear.

Michael Young's contribution provides a valuable background and frame for discussion on policy and epistemology. He does this in the process of engaging Elana Michelson's (2004) critique of Johan Muller's book, *Reclaiming knowledge* (2000). Michelson is challenged on a number of specific points: her reading of Walkerdine in relation to Muller's position; her understanding of Bernstein; and her claim that there is no debate about the epistemological basis of experiential learning outside South Africa. However, this is no technical point by point refutation of Michelson's critique. In fact, Young suggests that her critique passes Muller's central argument by. While Muller's central concern is with the practical lived consequences of policy based on an ideology of constructivism, Young argues that Michelson's gaze comes from within and does not extend beyond the theoretical and scholarly literature on social constructivism. In his seminal *Knowledge and control: New directions for sociology of education*, Young asked: Why no sociology of the curriculum? (1971, p. 40). In his current article, and with specific reference to South African schooling, he is in effect asking: "Why no curriculum?" In so doing he raises questions of critical interest for theoretical debate as well as for education policy and practice. Questions of policy and its connections with epistemology are both global and local, as he demonstrates.

But they have a particular relevance and resonance for the viability and future of democracy – for all – in South Africa.

In our second article addressing Michelson's critique of *Reclaiming knowledge,* Wayne Hugo shares some common ground with Young. Both, for example, see social constructivism and its handmaiden – progressive education – lying at the heart of the critique of Muller's work. Both point out the limitation of critiques of formal knowledge on the basis of who constructed it in the first place.[1] Most importantly though, both argue that Michelson misses the main point of Muller's work by taking him to task with respect to the nuances and *value* of radical forms of social constructivism. The real issue is how constructivism, with its blurred knowledge boundaries and lack of hierarchy, functions in a context riven with historical inequalities and deprivation. However, in focussing more strongly on the context in which the dreams of policy makers are ironically shattered by shallow practices that fail to translate everyday knowledges into the more abstract world of formal knowledge, Hugo nudges the epistemological debate in the direction of pedagogy. Whereas Young's critique of Michelson comes from a broad international perspective, Hugo's response draws more strongly on the local literature in making the key point regarding the consequences of social constructivism. These consequences reveal Muller himself as neither a new conservative nor a new radical, but as a "passionate moderate living in extreme times". A feature of Hugo's response is his scholarly and political passion that might well be a characteristic of much current academic endeavour in South Africa.

Aslam Fataar's contribution moves us from schooling to higher education, and to the highest epistemological level in the qualification structure. A literature on the supervision of doctoral work – a domain hitherto seemingly regarded as 'private' – has recently begun to emerge. A lively account of how students move from being practitioners to doctoral researchers appeared in *Journal of Education* 36. While Jansen et al (2004) focussed on the student perspective,

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[1] Because of South Africa's particular history, there is a tendency to question 'knowledge' on the basis of the characteristics of those who constructed it. 'Formal' knowledge, sometimes elided with authoritarian elitism, has been the object of suspicion. One notes that even academic journals are not immune to such suspicions: "For years, our refereed academic journals have been monopolised by an academic elite that established nodal points for one another's academic contributions …." (Waghid and le Grange, 2003, p. 5).

Fataar provides a particularly revealing ‘insider’ analysis of his own supervision of two students at the stage of proposal development. This candid account is interesting in its own right, but in the present context particularly interesting because of what it reveals about the nature of the shift the students were required to make. From thinking about research from vantage points strongly rooted in their own identities and value systems, the students had to move to a position of thinking like researchers, conceptualising their research intentions from within the formal procedures and protocols of the academy. In somewhat different terms, they were moving from everyday knowledge to formal knowledge structures. Fataar’s account shows how tricky this transition can be, and how carefully its negotiation has to be guided if it is to be successful. For indeed, even at this level of study a necessary part of identity negotiation and reconstruction is respect for the academic authority of the teacher. Fataar’s article echoes a further feature of the South African context identified by both Young and Hugo: political imperatives stemming from national aspirations and hopes easily settle into epistemic and pedagogical imperatives. This was evident even in the thinking of Fataar’s extremely capable students about to step onto the highest rung of the academic qualifications ladder.

With Di Parker and Jill Adler’s contribution we remain in higher education. Their focus on the inter-relationship between institutional and policy contexts in teacher education in South Africa arises from concerns rooted in epistemology and pedagogy. As mathematics teacher educators, they are acutely aware of the body of research showing, firstly, the gap between curriculum policy intention and its realisation in classrooms; and secondly, research questioning whether the conceptual knowledge of school mathematics can be achieved when the ideology of ‘relevance’ privileges everyday knowledge. Does the regulation of teacher education allow teacher educators the space in which to develop the three different mathematically-related specialised pedagogic identities they argue are necessary for good mathematics teaching? Yes, it does. They argue persuasively that teacher educators and academics are well-positioned to develop programmes that re-insert disciplined and disciplinary inquiry into teacher preparation programmes. The important thing is for them to seize the opportunity!

Parker and Adler argue that lists of teacher competences do not specify criteria: that they are ‘place holders ’ for criteria yet to be designed. This invokes the need for definitions and descriptions of contextually good

practice. In this regard, there appears to have been little, if any, progress in the ten years since Barber (1995) pointed out that we simply do not have answers to the most important question: "How are some teachers able to make impressions on the lives of young people, to generate sparks of learning, and to encourage learners to use their minds?" In our next article, Wayne Hugo provides a useful view of good teaching beyond the minimum regulatory standards. In fact, a notable characteristic of the personal accounts he presents of teachers' own experiences of good teaching is a general sense of the *absence* of explicit criteria within these special lessons. Hugo's respondents present clear and vivid examples of what is essentially a slippery and indefinable notion, and the writer captures well the richness of these teaching moments through the use of experiential and phenomenological categories of good teaching. The article is provocative and philosophical, while still grounded in 'real' data. This is its great strength. To use Hugo's own term, his account is itself 'non dual'. The seriousness of the issue cannot be doubted, yet it is presented in a deceptively lighthearted and even teasing tone.

Our final article takes us back to one of the key questions with which we began: What happens when everyday knowledge is intended to lead to formal knowledge? Whereas Young and Hugo's critiques of Michelson focussed this question on what learners actually learnt, James Garraway shows how knowledge about practice in different sites comes to be re-represented, or codified, into formal qualification statements. He does this using grounded data – with this term potentially having added resonance since the field of practice is not schooling, but sanitation – to show how workplace knowledge becomes something substantially different when it is abstracted and recontextualised into educational discourse. Given that the NQF 'unit standards logic' favours outcomes and assessment criteria that are stated as activities or behaviours and not as knowledge, the issue Garraway raises is of significance beyond the field of practice he analyses. Whether such qualification specification is an effective form of enabling the state to direct, monitor and control actual teaching and learning is certainly a question worthy of further consideration.

Edith Dempster's very readable and eloquent review of *The Architect and the Scaffold: Evolution and Education in South Africa* has direct links with the consequences of curriculum policy premised on the replacement of traditional discipline-based subjects with a radical form of integrated knowledge. Her review of the book leads to the question in her title: Where have all the experts gone? From her biologist's disciplinary perspective, the question is: "Where

were the biologists in education / evolution debate?" Contributors to the book present an array of perspectives rich in diversity, but at the end of the review, Dempster's original question still stands. Biologists are not part of the conversation – but social scientists are.[2] Broader issues are invoked: "There is a danger that in the drive to legitimately democratize the inherited fascism of our past educational system we allow the weakening of the boundary strength of powerful knowledge structures to reach the point of banality."

At the end of this issue we are thus led directly back to the issues and challenges introduced by Young. In noting that the present time is auspicious for debate, Young observes: "In this context the role of educational research and theory takes on a new significance, not as perhaps was assumed a decade ago, just in providing prescriptions for new policies, but in providing intellectual spaces within which alternative policies and their possible consequences can be debated."

We hope that this debate will continue in our journal.

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[2] It is worth noting that the education/ evolution debate is not confined to South Africa. The theory of evolution and its teaching in schools is being strongly challenged by 'creationism' in the guise of a theory of 'intelligent design' using the language of science to argue we will never understand nature unless we take the supernatural into account (Editorial, *New Scientist*, 9 July 2005). The difference with South Africa is that the debate is being conducted by natural scientists (even though the upholders of 'intelligent design' are vulnerable to accusations of pseudo-science.)

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