
Editorial

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Researching HIV/AIDS and education in Sub-Saharan Africa: examining situated spaces

The research literature on HIV/AIDS in education has generally focused at the macro-level of national education systems using quantitative research approaches. In particular, it has drawn attention to the destructive impact of the pandemic on teacher numbers, learner attendance, and systemic management. Little attention has been given to the micro-level of analysis of the effects of HIV/AIDS on particular schools and communities, and the concrete experiences and responses of educators, beginning teachers, learners and parents regarding HIV and AIDS. Recent studies, however, suggest that micro-level research, using more qualitative and participatory methods, can elicit very different information that offers valuable insights for policy-makers as well as the participants themselves. An important theme at the World AIDS Conference in Bangkok in July 2004 highlighted the need for creativity both in relation to research approaches and in relation to giving momentum to the research community. There is thus a need to complement the quantitative, macro-level studies with qualitative, micro-level research into how participants experience and make meaning of HIV and AIDS at a local level within the education system, and to explore the ways in which creativity and innovation need to be factored into research approaches.

This themed issue of the *Journal of Education* goes some way to addressing the micro-level in what we call the situated spaces of HIV and AIDS, particularly (though not exclusively) in KwaZulu-Natal, the province which has the unenviable position of being at the epicentre of the disease in Southern Africa. Furthermore, like the results from clinical trials that our colleagues in bio-medicine anticipate, almost for the first time we are getting what might be described as ‘up close’ representations of life in classrooms in the age of AIDS. Taken as a whole, the articles in this collection show both the diversity of issues, and the commonalities across rural and urban spaces and across

regions, particularly in relation to gender and gender violence. While the pictures are often grim and suggest the magnitude of the challenges ahead, the very methodologies used in the studies, many of which are participatory and reflexive, can also be read as central to finding solutions.

While we have ordered the articles according to ‘about teachers’ ‘about learners’ and ‘about communities’ (local communities, research communities), we recognize that the articles can be read in a variety of ways. For readers who are interested in what is being said about the lives of teachers (beginning and experienced), the first four articles map out a broad spectrum of issues that are pertinent to teacher development. Deevia Bhana, Robert Morrell, Debbie Epstein and Relobohile Moletsane, in their study of the hidden work of caring in the lives of teachers in a number of secondary schools in and around Durban, describe the pastoral work that goes with the large numbers of learners who are either infected or affected by AIDS. In so doing, they point to the ways in which the roles of teachers are inevitably changing ‘in the age of AIDS’. Fatuma Chege’s article on the gendered identities of teachers in the context of HIV and AIDS highlights the significance of teachers dealing with social relations in addressing the disease rather than strictly focusing just on sex. The article by Naydene de Lange, Claudia Mitchell, Relobohile Moletsane, Jean Stuart and Thabisile Buthelezi on visual representations by educators of HIV and AIDS highlights the notion of the embodied practitioner and the ways in which we must start with ourselves and our own bodies if we are to understand stigma, power relations, and even the facelessness of AIDS, and they note the significance of the visual in taking action. Finally, Stuart describes a media-based study with beginning teachers of HIV and AIDS and social identity. Like the article by De Lange *et al.*, she makes a strong case for the place of the visual in this type of work, and notes in particular why the involvement of beginning teachers is so crucial.

The two articles on learners make a strong case for the significance of gender in addressing youth and HIV and AIDS. Gender is a situated space. Rob Pattman in his study of young people in Eastern and Southern Africa uses participatory methodologies to highlight the ways in which young people themselves can be a resource in studying and combating the gendered nature of HIV and AIDS. Reshma Sathiparsad and Myra Taylor, working with a group of boys and young men in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, draw attention to the significance of alternative forms of masculinity in countering gender violence.

The last two papers in the collection offer up insights on broader issues of dealing with the micro-level of schooling and HIV and AIDS. Dennis Francis, Nithi Muthukrishna and Anita Ramsuran provide a much needed analysis and critique of participatory methodologies in HIV and AIDS studies, and offer new readings on ethical issues in this work, an area that in and of itself is critical in the context of the lives of teachers and learners. Finally, Vaughn John and Peter Rule draw on indepth research in the rural community of Richmond to detail what they term ‘the socially embedded nature of the disease’, noting in particular the ways in which Richmond’s violent past is central to an understanding of HIV and AIDS and schooling.

Read another way the collection speaks to the changing times of community-based research and the significance of participatory methods. These range from the analysis noted above by Francis *et al.* of this work, to the studies by De Lange *et al.* and Stuart which draw on visual methodologies such as photo voice and media posters, to the work of Pattman on participatory methodologies with young people themselves. Finally, the papers in this collection suggest the dynamic nature of the disease. As Bhana *et al.* observe of the maturing epidemic, and as John and Rule discuss in their study of HIV and AIDS in the context of violence in just one community, social science research which attends to social movements as well as personal change is vital.

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