

Book Reviews

Knocking the stuffing out of education. Review of *Changing class*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press. 464pp.

Wayne Hugo

Ten years after liberation, education intellectuals in South Africa seem caught in a similar bind to that Casanova of the late twentieth century, post modernism. We still love wrestling with our various Others but struggle to settle on who and what we educationally are. The education intellectuals who wrote *Apartheid and Education* had it easy, with a couple of bad sheriffs to gun down and a number of heroes to take over the running of the town. *Changing Class* revisits the same terrain after a decade of liberation to see how the heroes have fared, and even before we listen to the report we suspect either tragedy or parody, for these are the registers that most commonly come after the epic. Instead we stumble upon a mystery with 139 acronyms.

On first sighting we find our maverick heroes in fine fettle. They have taken to their new roles with aplomb, throwing off the desperate desire of new horizons for the safety and tenure of plush offices with good views. Their accounts of change within post-apartheid South African education are nuanced and lucid, providing coherent and substantive analyses of recent developments. The new sheriff of the town, Linda Chisholm, starts proceedings off with a fine introduction of what to expect on the tour. It will explore the active processes of change within social classes and classrooms. It is a clever pun, 'changing class' catches in one heading two processes in dynamic interaction, although it is actually three when we look at the suits of the presenters. She warns, with the scent of cordite still attached to her, that even now there are enemies to be found circulating both outside and within the borders, although they do not wear black conjuring hats and gowns like the broederbond of old. Human Capital Theory is one particular nasty who, under the mantle of caring for the growth and development of education, secretly strips from its victims all complexity, contextuality, interrelatedness and history, leaving them abandoned, alone and at the mercy of the market. Even worse are the dreaded middle classes, old and new, who espouse the rhetoric of freedom within education only to secure dominance and reproduction of their own kin and kind. It is the major trend within the town she observes – educational development and the emerging system have favoured an expanding, racially-mixed middle class. This was not the intent of the pioneers, indeed they

intended to uplift the poor, but somehow the middle classes were able to twist the educational system to suit their own interests. To get a handle on these scurrilous developments she points to the necessity of using analytical weapons that privilege the concepts of class, power, conflict and inequality. It is by reflecting on the relationship between the changing political economy of race, class, gender and education that there is a possibility of *Changing Class* coming up with some answers to this perennial question of education: why and how does the educational system manage the reproduction of inequality when redistribution and social justice are intended and legislated for.

With this hope held in front of her Chisholm sets out the itinerary. It will start with a contour analysis of the broad forces that have impacted on education in post-apartheid South Africa: the labour market, school fees, integration, decentralisation and privatisation. This will be followed by a direct plunging into the “stuff of education: language policy, curriculum and assessment practices, teacher education, unionisation and higher education” (Chisholm, 2004, p.18). Finally, those on the margins of the new system will be given a voice, and if the list on the broad forces and stuff of education felt a little bizarre then NGOs, early childhood development, youth development, adult development and private contractors as the current lepers caught just outside the borders of the town are a peculiar bunch indeed. We wonder whether there is going to be any insight into what is actually happening inside classrooms, but quickly silence the query as the presentations begin.

The first presenter, Haroon Borat, looks at developments in the post-apartheid labour market. He can be forgiven for not engaging with educational issues as he is an economist (thankfully not of the Human Capital kind) and the functioning of the labour market is a key driver of schooling. It makes for depressing reading. He concludes, against the neo liberal free marketeers, that economic growth alone will not solve South Africa’s unemployment problem. More radical interventions are needed with a closer articulation of labour demands with skills training and direct poverty alleviation for those destined to be unemployable for the rest of their lives.

Edward Fiske and Helen Ladd follow with a discussion of school fees. Again one can quell the desire for direct explorations and research on teaching and learning in South Africa as school fees are a vital issue. The decision to allow school fees meant that middle class schools could protect their privilege by buying extra teachers and investing in school infrastructure, effectively keeping them within state schooling and not creating a two tiered system where those destined for health and wealth went to private schools and everyone else to governmental mediocrity. It would not do to have the middle classes escaping the regulative dimensions of state education, especially as they would definitely not watch the ministrings of SABC.

The contour analysis continues with Crain Soudien's exploration of integration within post-apartheid schools. He notes a surprising result in the research literature. With the break down of apartheid schooling Black learners have attempted to get out of their own schools and into Coloured, Indian and White schools, while Coloured and Indian learners have attempted to move into White, mainly English schools. He notes, with irony one hopes, that there has been no corresponding attempt of White, Coloured and Indian learners to move into Black schools. There cannot be anything startling about this asymmetrical movement. White schools, in general, offer better teaching and learning than Black schools. Yet one would struggle to guess that good pedagogy has anything to do with the choices made from the presentations of *Changing Class*, instead we move on to an analysis of how assimilationist models of integration have dominated where those in power have dictated what, where and how integration occurs within schools. The mystery begins to rear its head. Why is there a racial, class and gender scape to educational issues, but no pedagogic scape that looks to what teaching and learning is happening, not what class this, what race that, but what is happening pedagogically in the classroom. Where is the tradition of researching teaching and learning in terms of teaching and learning within post-apartheid South African educational discourse? Surely as educational academics we have an internal language of education that exists prior to what politics, sociology, psychology, cultural studies and philosophy bring from their own disciplines to ours. Surely we add their languages to our own rather than allow their domination of us? Soudien does not seem to have any qualms about this kind of assimilation, but at least he has focused on social class and given some substance to the claims of the introduction.

Suzanne Lewis and Shereen Motala concentrate on the democratisation of education through decentralisation via school governing bodies (SGBs). There are numerous issues to be dealt with here: the international and local forces driving decentralisation; the successful implementation of decentralisation; and the impact of decentralisation on equity, democracy and quality. There is not the slightest hint that it is strange to have unqualified parents and assorted others getting involved in the running of a complex educational institution. Concern is expressed over whether all interest groups on the SGBs are getting their say, not on whether they are in any way qualified to do so and this extends to even the curriculum. What, one wonders, would doctors and professional administrators make of the whole world and its assorted families becoming involved in the running of hospitals and the making of diagnoses? Why is democratisation taken as a given within educational discourses when education is one of the most hierarchically structured of all fields? Where is the specialised voice of education speaking back at these reform imperatives from its own logic and operating principles?

Jane Hofmeyer and Simon Lee explore the new face of private schooling where Black demand for any kind of schooling that escapes the township has opened up a whole range of private schools that cater to the attempt of non White constituencies to buy their children out of their own misery. Yet when it comes to new questions for research there is again hardly any focus on the quality of teaching and learning happening in these institutions. "In depth research among a sample of low- to average- fee schools to find out more about learners and their families will be valuable" (p.170) as will an exploration of the impact of the emerging Black middle class on high fee schools, or the cost effectiveness of independent schools, or even the hesitancy of government to get involved in partnership programmes with private schools. Yet another outside in analysis of education with education itself an absent centre.

To be fair, Bhorat, Fiske and Ladd, Soudien, Lewis and Motala, Hofmeyer and Lee have all been tasked to provide an analysis of how education interacts with wider social change, perhaps once we get into the stuff of education itself, a clearer articulation of what is happening within classrooms in terms of teaching and learning will become more apparent. This certainly does not happen with the first entry into the landscape of education. Thobeka Mda explores the status and use of African languages in post-apartheid education. Multilingualism is a key issue in South Africa and respecting linguistic human rights vital to a healthy multicultural state. But one has to look very hard to find the 'stuff of education' here, instead we get an account of the factors inhibiting the effective implementation of the Language in Education Policy and how to address these constraints to ensure the effective implementation of multilingualism. Mda recognises that this is actually a social and political issue that needs addressing throughout South African economic, social, cultural and political life. With this we cannot but agree, but then surely this should have gone into a contour analysis rather than the 'stuff of education'?

It is only with Ken Harley and Volker Wedekind that we finally get an explanation for the lack. Their topic is the curriculum reform process and they immediately point to how C2005 emerged as a political and not a pedagogical project.

The new curriculum did not emerge from debates within the education sector about the most appropriate forms of pedagogy to bring about the new political vision, or about what was feasible in the profoundly diverse and unequal range of schools (p.199).

Not surprising, given that their review of educational research delivered very slim pickings on anything to do with pedagogy and knowledge integration. They note with exasperation that "there is almost no focus, in the literature on C2005, on the fabric of daily life in schools and classrooms" (p.214). The

same can mostly be said for *Changing Class*, although Harley and Wedekind do provide the only glimpse of the book into the classroom.

We have to ask with them: where is the actual research on what is happening inside schools in terms of teaching and learning, not this policy or that implementation, but what practices of educating and how effective have they been? If one goes into the dustier sections of the archives and pulls out South African educational journals from our apartheid past, one struggles to find any sustained research projects on the actual quality of teaching and learning. There are no shoulders to stand on. In America, Europe and Russia there were educational research programmes directly engaging with pedagogical issues, with questions of what was effective teaching and learning, with how school knowledge was structured and how it could be learnt. The work of Dewey, Bloom, Piaget, Vygotsky and Shulman stand out, but behind them were massive investigative industries testing, publishing and pushing research in education into deeper dimensions. In South Africa the question of ideological use was of far more importance. Phenomenology became Fundamental Pedagogics; the work of Dewey became Peoples Education; Vygotsky was better than Piaget because he was Marxist, Giroux better than Bloom because he spoke for democratic resistance not hierarchical structure. When the New Sociology of Education blew its radical message across Europe and America, it was based on a critique of an already existing set of powerful research traditions within education. The same cannot be said of South Africa. Here it arrived as a useful weapon for the radical left to batter their liberal counterparts. But the key point is that within the West it contextualised an already existing research tradition, deepening its overly psychological and positivistic focus with new insights. Here it contextualised no research programme, providing a massive bracket to emptiness, a sociological and political context to an educational discourse that was already mere ideological rhetoric. Here, the concept of Pedagogic Content Knowledge and research into its dimensions is breaking news for it finally offers a focusing in on what effective teaching is. Here the work of Bernstein can completely dominate the Kenton Conference at Mpekweni because it offers an educational language that has something to do with education in its own terms. And we hate him for it. Why do we have to learn all these abstract terms, all these connections, this vast apparatus of concepts is the muttered question. Even a mechanic is happy to give the parts he works with technical terms like ‘brakes’, rather than ‘the thingy that stops the car’, but we feel threatened when we see the same thing done in education.

So we look on with interest when the next presenter is Joe Muller, the avatar of New Sociology, Bernstein, and sustained qualitative and quantitative research projects into the state of education in South Africa. He has been tasked to provide an overview of developments in assessment and

qualification. By the fifth sentence he is already into the conceptual apparatus of his presentation.

There are two principal axes of contestation in assessment and qualifications thinking. The first is between those who distinguish between different modes of knowledge, learning and qualification, and those who don't. For ease of reference I will call the former dualists and the latter monists. The second is between those for whom assessment in the classroom for pedagogic purposes is primary [decentralisers], and those for whom assessment as a signalling system for systemic performance is primary [centralisers]. (p.221)

This apparatus does not derive from some field outside education that is applied to education, the way we have done it countless times with Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, or whoever is currently fashionable. It picks up its use from education – it is a set of distinctions from within assessment about assessment. We can contest what Muller says in all sorts of ways, but at least he is speaking from within the discipline he comes from. His matrix generates four possibilities within itself: centralising monists; decentralising monists; centralising dualists and decentralising dualists.¹ Like a doctor working with a case history he uses the options to look back at what cures have been prescribed, why they have not worked and what option he currently recommends to alleviate the symptoms. The patient is severely ill.

All the studies conducted in South Africa between 1998 and 2003 suggest that learner achievement scores are far below what is expected at all levels of the schooling system, both in relation to other countries. . . and to the expectations of the new South African curriculum. (p.238)

His diagnosis is that three of the options already attempted have only made the patient more ill. The centralising monists with their one size fits all policy landed up with an unworkable qualifications framework that obscured rather than clarified for the working classes what it is they were supposed to learn. The decentralising dualists and monists come off equally poorly with their abortive progressivist attempts to implement C2005 with its decentralised, individualised libertarian forms of continuous assessment and the attempted systematisation of it in the Common Tasks of Assessment. It leaves one option over, the centralising dualists, and it is with this option that Muller believes we can get some way towards a diagnosis, if not a cure. On the one hand there is the need for systemic centralising reform of assessment and qualification procedures so that learning gaps in the system can be identified and addressed.

¹ Monist and dualist are unfortunate choices of terms for the work Muller wants them to do. Dualist implies two, no more. By Dualist Muller is referring to a specialising force that works with distinctions, by Monist a dedifferentiating force where in the night all cows appear black. For a similar matrix put to different work see Bernstein (2000).

But this has to happen in a manner that rejects the monist idea that one size fits all, that there can be one language for all types of qualifications. A specialising force that differentiates between different parts of the system, different types of knowledge, different sectors of the educational spectrum is needed. This will improve our diagnostic abilities in dealing with the performance data of what is an almost terminally ill patient. It is a peculiar thing, to see who once was Billy the Kid cracking the whip but then there is a town to run.

If our education system is in such poor health then one hesitates to imagine what is going on in teacher education. Not only is it a part of a system in malaise but it is producing the very people partly responsible for the mess. Yusuf Sayed tracks how teacher education has gone through a massive upheaval, shifting from a college-based system under provincial control to a university-based system under national control. This has had the counter-intuitive effect of decentralising teacher education away from strict provincial control into the specific logics of the various universities, almost a direct reversal of trends in teacher education across the world, where specialist colleges of education are increasingly the norm (see Parker and Adler, 2005 for an excellent exploration of the possibilities it opens up). Within this new dispensation the state administers like a catholic god, from a distance with decrees, setting out norms and standards that it monitors with envoys dispatched from heaven. These are valuable insights into the neo liberal governmentality of post-apartheid South Africa but one again begins to feel the shifting of focus away from education and its internal processes. What is actually happening in the universities that have taken over teacher training? Have they managed to identify what it is that teacher education is about and construct specialising courses that actually produce teachers rather than some liberal ubermensch whose every second sentence involves something about either being a critical thinker or a self reflexive practitioner? What research are they actually doing into the processes of pedagogy within a developing country? We cannot help but feel we are back into the poverty of educational research, with teacher education even more poorly served than its schooling counterpart. Where have our universities produced any sustained research programme into what effective teaching and learning is and how to specialise our students into a demanding profession, not overviews of policy change, but what is actually happening inside the university programmes themselves. I can list them on one hand.

With Logan Govender we then enter the area of teacher trade unions in post-apartheid South Africa, a completely under researched area until his own path breaking PhD work in the field. Whether a recent history of the increasing professionalisation of SADTU, NAPTOA and SAOU stands as a contribution to the 'stuff of education' is another question. When we see that the last (as always lucid and entertaining) contribution to the landscape of

education is Jonathan Jansen on Higher Education it becomes clear that the 'stuff of education' is a mixed bag with policy as its major organising principle: language policy, curriculum policy, assessment policy, teacher education policy, trade unions, and higher education policy. This is more like knocking the stuffing out of education than putting it back in. The stuff of education surely exists in a place deeper than policy with a logic somewhat separate from it, it resides in the content of education and after the first third of the book being devoted to context, the last thing one wants is to find that the second third is more of the same. This is only confirmed when the rest of the book looks at the margins of education: NGOs, early childhood development, youth development, adult basic education and private contractors. So the mystery comes at us with a double question: what is the organising logic of the book and what happened to actual classes in *Changing Class*?

The logic has something to do with how education is geographically structured, almost all the topics have education as their focus – but they do not have education as their heart. Education is the region under exploration, hence the geographical metaphors of contour, landscape and margin. There is nothing much wrong with this type of analysis. It is an extensional logic that works with contexts: the context of broad economic, social and political forces, the context of policy, the context of all those on the margins of the official system. This elaboration of context directly works against the human capital theory and neo liberalism with their attempt to decontextualise education and make it a simple transaction in the market between individuals and institutions. But it is as guilty as human capital theory of eviscerating the substance of education, only it does this not by oversimplifying what the context of education is but by continually providing contextual brackets to something that is never filled in. And this can go on *ad infinitum*: where are women, where is gender, where is AIDS asks another book review of *Changing Class* (Mitchell, p.104). At some stage it has to be said to our heroes – stop providing the contexts of education and get into researching the text. It seems we still prefer the ideological wars of the past to a current project of building up co-ordinated research programmes into the nature of teaching and learning. Human capital theory is a useful new enemy with the collapse of apartheid, but do we continually want to find another 'other' to define ourselves against when a more positive project of substantively engaging with the internal positivity of education in its own terms awaits us? We seem to prefer the administrative quest for delineating how policies play out rather than asking what the internal functioning of education is in a place more primal than any policy will reach. We hate the behaviorists for turning our learners' minds into black boxes with inputs and outputs and a mystery in between, but merrily do the same to our own discipline. So the tour ends, not with a bang but with a paper on private contractors in public education.

References

- Bernstein, B. 2000. *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Chisholm, L. (Ed.) 2004. *Changing class: education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Mitchell, C. Book Review: Changing class: education and social change in post-apartheid. *Compare*, 35(1): pp.103–104.
- Parker, D. and Adler, J. 2005. Constraint or catalyst? The regulation of teacher education in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, 36: pp.59–78.

Wayne Hugo
School of Education and Development
University of KwaZulu-Natal

hugow@ukzn.ac.za