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## Editorial

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### Liz Botha and Hennie van der Mescht

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The 2005 Kenton Conference, held at the beautiful seaside resort of Mpekweni and hosted jointly by Rhodes University and the University of Fort Hare, addressed itself to the challenges of re-examining what we mean by (in)equity, democracy and quality in education in South Africa. Delegates were treated to 126 papers, workshops or poster sessions. Twenty-seven of these turned into papers submitted to this special edition of the *Journal of Education*, and six of these are presented here.

Wally Morrow's paper on teachers' work is a strong opening to this journal, as indeed it was for the conference. Morrow's experience on the Ministerial Committee for Teacher Education strengthens his attempt to recapture what has arguably been lost amidst the plethora of policy development, namely the essence of what it is that teachers do. Morrow strips down the apparently neutral and unproblematic material elements contained in the *Norms and Standards*, and presents a case for a clearer focus on the formal (essential) nature of teaching and an increased sensitivity to variations in context. Morrow's paper is a reminder of the core business of schools, perhaps a difficult concept to hang on to as we constantly re-invent notions of curriculum, assessment and quality assurance.

But of course, quality teaching and learning can only take place in a wholesome and positive environment, and Lorraine Lawrence's paper narrates how such an environment was brought into being in a sample of disadvantaged 'best practice' schools that participated in the Eastern Cape Department of Education's Imbewu School Transformation Programme. Using narrative enquiry, Lawrence reports on one of the primary schools and demonstrates how transformation is indeed possible, and above all a value-driven activity that profoundly alters attitudes and relationships. The paper is an eloquent answer to those in the business of change and development who believe in quick fixes.

In a Higher Education context increasingly dominated by commodified output and economic incentives, Jean McNiff and Ana Naidoo's exploration of an alternative conceptualization of research raises important questions. In arguing for an inclusive epistemology based on 'living' theories rather than propositional thought, the writers propose a research programme that focuses critically on their own practice as academics, while at the same time remaining true to democratic and humanitarian principles. The paper provides an example of how members of the programme work towards internal and social

validity. This is exploratory research on an initiative in its early stages and it would be interesting to keep track of the programme so that its effects may be noted and evaluated.

Higher Education is also the context for Cecilia Jacobs' paper in which she addresses an issue that is at the heart of teaching and learning in South Africa. The problem of learning in an additional language has long been exacerbated by notions of 'academic development' which somehow lie outside the domain of discipline knowledge. Jacobs draws on fieldwork to show that through sustained interaction with language lecturers, disciplinary specialists are able to make their tacit knowledge of the literacy practices and discourse patterns of their disciplines explicit. As such, the paper provides insight into the conditions necessary to make collaboration between disciplinary experts and language practitioners, and thus the use of cross-curricular approaches, possible.

The ubiquity of the notion of sustainable development (SD) in contemporary discourse makes Lesley le Grange's exploration of 'needs' both refreshing and timely. Le Grange argues that consideration of 'future needs', in particular, provides a lens for critical engagement with the essentially problematic notion of SD. While not providing clear pointers or 'answers', the paper provides a theoretical basis for teachers and lecturers to engage critically with a concept which is central to the New Curriculum Statements. Teaching about SD from a needs perspective is likely to provide opportunities for class interaction, debate and discussion in a variety of learning areas.

Jacqui Dornbrack's longitudinal study of 'difference' in an ex-model C school provides rich insights into particular challenges of organisational dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. Dornbrack used a range of qualitative data-gathering techniques to construct a space where teachers could engage with the effects of gendered and racialised stereotyping. Her data represents lived experience within particular incidents and hence brings into sharp focus a level of organisational life that lies at the heart of current interest in social justice.

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