
Tribute to Ben Parker

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The editors of the *Journal of Education* were deeply saddened by the untimely death of one of the members of the Editorial Board, Professor Ben Parker. Ben was invited onto the Board when the journal was resuscitated in 1993 and he remained a staunch supporter of the work of the journal, contributing papers, acting as a referee and providing critical support to the editorial team over the past fifteen years.

Ben's contribution to the field of educational studies, the educational system and the country more generally is immeasurable. There is scarcely an educational institution in South Africa that has not been touched by Ben. He has worked with or for the universities of Witwatersrand, Natal, Durban-Westville, Rhodes and Fort Hare in philosophy, education development, education, and ethics. He has worked at colleges of education, for SAQA, CEPD, the Department of Education at national and provincial levels, development NGOs, and a FET College. And he has contributed to the work of WESSA, Umalusi, SACE, SAIDE, and the presidency to name but a few. In between he made forays into farming! As an academic, Ben was able to bring to education the ability to engage with the practical matters of the time, but always through a theoretical lens. Whether he was critiquing Fundamental Pedagogics, focusing on rural education in KwaZulu villages, the architecture of the NQF, teacher development policy, environmental education or vocational education, Ben always brought his philosophical training to bear on the problem. Education is a vast field, and it is possible to bring a range of disciplines to it. Often this leads to a lack of depth, but that did not apply to Ben's work. He was remarkably adept at bringing a range of perspectives to an issue in an authoritative manner and was equally comfortable engaging with classical philosophy, Durkheim and Bernstein, or Foucault and Chaos theory. He read voraciously, and was never happier than when he could debate ideas with his colleagues and students.

Since JoE is the official organ of the Kenton Education Association, it is fitting also to mention his role in the association. Ben presented regularly and a number of his papers are captured in the proceedings of the conference. But his contribution from the floor and as a discussant is possibly more significant. He had the ability to ask searching and difficult questions and push presenters to

clarify their thinking. With others of his generation he set the tone of the conferences as a place for rigorous debate, and helped to give Kenton conferences their unique flavour.

Ben was always more than an academic. He was an activist as well, and was involved in educational organizations and NGOs, and contributed significantly to the development of educational policy. He was a contributor to the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) and has been central to the development of various aspects of the education system. Most notably he led the policy processes that culminated in the incorporation of all teacher education into the higher education system and the closure of the colleges, and was the architect of the Norms and Standards for Teacher Education. More recently he was central to the NQF review. The outcome of these processes has fundamentally shaped the education system in South Africa.

When Ben took on management positions he invariably brought about innovation and change. At the University of Natal, he and others expanded the delivery of programmes through mixed mode and distance education and influenced the entire distance education terrain. At Fort Hare, he was Dean at a time when restructuring and merger required major changes. At SAQA he championed the need for 'blue sky' research which has injected energy into under researched aspects of the qualification system. As a manager of people he always supported those with potential, and protected them within the hierarchies of organizations. Our memories of Ben as a friend and colleague are of someone with a zest for life, open to fresh horizons, and always connected once he had touched your life.

The journal editorial committee is discussing an appropriate way of critically engaging with and celebrating Ben's legacy, and we invite the readership to contact us with suggestions or proposals.

We send our deepest condolences to Ben's family and especially to Diane, a treasured colleague who has been Ben's partner and collaborator throughout his very full life.