
Editorial

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Each of the articles in this special issue addresses either directly or indirectly the ‘What is to be done?’ question which framed the 2008 Kenton Conference. The conference focused on identifying and addressing the challenge of creating and sustaining an education system based on a culture of human rights, democracy and social justice.

The decision to publish a total of eight articles leaves little space for editorialising so we restrict ourselves to explaining the order of presentation and to offering a brief summarising comment on each one.

The first two articles address key aspects of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase of schooling: the teaching of number (Ensor *et al.*) and the production of literate subjects (Dixon). Ensor *et al.* were stuck by ‘the uniformity of practice’ among nine teachers in three schools between 2004 and 2006 – practice which did not present learners with enough mathematics at a sufficiently complex level to enable them to move on to the more complicated arithmetic operations required in the Intermediate Phase. They argue that the teachers were hampered by the inadequate guidance offered by the National Curriculum Statement and by the emphasis in the NCS on group work and the use of apparatus which teachers have interpreted as ends in themselves rather than as strategies for the achievement of pedagogic ends. Dixon uses Foucault’s dual definition of discipline – a body of knowledge and a means of social control – to examine how literacy is configured in relation to how children are disciplined in five classrooms from Grade 00 to Grade 3. Her analysis of the workings of space and time show that there is a narrowing of spaces and tighter control of time with each year that learners spend in the classroom so that by the time learners reach Grade 3 they are immobilised in their desks and subjected to a phonics influenced reading and writing programme ‘with little space to develop as readers and writers where pleasure, play and creativity were fostered, or for that matter reading and writing texts with a real purpose’.

In the third article the focus shifts to the final year of primary schooling as Muthivhi and Broom describe and discuss findings from their research into the conceptual thinking of Grade 7 learners. Illustrating how the learners failed to

complete tasks that required formal operational thinking, they argue that the external, socio-cultural processes of rural classrooms need to be structured in ways that enable the internal, individual engagement with abstract theoretical ideas and problem-solving. Next, Meyer and Kühne and their colleagues in the Rural Education Project focus on 'the complex interplay of factors that can boost or impede school improvement' in relation to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in two rural primary schools. From their detailed case studies of two contrasting schools they conclude that key factors in promoting and sustaining improvement include teacher motivation and teacher subject knowledge. Each of these is likely to be enhanced where teachers work co-operatively within the school and have a commitment to both the school and the community in which it is located, and where there is mediated input from external support agencies.

The fifth article takes us into the last year of schooling. Bolton asks the question 'What, if any, are the specific pedagogic features associated with achievement in a Grade 12 art class by learners in general, and disadvantaged learners in particular?' Her research project explored the pedagogy of teachers in six schools, two at each of the socio-economic levels defined as upper middle class, lower middle class and working class. Her findings suggest that there is a set of identifiable pedagogic features associated with successful art making and that some of these features can be operationalised in different ways in different social class settings with equally favourable results.

The last three articles are concerned with teacher learning. Wood reflects on an investigation into the responses of a purposively selected sample of teachers in township schools to the challenge of 'Teaching in the age of AIDS'. She describes the picture that emerged from this investigation as 'depressing' and argues that HIV and AIDS education for teachers needs to be radically transformed, as does support for their ongoing work in this complex and challenging area. Dornbrack analyses what she learned from an intervention designed to encourage teachers at a suburban school to become more critically reflective of practices in their school and to become 'change agents'. She argues that teachers need knowledge (including that of 'outsiders'), safe spaces and time to identify what needs to be changed in their schools and to act on the insights arising from their critical reflections. Reed has used a range of international and local teacher education literature to conceptualise a two part framework for analysing the selection and organisation of content in teacher education materials/programmes and for identifying the orientations to teacher knowledge in such materials/

programmes. She suggests that this framework could be useful to both designers and evaluators of teacher education materials and programmes, particularly in terms of understanding how design choices offer particular subject positions for pre-service and in-service teachers – positions that could affect their investment in their studies and their teaching.

While we have chosen to sequence the articles in terms of their focus on phases of schooling and then teacher education, we draw the attention of readers to two themes that are threaded through most of them: (i) the orientation to knowledge(s) of teachers in various sites; (ii) teachers' productive or unproductive use of time and space. We suggest that identifying the kinds of knowledge that are privileged in sites of learning and the likely consequences of this privileging for learning and learners, together with understanding how time and space are used in these sites may be helpful for advancing the social justice in education project.

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