
Editorial

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Teacher education is one of the key causal mechanisms that can make a difference to the development of South Africa. One good teacher over a lifespan of teaching reaches around four thousand learners (100 new learners per year x 40 years). Good teachers have a positive impact on learning and character. Effective learning leads to higher educational performance, improved educational performance lays the groundwork for increasing specialisation, specialisation of function results in a more differentiated system that can respond effectively and productively to the demands of an increasingly complex world. How are we, in South Africa, using this vital lever of development? What are we doing to ensure that our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes are producing good teachers? What are we doing to ensure that a multiplier effect of 1 to 4000 is as good as she can be? A fair amount I would say.

We have shifted teacher education away from a mostly dysfunctional college sector into a mostly functional university sector; we are offering serious bursaries to attract good candidates; we are investing in infrastructural programmes to increase institutional capabilities; and we have a teacher education policy that sets out minimum requirements for teacher education. Research on teacher education in South Africa is strong and growing, but still has a long way to go. In this edition of the *Journal of Education* we publish two articles that contribute to our understanding of ITE.

Lee Rusznyak has spent much of her professional and academic career on ITE, and it is starting to bear fruits, both in terms of her professional abilities to organise ITE programmes and research on how ITE works. In the lead article to edition 60 of JoE, Rusznyak provides a number of conceptual categories drawn from Bernstein, Muller and Maton to help us understand the dynamics of ITE programmes across South Africa. Her key insight is that there are mutually interacting and sometimes conflicting ordering principles at work across ITE programmes. Some ITE programmes define themselves against existing traditional practices in schools and teach liberating pedagogies and critical thinking that challenges the status quo. Others emphasise the development of relevant practices that are contextually specific

and adapted to given local contexts (like rural schools and multi-grade teaching). A third type of programme orders itself around personalised processes of self discovery that produce genuine and meaningful teaching practices. A fourth emphasises access to powerful knowledge structures and orders the programme around how best to access knowledge. Finally, a fifth takes a realist and pragmatic stance and inducts the students into the policies and practices currently existing within the schooling sector. Rusznyak refuses to fall into an all or nothing gambit, where one principle necessarily trumps and excludes all others. Teacher education is a complex professionalising process that demands a number of ordering principles to work together, with different principles foregrounded or backgrounded at different times. Just because one ordering principle is dominant does not mean it cannot allow for and use other principles, only that it does so in particular ways. Key to getting this right is time, time for students to develop both theoretical insight and practical implementation know how. Careful attention to the selection, sequencing and pacing of the ITE programme within and between years is key to allow the different principles to consolidate and for an integrated picture to emerge of what good teaching is, especially in our bimodal education landscape.

There is a real danger in ITE that one ordering principle swallows all the others and that this is allowed to happen across different campuses, each with a different tyrannical principle that insists on its pristine purity and all encompassing glory. For example, powerful knowledge as an all encompassing principle can argue that it has built into its functioning all the other principles, making them redundant. In South Africa, with CAPS, powerful knowledge is a key organising principle students need to be introduced to. Proponents of powerful knowledge would argue that it is liberating and results in social justice by providing access to powerful knowledge structures, obviating the need for specific social justice pedagogies that merely waste time and clutter the educational terrain with obfuscating ideologies; it lifts the students away from the trap of being caught in localised practices that lock learners into a limited world; it answers issues of bimodality by offering explicit steps to all, ensuring there are no hidden expectations that obscure the ladder climbing ever upwards. It is a principle that towers above all others, and either one must bow or fight. Other ITE programmes can insist on other principles as their sole driver – demanding a personalised self discovery path; urging a social justice pedagogy; driving the reproduction of whatever current policy is in place; forcing an immersion in local contexts. We could land up in a world of extreme ITE practices that

impoverish more as their claims to enrich become increasingly shrill and solitary. We need to learn how to respectfully negotiate the terrain of ordering principles within education and Lee Rusznyak provides some indications of how to take this difficult process forward.

The second article shifts focus to assessment practices within ITE, specifically around teaching practice. The profession of teaching requires a period of time where students go into a school and teach for a while. These lessons are observed and ‘critted’ by mentor teachers and academics, who write up reports that evaluate the performance of the student teacher. What do these reports look like? What criteria are used for evaluation? Given a student cannot qualify as a teacher if she (she/he) fails the teaching practicum; what evaluation instruments are used? If we had to take all the student teacher evaluation instruments from all the education schools across South Africa, what motley crew would we find and how could we make sense of them? What mirror would it lift up to the practices of teacher education? Lee Rusznyak and Carol Bertram have attempted to answer the above questions, although, unlike the evil queen of Snow White fame, they do not actually ask which of the instruments is the fairest of them all, albeit I suspect, they have their favourite. Their article *Knowledge and judgement for assessing student teaching: a cross-institutional analysis of teaching practicum assessment instruments* discusses what conceptual categories should be used for teaching practice assessment and then analyses five education institutions teaching prac forms. It is a vital engagement that sits at the core of how teacher education conducts itself.

I leave you to the substance of the article, but wish to raise an issue it left me contemplating – the absence of any sense of long term collaborative process in the forms. There was no indication of a return or reworking of a lesson to make it better and no sense of a community of practice trying to do the improvement together. In Lesson Study, for example, the same lesson is worked on with peers and practiced until it is perfected. In Instructional Design, to give another example, lessons are repeated to explore if mistakes and misunderstandings have been addressed. There was no demand, in any of the forms, for a feedback loop that went backwards to the already completed lesson with the instruction – do it again, only this time better. Am I being unfair? Is teaching practice not caught up in the pressures of daily teaching where present and pressing issues are always at the forefront at the cost of revisiting the past or envisioning the future (Lortie, 1975). Are the teaching practicum forms not summative in nature, or maybe the forms themselves do

not give an indication of the actual practices of mentorship? Probably. But there is not even a hint of any attempt to craft an excellent lesson where all the small details are thought through, where each individual step, each implication sequence, is carefully interrogated; and there is certainly no indication of this being done in a community of practice. Maybe these kinds of practices cannot be caught with these types of instruments, but if we do not develop instruments that track the long term and collaborative process of designing and teaching effective lessons, then we have little chance of breaking the stranglehold of presentist, conservative and individualised practices that characterise everyday teaching at schools.

The third article of edition 60 provides a history and current analysis of the state of the subject 'Agricultural Science' in South Africa. It used to be the infamous subject 'Gardening' in black primary schools and 'Agriculture' in high schools during apartheid times. With the transition to democracy, 'Agricultural Sciences' arose with a strong vision of 'sustainable agriculture' within the curriculum statement – the only problem was that no sustainable agriculture could be found in the actual content. Granted this was partly due to there not being much content at all, but the content there was all about industrial agriculture. The transition away from Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and learner centred pedagogies towards increased specification of content and pedagogy within the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) resulted in a stripping away of the broad vision of sustainable agriculture and replacing it with micro specification of what had to be learnt, where and when. Ironically, Moraig Peden's analysis shows that this increased specification actually provides some of the basics needed to understand how sustainable agriculture works. OBE gave the vision without the substance; CAPS gives the substance without the vision.

If Peden tracks developments in the Agricultural Sciences, then Kathy Johnson, along with Edith Dempster and Wayne Hugo, track developments in the Life Sciences curriculum. Dempster and Hugo (2006) had argued for the importance of using the highest ordering concept of Biology – evolution – as a structuring principle for school Biology. This argument was taken seriously by Penny Vinjevoldt, who asked Dempster to assist in the process of reorganising the Life Sciences curriculum. This resulted in a far more coherent and structured pathway within Life Sciences that worked towards learners coming to a full and substantive understanding of how evolution worked. Johnson, Dempster and Hugo (2011) tell the story of this change up until 2009. The current article updates the analysis of the Life Sciences to

include CAPS. Given the tumultuous changes within the Life Sciences over the past 20 years, it is with some relief that the current iteration of curriculum revision shows broad stability in terms of content. This has allowed for a more micro focus on the details of selection, sequencing and pacing, enabling more intricate engagement. The stabilisation of the Life Sciences curriculum is a vital development in our turbulent history of curriculum transformation. It allows teachers and learners to establish memory and routines. Providing a stable and worthwhile curriculum will never solve all the problems of education, but it does make the battle waged on a daily basis to provide access to powerful knowledge slightly easier.

If schools in South Africa were fulfilling their functions properly and providing a good baseline for access to powerful knowledges, then we would not have the persistently low and racially skewed completion rates in higher education. Universities have to deal with the failure of basic education to provide students who can cope, never mind thrive in higher education. Some solution has to be found, and Bruce Kloot critically explores the current Council for Higher Education's (CHE) proposal for extending the current three-year degree to four years by adding an extra 120 credits of foundational provision. The CHE is not recommending an extra foundation year at the beginning of the student's academic career, but that these 120 credits should be integrated into the academic programme in a flexible way. To be honest, when I hear the word 'flexible' attached to academic development I get very nervous. Academic development within Higher Education is a highly dedicated and focussed undertaking. To expect mainstream academics to take over this function is dangerous, especially in the current climate that rewards research over teaching. If Academic Development has a low status in our universities, then work on upgrading their funding, status and skills, not integrating their functions within the mainstream. Possibly my own experiences of foundation year programmes are contextually limited, but what I have seen are dedicated academic development staff working intensively with students who really need specific and ongoing assistance. The term 'flexible provision' in no way helps this deeply committed endeavour. But then, as Bruce Kloot points out, perhaps the bigger problem is 'embracing curriculum modification as the panacea to the ills of higher education'. It is pointless reshuffling the chairs on the deck of an ailing ship and that is what flexible foundational provision sounds like to me.

The final article of edition 60 focusses on the issue of how to enhance the employability of graduates by making sure they have competencies the labour

market needs. My own academic history is in post modernism, deconstruction, ancient and medieval philosophy, semiotics, Bernsteinian sociology of education, complexity theory, and legitimation code theory. These have all made me highly desirable out there in the labour market. Hollis-Turner provides an analysis of what knowledge and skills are key for employability in office management, almost none of which I have. She describes a key process where the University of Technology he works at has an Advisory Committee comprising of graduates and employers who provide feedback on the curriculum that focus on improving the employability of graduates. Given that our students are not all destined to become professional academics like us, taking this process of employability seriously rather than joking about it or dismissively critiquing it might be a good thing. Hollis Turner shows us one route on how to do this.

So edition 60 provides an interesting set of papers that run from teacher education to school curriculum through higher education to issues of employability, all done in ways that combine theoretical engagement and intricate empirical analysis to deepen our current struggle to use education as a force for good in our increasingly beleaguered world.

References

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