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## Editorial

### Dipane Hlalele, Adre le Roux and June Palmer

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This special edition of the *Journal of Education* emanates from presentations of the 2015 South African Education Research Association (SAERA) conference held at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. SAERA was established to bring together South African education academics and researchers into a unified research organization. The association provides, amongst others, an opportunity to promote research and academic collaboration, link research policy, theory and practice, encourage the promotion of research quality, and help develop the next generation of researchers.

The theme of the conference from which the articles published emanated is: *Strengthening Educational Research for Sustainable Futures*. The conference succeeded in providing space to reflect on the nature, purpose and role of educational research at present, in anticipation of unpredictable and complex futures. Securing education for sustainable futures has to be understood within the context of complex ecologies that involve historical, structural, political, environmental, and ethical dimensions.

The peer-reviewed articles in this edition tackle the theme of the conference in various ways. Grounded on postcolonial theory and drawing from the move by the South African government at the turn of the 21st century to spearhead the conception of what then President Thabo Mbeki referred to as an African Renaissance, Marshall Maposa argues that while the macro-level of power produces the dominant discourses, the micro-level of the citizen also contributes to the discourses that permeate the history textbooks. The author employed critical discourse analysis to analyse a sample of four contemporary South African history textbooks with a focus on the chapters that deal with post-colonial Africa. At a descriptive level of analysis, the textbooks construct the African being as five-dimensional: the spatial, the physical, the philosophical, the cultural and the experiential notions. The article concludes that there are ambiguities and the imprecisions that characterised most of the constructions of the African being in the analysed textbooks.

Lesley Wood and Merner Meyer draw our attention to the criticality of participation in service-learning through Creative Arts Education and submit that participatory approaches are likely to yield win-win learning opportunities for campuses and communities. This article reports on attempts to create a service-learning experience that allowed students and community youth to learn with and from each other. Data were generated in four cycles of a participatory action research design, using visual, art and text-based strategies. The thematic analysis indicated that the process gave participants a better understanding of each other's lived realities; that it helped to level out unequal power relations; and that the reciprocal learning boosted development on personal and professional levels.

In search of *learning for sustainable futures*, Tendayi Marovah and Melanie Walker advanced arguments for a human development approach to citizenship education. The paper is divided into five sections which start with a conceptualisation of sustainability followed by a brief discussion of underlying four human development values as applied to education. The values are equity, participation, empowerment and sustainability. The third section provides an overview of the study methodology. Thereafter, the paper presents empirical data demonstrating how policy stakeholders experience the operationalisation of National and Strategic Studies. The last section encompasses a synthesis of policy processes and practices showing how the human development framework provides a helpful lens for interpreting the various complexities and contradictions that emerge from the data, and so potentially opens up new avenues for interventions that seek to advance learning for sustainable futures.

In addition, Frans Kruger traverses *posthumanism and educational research for sustainable futures*. Tapping into Karen Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action and Rosi Braidotti's (2013) nomadic posthumanism, this article problematised the notion of educational research for sustainable futures, rejected the hierarchical dualism of Cartesian objectivism, which places the human above the non-human, and challenged the stable self-contained subject that presuppose a dialectical relation to the other on which most educational research is premised. Instead, in drawing on the work of Barad and Braidotti, subjectivity is posited as always in the process of becoming-other through the actualisation of new relations. In light of such a subjectivity, the article pondered the implications for educational research for sustainable futures.

Furthermore, four avenues of thought are proposed on how educational research informed by posthumanism could contribute towards sustainable futures.

Eureta Rosenberg, Presha Ramsarup, Sibusisiwe Gumede and Heila Lotz-Sisitka added a somewhat ‘strong specialisation’ tweak to sustainable futures. The authors argue that education has contributed to a society-wide awareness of environmental issues, and we are increasingly confronted with the need for new ways to generate energy, save water and reduce pollution. New forms of work are emerging and government, employers and educators need to know what ‘green’ skills South Africa needs and has. This creates a new demand for ‘green skills’ research. The authors propose that this new knowledge field – like some other educational fields – requires a transformative approach to research methodology. In conducting reviews of existing research, the authors found that a transformative approach requires a reframing of key concepts commonly used in researching work and learning; multi-layered, mixed method studies; researching within and across diverse knowledge fields including non-traditional fields; and both newly configured national platforms and new conceptual frameworks to help us integrate coherently across these. Critical realism is presented as a helpful underpinning for such conceptual frameworks, and implications for how universities prepare educational researchers are flagged.

The final paper by Nimi Hoffmann, Yusuf Sayed and Azeem Badroodien reports on the initial results from a representative survey of teachers in the Western Cape regarding their views of professionalism and accountability. The authors note that this is the first survey of its kind in South Africa. Preliminary analysis of the data from 115 public schools suggests that teachers at no-fee schools, who are predominantly black women, report facing the greatest institutional burdens and the greatest need for institutional support, particularly from the state. Related to this, they tend to stress pastoral care-work as central to being a professional, while those at fee-paying schools stress their claims to pedagogical knowledge and job prestige. This indicates that teachers at different schools are subject to different and unequal institutions (or rules), where the kind of school that teachers work at often reflects their race and gender positioning. This implies that the concept of a bifurcated education system, characterised by different production functions and outcomes for learners, should be expanded to include teachers and deepened to include institutions.

At its fourth conference in Cape Town towards the end of October 2016, SAERA once again provides a platform for members to engage head-on with South Africa's educational challenges, and to reimagine a system within which the children, students and adults of our country can flourish. It will focus on institutional cultures, practice-based teaching and learning endeavours, and the centrality of curriculum and pedagogy in revitalising teaching and learning. The conference aims to contribute to a knowledge base that builds on research being done to reimagine education in the light of the complex and diverse challenges that confront education for sustainable change. It seeks to consider research that goes beyond schooling by also addressing current matters concerning higher, further and adult education. The conference focuses, among others, on questions of policy, language and literacy, educational psychology, inclusion, social justice and equity.

## References

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