Editorial

Introduction

Roger Deacon, Ruksana Osman and Michelle Buchler open this edition with a comprehensive overview of educational research texts in South Africa from 1995 to 2006. Their paper, somewhat disquieting in its implications, reviews 600 texts produced in this period. It identifies the rapid growth in research over this period, but also a strong tendency to small-scale research with little international reach. The strong emphasis on qualitative approaches is consistent with international trends. They identify the key themes within the publications as these: the re-conceptualisation of teachers as facilitators, the problems and possibilities of cooperative learning or group work, the use of educational support materials and resources, the idea of 'teaching for learning', the importance of context, the nature of continuous assessment, and debates on teacher evaluation. Given the poor state of education nationally, there is a need for some re-evaluation of how research can contribute more effectively to national policy and implementation. This paper gives a critical edge to the reading of the other papers in this issue.

CE McLellan and Venitha Pillay, in *Diverging on diversity and difference: the mask of inclusion* address diversity within a South African university which uses both English and Afrikaans as languages of instruction. Drawing on the conflicting perspectives on transformation revealed through interviews with academic and student leaders, and the different ways in which respondents framed diversity, they demonstrate the ways in which ambivalence is often used to conceal exclusion and resistance to transformation. Instead, they argue for the use of ambivalence as a way opening up interaction and engagement to enable transformation of a kind that would lead to fresh avenues of development for the university.

A similar openness to uncertainty and to its educational possibilities is interrogated in Sofie Geschier's paper, *Vulnerability and belonging in the history classroom: A teacher's positioning in "volatile conversations" on racism and xenophobia*. In two specific teaching moments a history teacher in a well-resourced school takes on issues of central importance. Geschier demonstrates how in the first moment the teacher opens up challenging questions related to racism without presenting the possibility that she may herself be racist. In the second, the teacher uses the vulnerability of exposing her own xenophobia, leading to greater openness and engagement from the learners. This opens an enquiry into how teachers can work with vulnerability instead of assuming a high moral ground, and thus initiate dialogues that may otherwise remain unexplored.

In *Youth self-formation and the 'capacity to aspire': The itinerant 'schooled' career of Fuzile Ali across post-apartheid space,* Aslam Fataar considers how a young South African negotiates the complexities of space in meeting his aspirations, moving between urban and rural areas, sometimes welcomed, sometimes excluded. His 'schooled career' extends beyond the schools; it requires a disciplined commitment and the engagement with sets of meanings that speak to both individual and societal processes. Throughout his journey in highly diverse contexts the youth maintains self-representations that enable him to draw on whatever knowledges he can access. The study speaks to the need for greater understanding of the complex ways in which youth may succeed or fail in their educational endeavours.

Using cultural capital as a resource for negotiating participation in a teacher community of practice: a case study, also addresses how a young man, in this case a teacher of insecure status in his school, pursues his aspirations by drawing on a range of what may be referred to as 'community cultural wealth'. Suriamurthee Maistry describes how the teacher, though constrained in terms of economic and his limited qualifications, uses these capacities as a way of engaging fully in a group of teachers who are together learning to meet the challenges presented by new curriculum development in their subject area. As with the previous paper, we see how young people may develop innovative and determined strategies for overcoming the adversity they face.

The challenges of addressing violence within schools are the focus of a paper by Gerda Bender and Annemarie Emslie, *An analysis of family-school collaboration in preventing adolescent violence in urban*

secondary schools. A study of two urban secondary schools reveals different dynamics, in particular in relation to the effectiveness school security measures and in the closeness of school and family links. Both schools have some success in preventing overt violence, though have different organisational climates. It is found that learners – even those who feel responsible for violence – are willing to have greater support from parents and teachers in preventing violence. They also want to influence though the terms of parental involvement. The authors argue for ways of developing greater connections between schools and families, and for addressing the organisational climate so as to enable a culture that is positive for peaceful engagement in school.

Two papers argue for the advantages presented by specific approaches to the development of professional abilities in higher education, within the social sciences and education. Josep Gallifa and Jordi Garriga, in their paper *Generic competences in Higher Education: Studying their development in undergraduate social science studies by means of a specific methodology,* present evidence that students identify their experiences outside university as more effective at enabling the learning of generic competences than regular courses. However, they rate cross-course seminars are more effective than both regular courses and outside experience. In addition, the competences produced through these seminars are those that are most highly valued by the professions. One implication is that specific attention needs to be given to the development of these generic competences in higher education.

A similar problem is addressed through the paper by Liesel Ebersöhn, Gerda Bender and Wendy Carvalho-Malekane, *Informing Educational Psychhology training with students' community engagement experiences.* While professional training at universities has been shown to be limited in its ability to address the prevailing needs of the society, could such training be strengthened through combining formal education with community engagement? The evidence is that it can be, not least by exposing students to both the challenges and resources presented within such contexts. Students learn through this to consider a wider range of problems and a more diverse repertoire of responses. Such engagement provides the possibility of assisting students to make a necessary shift towards a model of professional activity that that the form of collective rather than individual practice.

Locating the doctoral study in the 'paradigm skirmishes': Challenges and prospects for adopting a paradigm cradle investigates the challenges facing both supervisor and student in the doctoral process as both confront the issue of locating the work within a particular paradigm. Rose Ruto-Korir and Carien Lubbe reflect on their own experience of the supervisory relationship; the paper quotes alternately one voice, then the other, and finally both together. Their focus is on how each deals with the issues of paradigm proliferation in relation to the development of the student's scholarly identity – and the implications also for the supervisor. They use the metaphor of a 'cradle' to describe paradigm location, which they see as part of an unfolding and incomplete process in developing scholarly identity. To enable this identity to develop, both argue for 'guided autonomy' in the relationship.

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