

Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 6 No. 2, September 2017

pp. vii-x

ersc.nmmu.ac.za

ISSN: 2221-4070

Editorial

Naydene de Lange

Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela University

naydene.delange@mandela.ac.za

This open issue of *Educational Research for Social Change* offers a collection of eight articles from authors across several education institutions and from diverse disciplines, all grappling with the bigger ideal of transformation and social change. Their publications draw on their own practices as academics and researchers, demonstrating a willingness to reflect on and critique their own teaching, research, and engagement—in an effort to deepen their understanding of how university work can indeed contribute to social change.

What has crystallised from this collection of articles is the role of discourse, criticality, and reflexivity in our own thinking of, and writing about, the work done at university. Instead of giving an exposition and critique of these concepts, I choose to raise several questions around these constructs for us as academics and researchers to consider. First, referring to discourses:

- What socially constructed discourses are we drawing on?
- Who constructed the discourses, and why?
- What discourses are we not drawing on, and why not?
- Are we contextualising the discourses?
- How are we positioning ourselves within these discourses?
- How are these discourses helpful or not helpful in advancing research as social change?
- How are the discourses contributing to transformation?
- How aware are the discourses informing our thinking?

The last question brings me to the second construct—that of criticality:

- How do we ensure our own constant criticality?
- How aware are we of criticality?
- How aware are we of the power of criticality?
- How do we use criticality in a generative way?
- How do we use criticality to advance research as social change?

The construct of criticality is also linked to reflexivity, about which I ask the following questions:

- Why is reflexivity important?
- How does reflexivity influence the quality of research?

- How can reflexivity enable inclusivity of voice?
- How can reflexivity enable a deepened understanding of research for social change?

Keeping these questions in mind, I offer an overview of the articles that presented themselves for inclusion in this open issue of the journal.

The first three articles touch on the crucial topic of violence with Sheena Lamb and Lyn Snodgrass, in their article, “A Nonviolent Pedagogical Approach for Life Orientation Teacher Development: The Alternatives to Violence Project,” which takes up the idea of teachers as activists. They argue that life orientation teachers are positioned to play a pivotal role in addressing violence at school through their personal and life skills development work with learners in enabling the learners to be agentic in preventing and addressing violence. The caveat they add, though, is that teachers themselves should first engage in such self-development processes before they can meaningfully engage the learners around issues of violence. Lamb and Snodgrass suggest that the Alternatives to Violence Project could provide such a development process for life orientation teachers.

Shan Simmonds, writing about “Teachers as Curriculum Leaders: Towards Promoting Gender Equity as a Democratic Ideal,” in making her argument, draws on the lived experiences of South African female teachers in schools. She shows how some still experience patriarchy and sexism, and how they find it difficult to confront these traditional discourses, while others succeed in positioning themselves as activist teachers using the curriculum—which as she points out, is a “site of political, racial, gendered, and theological” dispute—to have complicated conversations about gender injustice and to create an awareness of the need for gender equity as a democratic ideal.

Ansurie Pillay and Johan Wassermann in “Espoused and Enacted Values of Student Teachers Interrogating Race, Class, and Gender in Literary Texts,” go deeper into the use of the curriculum in the university classroom as catalyst to interrogate issues of race, class, and gender. Having used various relevant literary texts in university classes, they however grapple with, as the title shows, what they see as a dichotomy between what the students espouse and what they enact. It seems, however, that the work over time and in the participatory action research cycles did serve to deepen their students’ awareness of race, class, and gender and contributed to sensitisation and small movements towards transformation in this regard.

The next set of articles turns to the engagement aspect of university work, which is also conceptualised to contribute to transformation and social change. In both articles, the authors are candid about the complexities of this challenging aspect of university work. Sally Matthews, in her article, “Privilege, Poverty, and Pedagogy: Reflections on the Introduction of a Service-Learning Component Into a Postgraduate Political Studies Course,” takes a brave step in introducing service-learning into a postgraduate module, focusing on exploring poverty and privilege with her students through community engagement work. While the service-learning was meant to deepen the students’ understanding of poverty and privilege, the criteria for quality service-learning are complex and several unanticipated challenges revealed themselves. The author argues that, in spite of the challenges, the service-learning enabled both her own and her students’ learning in several ways and provided an opportunity for her to reflect on, and critique, the assumptions underlying service-learning as a means to actualise social justice.

The media often highlight the shortfall in mental health provision in South Africa, a point taken up by authors Rosemary Exner, Jennifer Jansen, Louise Stroud, and Mignon du Preez. In their article, “A Multidisciplinary Approach to University Engagement: Key Considerations for Dynamic Mental Health Teaching and Service Provision to a Disadvantaged Community,” the authors make a case for the

university to be engaged in communities, particularly in under-serviced communities, and to apply its scholarship and expertise and share its various resources with the community. They position their engagement work as a university–community collaborative initiative, enabling transformative learning, and providing beneficence. They reflect on the challenges experienced in the university trying to play its socially just role.

In a further set of articles, the focus falls on entrepreneurship and its potential for transformation and social change. Zayd Waghid and Henry Oliver explore how film is used in social entrepreneurship education in their article, “Cultivating Social Entrepreneurial Capacities in Students Through Film: Implications for Social Entrepreneurship Education.” They argue that social entrepreneurship (SE) education should be a part of the preservice teacher education curriculum as a tool to help address socioeconomic injustices. They explain how film and online discussion could be used to create a space to engage preservice teachers towards understanding theory of SE, and how to implement it when in school to enable learners to become successful entrepreneurs.

Suriamurthee Maistry and Roshnee David’s article, “Phantasmagoria: Communicating an Illusion of Entrepreneurship in South African School Textbooks,” contributes to the argument raised by Waghid and Oliver in that it raises concern about the texts used in entrepreneurship education, pointing out that subliminal messages are contained in the content of some textbooks. These messages do more harm than good when they uncritically perpetuate discourses of personal responsibility for economic liberation in a context of a historically unequal and oppressive past, and in the context of the neoliberal market of the present. The authors argue for a sense of criticality when writing and selecting textbooks and when using them in school.

The last article, by Neerusha Baurhoo, “An Autoethnographic Exploration of Disability Discourses: Transforming Science Education and Research for Students With Learning Disabilities,” continues with the importance of critically engaging with existing discourses—in this instance, discourses around people with disabilities—and how they inform research and practice in science education. What is of importance here is how the author used a reflexive autoethnographic approach to interrogate and deepen her own understanding of the disability discourses and, through the process, enabled what she refers to as self-transformation. This article, I believe, provides a meaningful contribution to the body of work of transformation and social change—work that is important in the world in which we work and live, but work that can only be done by and for oneself.

The recently published book, *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education* (2016) edited by Daisy Pillay, Inbanathan Naicker, and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and reviewed by Angela James, is a helpful resource in deepening our understanding of autoethnography as methodology as well as in provoking thoughtful engagement with the position of self in academic work in higher education. It is the reflexivity within autoethnography that enables the author to look back and to look forward, to look in and to look out which can contribute to transformation of the self. It may also enable its readers, other academics, to experience verisimilitude and to reflect on and critique their own positioning and roles in higher education.

Pamela Lamb’s insightful report on the 35th International Visual Sociology Conference held in Montreal, Canada, with the theme of *Framing/Reframing Visual Sociology, Goffman & the Everyday*, is a fitting conclusion to this open issue, drawing us to the power of participatory arts-based research methodologies in research for social change. Her analysis of the conference as a whole brings her to conclude that the theme of educational research for social change was apparent throughout all aspects of the conference including the organisation thereof:

Principles of Indigenous recognition, environmental sustainability, and social equity were mirrored not only in the selection of conference papers, but even in the conference support structures.

Returning to the introductory questions I posed, I leave the reader to engage with the articles and to consider how discourse, criticality, and reflexivity have been taken up within them, and how they might inform their own work.

References

Pillay, D., Naicker, I., & Pithouse-Morgan, K. (Eds.). (2016). *Academic autoethnographies: Inside teaching in higher education*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.