
Editorial

Reimagining education: poetics, practices and pedagogies

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South Africa is a country of challenges, and none more so than when it comes to the education of its children, young people and also its adults. Ours is a country of poor literacy levels, pass rates and poor performance. South Africa, however, is also a country of opportunity, hope and potential. It is in this light that the annual conference of the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) endeavoured to reimagine an education system that can help all of South Africa's people live up to their full academic potential. The deliberations at this conference were founded on the pursuit of educational renewal based on intellectual integrity, rigour and critical illumination.

Illuminating the theme of conference, as *poetics*, the conference emphasised the pursuit of the 'idea' as pivotal to generating quality education scholarship. As Edward Said (1996) explains, our intellectual task is not always a matter of being a critic of government, but rather thinking of the intellectual vocation as a maintaining of a state of constant alertness, of perpetual willingness not to let half-truths or received ideas steer one along.

At the heart of our reimagining education is the struggle to establish a rigorous research platform for our educational work that balances this intellectual task with the performative demands of our universities. The conference engaged head-on with South Africa's educational challenges, setting out to reimagine a system within which the children, students and adults of our country can flourish. It focused on institutional cultures, practice-based teaching and learning endeavours, and the centrality of curriculum and pedagogy in revitalising teaching and learning. The conference aimed 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 considered research that goes beyond schooling by also addressing current matters concerning higher, further and adult education. The conference focused, among others, on questions of policy, language and literacy, educational psychology, inclusion, social justice and equity.

Papers, posters and panel discussions addressed one or more of the following themes:

- Reimagining the epistemological/methodological terms of educational renewal
- Reimagining education systems for social justice
- Reimagining educational institutional change
- Reimagining teaching and learning cultures
- Reimagining teacher education policy and practice
- Reimagining how students experience educational access and success
- Reimagining curriculum and pedagogy
- Reimagining postgraduate study and thesis supervision
- Reimagining language, literacy and learning
- Reimagining professional educator identity
- Reimagining intersections of communities and education
- Reimagining data of, and for, education policy and practice
- Reimagining educational management, leadership, policy and law
- Reimagining Maths, Science, Technology education

We were privileged to listen to three generative keynote addresses presented by Marie Brennan from Victoria University, Australia and Extraordinary Professor at Stellenbosch University; Achille Mbembe from Wits University; and Richard Tabulawa from the University of Botswana. Articles by both Tabulawa and Brennan are the first and second published in this edition (see short summaries below).

Mbembe's address focused on the topic 'Future knowledge and the humanities' in which he highlighted the conceptual ambitions and challenges associated with calls in South African universities to decolonise our country's educational offerings. Warning that the object of decolonising education might be obsolete, he argued for the necessity of holding on to scientific and research protocols as a basis for critically working with broader, more inclusive, knowledge conceptions. Explaining that the decolonising project is back on the agenda worldwide, he pointed out that it has two sides. The first is a critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model, what is called 'epistemic coloniality', that is, the endless production of theories that are based on European traditions. The second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like. This is where Mbembe believes a lot remains to be done.

He suggests that there is a recognition of the exhaustion of the present academic model with its origins in the universalism of the Enlightenment. Calling attention to the notion ‘pluriversity’ in opposition to the mono-universalism of the *university*, he argued that imaging alternatives is not merely the extension throughout the world of a Eurocentric model presumed to be universal and now being reproduced almost everywhere thanks to commercial internationalism. By pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity. It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions. To decolonise the university is therefore to reform it with the aim of creating a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan *pluriversalism* – a task that involves the radical re-founding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions.

Moving on to the articles in this edition, the first is by **Tabulawa** who locates his focus within his experiences at the University of Botswana. He challenges the conceptualisation of interdisciplinarity as just a form of knowledge organisation, i.e. the repackaging of existing knowledge to be relevant and responsive to the needs of a changing university clientele and society. The author is critical about the ideological dimensions of interdisciplinarity to loosen academics’ grip on higher education, and to make them more acquiescent to market rationality. Though he is not suggesting that they are ideologically similar, he identifies the affinity between interdisciplinarity and neoliberalism. In the article he motivates for a re-politicisation of the interdisciplinarity debate, and argues that it is the only way that the profound effects of interdisciplinarity on academics’ identities and the university, can be exposed.

Brennan’s article explores the role of teacher education during the Anthropocene age. There are significant debates about the inextricable links between humans and the environment; how human presence has altered nature, but also how nature facilitates what humans can do. Brennan reasons that it is important for education to come to grips with the complex reading of the world, as both global citizens and as members of multiple communities. She argues for new analyses and structures of knowledge that have the capabilities to respond to the serious interwoven challenges of capitalism with ecological and climate change. Brennan posits that educators have a stake in the survival of the human species. Education, however, struggles to bring balance to the two dimensions of education: the passing on of past

knowledges, and “entrusting the future to the next generations, equipping them with capacities to survive, to organise, to think and plan and act”. Brennan employs Stengers’ version of pragmatism to deal with the chaos that policy reforms continue to visit on educational practices. She considers teacher educators to be “helpfully placed” in universities, which are sites of multiple disciplinary resources, that can be brought to bear on key problematics in community and the broader society. Teacher education, according to her, is opportunely placed to problematize the old grand narratives. As most of an educator’s work involves intergenerational activity, it is tied to the responsibility to help students navigate their way in changing conditions. Brennan sees the potential of new narratives emerging when educators work alongside their students on local or regional problems, “bring(ing) together old and emerging knowledges and practices to understand more about the local, and how the local is linked to other locals”. New complex narratives can emerge that specify the big issues that are challenging local lives, and this opens up spaces for action.

Zipin’s article proposes a problematic-based curriculum approach (PBCA) in which students work with knowledge in relation to community-based problems that matter. This interesting article contrasts PBCA with the social realist approach that underpins South Africa’s CAPS curriculum. Applying Nancy Fraser’s call for a politics to “transform the deep grammar of frame-setting”, Zipin argues for changing the grammar of curriculum in the direction of social justice. He outlines an ethical-pragmatic rationale for why PBCA would meet Fraser’s key justice principles of redistribution, recognition and representation. Zipin traces how shifts in post-apartheid curriculum policy reforms have been bi-polar. That is, Curriculum 2005 emphasised everyday knowledge, with outcomes defined in terms of vocational skills and competences, and left pedagogy mainly to teachers. By contrast, the CAPS curriculum emphasises disciplinary knowledge to the virtual exclusion of everyday knowledge, and is highly prescriptive of content, method and pacing, leaving little space for pedagogic agency among teachers. According to Zipin, both of these emphases fail to interrupt how schools reproduce inequalities of social-positional power. Against such bi-polarity, Zipin draws on Vygotskian ideas, and on those of pragmatist philosopher of science, Isabelle Stengers – to argue that there are richly meaningful knowledge processes – “funds of knowledge” – in the family and community lifeworlds of students, which curriculum should bring into dialectical connection with disciplinary knowledge. The most powerful curriculum, argues Zipin, would focus on problems that matter in learners’ local lifeworlds, and that link to matters of

global concern, drawing people with diverse community-based and specialist knowledge, including students and teachers, into collaborative work upon them.

Dauids argues in his article that black South Africans' invisibility in the historiography of the country during the colonial-apartheid period is responsible for their present day epistemic marginalisation. He proposes memory work as a counter-hegemonic approach towards constructing a representative historiographic record of South Africa's history. In the article, he reports on an inter-generational memory project that brought forced-removal survivors and third-generation learners who shared District 6 as ancestral home, together, to exchange memories and personal knowledge about this iconic community. Though this new generation did not grow up in the area they were co-constructors of building new and multiple narratives about their parents and grandparents' birthplace through the sharing of family and community memories. Dauids holds their co-constructed knowledge about District 6 up as one example of how epistemic justice can be advanced when indigenous and community knowledge about marginalised black communities are valorised.

Murris's article problematises the traditional ways in which the educational relationships in schools are conceptualised for its role players, and thus advanced. She describes the three aims of education as being to develop students' intellectual, linguistic and social capabilities, with the main purpose being, to socialise them into an existing order. Murris opposes the objectification of the learner, and of him/her being acted upon by the teacher as the knower in the relationship. Her focus, as central to the article's argument is subjectification, which relates to how education influences the child's development. Murris positions subjectification as an event in which the teacher's role is to mediate the child's engagement with curriculum. Murris however, is critical of the theorising of educational relationality as a process in which a teacher educates a learner, and argues for a post human educational focus, one in which the pedagogical focus shifts away from the teacher and the learner to the relationality of the learning encounter. Using Barad's posthuman methodology, Murris' reconfiguration of the educator as pregnant stingray is an attempt to shift thinking away from the knower and to advance a more egalitarian inter-relationality between learner and educator.

Educational theory is a central part of the teacher education curriculum and mastery of learning theories are assumed to inform teaching practice. The

premise of **Kwenda, Adendorff and Mosito's** article is that there is a disjuncture between theory and practice, a situation that arises when academics and their student teachers' conception and understanding of theory differs. Not enough is known about how student teachers perceive and understand the place, purpose and role of theory in their teaching practice and their emerging identity as teachers. In the article, he then sets out to explore the role of theoretical knowledge with a cohort of third year teaching students who had completed a 16-week teaching practice period. The article exposes the challenges embedded in some learning contexts, and the inconsistencies in how teachers practice and understand theory. Some teaching students devalue theory as book knowledge that is far removed from real-life classroom situations. When tutor teachers reinforce this view and dismiss theories as impractical and of limited value when seeking practical solutions in the classroom, it serves as validation for these student teachers' stance. Some students however, over time, do develop their own theoretical understandings, and show an awareness of the relationship between the teaching curriculum and their practice.

In their study of the first year experience of students at a University of Technology, **Pather, Norodien-Fataar, Cupido and Mkonto** highlight the influence of pre-university non-academic factors on the way in which students engage and participate in university structures and programmes. These factors include family support, financial status of the family, and family level of education. The paper reveals the struggles of many first-generation students, particularly those from challenging socio-economic backgrounds. The authors make a strong argument for institutions to recognize and acknowledge the pre-university profiles of students, and to build on these students' knowledge assets in order to provide more effective and inclusive support. In our view, this article makes a substantial contribution to the discussions of institutional structures and cultures, as foregrounded in the South African #FeesMustFall movement.

Reed continues this theme of resilience in a fascinating manner, locating the research in an entirely different historical and geographical period. She draws on a demonstration lesson notebook, lesson commentaries, a college handbook and interviews with the compiler of the notebook to provide a vivid account of the story of a primary school teacher's entry into the teaching profession in the Australian state of Victoria in the 1940s. She compares this story with studies of early career teachers in Australia in the early part of the twenty-first century. The comparisons indicate both similarities and differences in the way

in which resilience plays out in the personal and professional growth of teachers entering the profession sixty years apart. Reed concludes by encouraging teacher educators and school leaders to think about how one might support students and early career teachers to become resilient members of the teaching profession.

Msutwana and De Lange explore the difficult and essential topic of sexuality education for adolescents. They work from a premise that teachers need to understand how they themselves learnt about sexuality, and how such knowledge can enable them to teach their learners in authentic and meaningful ways. The authors show how participatory visual methodologies allowed these teachers, from four secondary schools in Port Elizabeth, to explore their own sexuality education within the Xhosa culture. Through discussions about their own drawings, the teachers were drawn into open dialogue about the relationship between sex, culture and beliefs, thus establishing their own positionality about how they would teach sexuality education.

Tsakeni and Jita considers the mutual, but often neglected, role of followership among teachers at a school. The article uses a follower-centred approach to explore how the role of the follower co-constructs and sustains leadership. Through narrative inquiry of a single case study (purposefully selected for being a top performing school in Science and Mathematics), the author illuminates the elements of an active follower identity. These include significant teaching experience, subject expertise and proven records of good results in learner attainments. The article further identifies a number of premises for teacher participation in co-constructing leadership processes, namely a distributed leadership configuration, continuous learning through professional learning communities, and active classroom practice. This article helps us to consider new approaches to the very topical challenge of leadership education in South Africa.

Mestry continues on the theme of school leadership, with a focus on the perspectives and experiences of the instructional leadership function of principals at eight public schools in the Ekurhuleni District of Gauteng. With all their administrative and management duties, it can become challenging for a school principal to maintain a role as an instructional leader and keep the school focused on curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment. As the author argues, a lack of effective leadership in curricular issues can result in poor academic standards of learners. Mestry shows how the principals in this study refute that instructional leadership is their main responsibility, seeing

their primary involvement as monitoring and control of academic standards. He makes a strong case for principals to devote more attention to instructional leadership and curriculum management, and to participate in well-constructed professional development programmes towards this end.

TVET colleges have been argued to be significant locations for skills development in our country, yet, as **Papier and Vollenhoven** argue in her article, little is known about the conditions that promote the intended integration of learning and work. This research thus looks at learners' experiences of workplace learning and their perspectives on how they might learn best. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of collective activity theory, situated learning and the Vygotskian socio-culturalist paradigm, Papier shows that these candidates at the TVET college experienced diverse learning modalities and affordances in their workplace settings. The central role of the expert artisan in moving candidates towards competence is shown to be a key factor for these students. This, she argues, holds important implications for how learning in the workplace should be organized and supported.

The last article in this edition discusses the shortage of skills in South Africa's private and public sector. **Mavunga and Cross** contend that what is missing from debates around skills shortages, and what they called 'employee learning', is a holistic conceptualisation of the culture associated with such shortages. They suggest that an understanding of culture needs to go beyond the government and employer initiatives to the actual process by which employee learning takes place. They argue that it needs to take into account the employees' biographies, identities and subjectivities as well as the social interactions which they engage in as they learn in the workplace. The authors propose a two-tier framework which integrates implications from two theories, that is Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Critical Realism (CR). Implied in HCT is the suggestion that the culture of employee learning is a function of the employer-initiated learning programmes, such as short courses offered by private employee learning service providers, Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and block-release programmes run by some institutions of higher learning. The basic aim of these forms of learning would be to increase profitability through improved productivity which itself is a result of employees having been equipped with the requisite skills. They argue that the final architecture of the culture of employee learning is not linear but a complex and multi-layered product of such factors as the employees' family and educational backgrounds as well as individual and collective agency, in addition to the government and employers' initiatives. The article suggests

that attention be paid to employees' lived experiences which also mediate their responses to the government and employee learning initiatives. This would help with aligning government and organisational employee learning initiatives and strategies to the employees' individual and collective workplace learning aspirations.

All in all, we, as guest editors are satisfied that the foci and diversity of the articles in this special SAERA 2016 conference edition is representative of the range of articles that were presented at SAERA's very successful fourth annual conference hosted by the Faculty of Education of Stellenbosch University in Cape Town in October 2016. The conference succeeded in advancing the objective of showcasing cutting edge research and debate on educational reform and renewal and providing a platform for the on-going development of junior academics. 300 individual papers were presented, 34 symposium panel sessions, 11 Special Interest Group sessions, and 5 development workshop sessions.

The best doctoral thesis was awarded at the conference to Dr Talita Calitz from the University of the Free State. Her thesis is entitled, "Agency and access through digital narratives: An application of the capabilities approach to academic literacy at a South African university".

The best article award was awarded to Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (UKZN), Prof. Nithi Muthukrishna (UKZN), Dr Daisy Pillay (UKZN), Dr Linda van Laren (UKZN), Prof Theresa Chisanga (Walter Sisulu University), Prof. Thenjiwe Meyiwa (Durban University of Technology), Prof. Relebohile Moletsane (UKZN), Dr Inbanathan Naicker (UKZN), Dr Lorraine Singh (UKZN), and Dr Jean Stuart (UKZN) for their article, 'Learning through co-flexivity in a transdisciplinary self-study research supervision community'. In K. Pithouse-Morgan & A. P. Samaras (Eds), *Polyvocal Professional Learning through Self-Study Research*, 145–171, 2015 (Sense Publishers).

We end this Editorial with the statement adopted at the conference about the universities' crisis of 2015/6, which emphasises support for free education for poor students, decolonising the curriculum, universities to remain places of safety, and for SAERA to develop a research agenda to take these objectives productively forward. The statement is as follows:

The South African Education Research Association (SAERA) affirms that education is a public good and that social justice cannot be achieved without full access to quality education.

We note that the current crisis in higher education is not a crisis of the education system alone, and thus requires a response from the whole South African society and beyond. We thus affirm and encourage creative and sustainable solutions to the funding of higher education. We urge decision makers in all sectors of civil society, the state and government to consider the unevenness of this landscape, and to take special consideration of those institutions in funding to ensure that the needs of all and especially the most vulnerable students are addressed.

We express our concern at any form of violence currently being acted out, both on and off university campuses. Meaningful education and negotiations cannot take place in such violent environments.

We support the right of academics to participate and show solidarity, and further call for and commit ourselves to meaningful and productive negotiations with all parties.

As part of the ongoing commitment to the intellectual and administrative transformation of universities, we commit ourselves to the processes of re-imagining, re-designing as well as coordinating efforts and engagements with what a decolonised higher education landscape could be.