



Resensies / Reviews

South Africa and higher education

Bitzer, Eli, ed. 2009. **Higher education in South Africa: a scholarly look behind the scenes.** Stellenbosch: Sun Press. 462 p. Price: R250,00. ISBN: 978-1-920338-14-5.

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This book consists of a collection of contributions in the field of higher education in South Africa, published as a tribute to the work of Prof. Kalie Strydom, emeritus of the former University of the Orange Free State, and one of the doyens in the field of higher education in South Africa. Eli Bitzer, the editor, also a prominent scholar in that field, succeeded in attracting contributions from a wide array of scholars. By his own admission, however, he did not succeed in involving all of the acknowledged South African experts in the field (mostly due to time constraints), with the result that important themes such as the financing of higher education in South Africa, the debate on the tension between higher education and the state, the role of higher education in economic development and equity (including problems such as affirmative action), student access (including the problem of massification), and staff workload had to be left by the wayside. Despite this lacuna, this collection of articles covers so many other issues that even a relatively uninformed reader would gain an excellent grasp of the higher education situation in South Africa in 2009.

The book consists of nineteen articles, divided into six parts. The first part covers issues of policy in higher education, the second some normative and epistemological issues in higher education, part three issues concerning teaching, learning and the curriculum in higher education, part four issues pertaining to professional development in higher education, part five issues concerning structures and governance in higher education, and the final part discusses pos-

sible research frontiers and agendas in higher education. The final part also contains a chapter by Kalie Strydom, to whom the publication is dedicated, in which he *inter alia* outlines some of his views about how higher educationists and researchers in this field could gain more and better control of policy formation and implementation.

Strydom's concluding contribution fulfils a key role in the wider scope of the book. Not only is higher education worldwide as well as in South Africa in a "constructed steady state of change" (p. xi) and in the throes of transformation, but also many people working in higher education are not been trained in the field of higher education itself (most have been trained in other specialist subject fields, and then called to teach and do research in higher education). Without this training, specialisation, and the necessary professionalism in terms of Higher Education as a specialist field in its own right, it would indeed be an uphill battle for higher educationists to gain more and better control of policy formation and implementation. This book, conceived for giving the reader a scholarly look behind the scenes in academia can go a long way towards helping them acquire some of the required specialised knowledge.

Few readers will sit down and read this book from beginning to end. Where one dips into it will depend to a large extent on one's own field of specialisation in higher education. For example, those involved in teaching of students might find the discussions in parts two (normative and epistemological issues) and three (teaching, learning and curriculum issues) important. Those involved in higher education management structures might find part one (policy issues) and part five (structures and governance) more interesting. Researchers in higher education arguably will be more interested in part four, where issues regarding professional development are mooted, and in part six, where research and other issues in higher education come to the fore. All educationists will, however, find this book useful as a resource book. It not only provides a description of the state of higher education in South Africa at the beginning of the 21st century, but also reveals to what extent this educational sector finds itself in the white waters of transformation, for instance having to face the challenges of entrepreneurialism. Although, as indicated, not all the possible topics in the field have been covered, the book emphasises the fact that higher education is a complex field (a reality which escapes some higher educationists themselves) that is beset with problems and issues, particularly in South Africa. The fact that the post-2009 Zuma government has decided to institute a separate Ministry of Higher Education and Training attests to the

complexities of this sector. The book also casts comparative light on higher education developments in South African higher education and elsewhere.

Much work and dedication have gone into the preparation of the book. Not only have a large number of researchers, opinion-makers, advanced students and some newcomers in South African higher education been involved in the publication, but also much thought must have gone into arranging the contributions into a meaningful and coherent sequence, one that provides the reader with a view of the “insides” of this particular scholarly field. One of Bitzer’s own contributions, in which he looks back on developments in higher education based on his own experience over three decades is particularly enlightening. The editing was well done, the publication itself is attractive, and the contents highly stimulating and occasionally contentious and provocative. Educationists would do well to have this publication on their shelves as a resource book. Not only can discussions about most of the problems besetting higher education be found in it but also efforts at moving higher education beyond the pragmatic to greater theoretical depths. The inclusion of a detailed index at the back of the book is useful for this purpose. The index provides access to themes such as accountability, typology, Ubuntu and world of work. *Power*, a key term, does not appear, however. The predilection among South African education policy-makers for acronyms made the inclusion of a list of those unavoidable.