

Sustainable empowering learning environments

Francis, Dennis, Mahlomaholo, Sechaba & Nkoane, Milton, eds.
2010. **Praxis towards sustainable empowering learning environments in South Africa.** Bloemfontein: Sun Press. 352 p.
Price: R275,00. ISBN: 978-1-920383-07-7.

Reviewer: J.L. van der Walt
Department of Comparative Education,
Potchefstroom Campus, North-West University

According to the back cover, the collection of articles contained in this volume presents

... some of the best peer-reviewed papers from a conference with the theme *Creating sustainable empowering learning environments through scholarship of engagement*. This conference was held from 20 to 21 August 2009 at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University in South Africa. Over 110 papers were presented, out of which 20 were selected for this publication based on a rigorous blind peer-review process. The main criterion for inclusion was that the paper should contribute to the theme by means of an original, tight, theoretical and empirical study conducted with the aim of informing the practice of creating sustainable empowering learning environments.

This brief background sketch explains the structure of the book. Its 352 pages embody twenty articles covering the entire spectrum of educational practice, ranging from Grade R (chapter 10), through grade 12 (chapter 18) to university education (chapters 1 and 4), and from the situation in South Africa (the majority of the articles) to

that in other countries (Botswana, chapter 20). It covers a wide range of topics, including collaborative research, empowering learning environments, teacher research, self-directedness in learning, self-regulated learning, assessment procedures, experimental teaching strategies, scholarship of engagement, mother-tongue teaching, marginalised children, outcomes-based education, psychological assessment, sexuality education, school management, readiness for higher education, multicultural learning environments, service intervention, economic responsiveness, learning styles – to mention only the main rubrics.

The underlying tenor of the publication is empowerment and scholarship of engagement. Most of the articles therefore focus on empowerment of marginalised target groups and the provision of sustainable empowering learning environments. Some articles also attend to the underlying methodology, namely critical theory, mainly in its South African post-struggle form. The book contains two parts that come in handy for understanding not only its structure but also its purpose. It begins with an Overview in which the editors briefly explain the purpose of the publication, and then proceed to a brief summary of each of the contributions. This is helpful, given the diversity of the contributions that follow thereafter. The first chapter, authored by one of the editors (Mahlomaholo), also explains much of the rationale for putting together a publication of this nature.

In my opinion, a purchaser of the book will not read it from cover to cover, but will select certain topics and chapters that appeal to him/her. The contents of the book is too wide-ranging for a thorough study of every chapter. Put differently, I expect only readers interested in the topic of how to help marginalised target groups to become part of mainstream education in a sustainable manner will read every chapter. For the rest, I think readers might be interested in particular chapters, depending on their own fields of specialisation. This does not detract from the fact that I think the peer reviewers and the editors had done a good job in selecting these twenty articles for inclusion. Each of them is interesting and important in its own right. It is just that the diversity is just too wide for reading through the entire book.

The book is well-bound with an attractive green paperback cover. I would recommend buying the book and keeping it on a shelf near the computer for future reference, especially when researching the problem of marginalisation. This collection offers many an example of how the problem can be addressed in a more or less sustainable manner.