

Editorial

Observing global issues in a national context

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The first issue of *PiE* for 2006 is our only general issue for the year. As usual in general issues, there is a rich collection of inter- and transdisciplinary contributions from which potent themes appear. In this issue we find a number of powerful bases for interpreting educational actuality. These attempts to understand educational processes have been constructed by our contributors with great enthusiasm and diligence, creating a wide-ranging collection of views. Paging through this selection, the critical reader will encounter a large number of enquiries that are used as a basis for interpreting and evaluating, thus drawing attention to current research developments across the spectrum of educational investigation. Once more the list of contributions is varied by institution, gender and international allocation. Since the journal remains committed to the publication of contributions by emerging scholars, I would like to extend another invitation to both emerging researchers to use *PiE* as a publication forum.

In the leading perspective, *Nation-building without mortar? Public participation in higher education policy-making in South Africa*, Teresa Barnes assesses a case study of public participation in the decision-making about restructuring South Africa's large cohort of higher education institutions, as inherited in 1994, against theories of South Africa's new democracy. She argues that people formally outside the higher education policy sector – students, academics, parents and the public in general – have been able to play only increasingly circumscribed roles in restructuring processes. Barnes reviews trends of participation in the production of the major post-1994 higher education policy documents and initiatives, such as the establishment of the Council on Higher Education. She scrutinises some ways in which a number of decisions on institutional closure and mergers were changed under pressure; not through open or transparent processes but behind closed doors. In conclusion, she contemplates the possible wider implications of these developments in higher education for South Africa's emerging democracy.

Higher education is in the news, probably even more so at the moment than ever before. In the second contribution, Lionel Thaver tries to bring a sociological sensibility to bear on thinking through the implications of researching institutional culture, particularly in higher education where the reaction for transforming the university, that is treating it as an "ivory tower", is always close. He provides a powerful methodological scrutiny of the efficacy of the conceptual complex "home-at home", as a heuristic for understanding the nature of institutional culture as it articulates in higher education institutions. Thaver brings together a discussion on different conceptions of "home-at home", institutional culture in general, institutional culture and higher education in particular, and their methodological implications and contemplates the notion that it is the nature of institutional culture to be as much a basis of inclusion as it is of exclusion.

Globally, education is becoming a predominantly female occupation. In the third article, Deborah Jones presents research on female teachers exploring their perceptions and experiences of male teachers in the early years and examines the views of male teachers in relation to this environment. She considers the dominant UK public discourse calling for more men in primary teaching (not an uncommon appeal in South Africa!) and shows how this affects both male and female teachers. UK statistics reveal that there are 26 200 male primary teachers and 141 000 females (DfES, 2005) yet, curiously, the numbers of male head-teachers are vastly

disproportionate. Jones considers why men and women invest in certain positions and how they interact within a feminised space, and in an attempt to disaggregate this phenomenon, the author explores contrary discourses of identity and power and their impact on men and women in schools and contends that inequalities and ambivalences permeate the school context, resulting in multiple tensions. Much can be gained from studying the findings in this article, which has special relevance in South Africa in 2006, where education is by and large a female occupation.

The scholarly debate about the lack of satisfactory achievement in mathematics is continuing at all levels of mathematics education in South Africa (as is indeed the case elsewhere in the world). In the fourth article, *The relationship between the mathematics identities of primary school teachers and new curriculum reforms in South Africa*, Loyiso Jita and Saloshna Vandeyar examine the construction of two teachers' mathematics identities. Basing their arguments on life history accounts of two elementary South African school teachers, the authors contrast these identities with the identity forms that are envisaged by the policymakers and the mathematics reforms currently underway in the country to construct an account of why the goals of reforming mathematics in primary school classrooms in South Africa continue to elude even the latest set of reform proposals for mathematics classrooms. They conclude their think-piece in a creative and imaginative way by exploring innovative possibilities for bridging the divide in order to transform mathematics teaching and learning in the South African classrooms and elsewhere.

In the fifth perspective in the current issue, printed for its particular currency and relevance in postapartheid South Africa in 2006, Jenni Karlsson and Michele Berger consider the challenges and enabling conditions when putting policy into practice within a dynamic policy environment such as that in South Africa. The authors confirm that the first decade of democracy in South Africa ushered in dramatic social policy reforms, including innovation in initial teacher education that emerged through the skills development policy, which introduced learnerships to address South Africa's human resource development needs. Assuming that South Africa's learnerships have been adapted from countries such as the UK, these authors focus on the first registered learnerships for those entering the teaching profession. They argue that these learnerships cut across concerns and responsibilities of the Ministries of Labour and Education and challenge long-established ways of offering and undertaking initial teacher education. On the one hand, political and systemic difficulties of straddling exist between two national ministries, and logistical and coordination challenges involve schools, training institutions and provincial education bureaucracies. On the other hand, learnerships offer opportunities for economically disadvantaged school-leavers to become skilled and qualified professionals, while supplying schools where staff is depleted through AIDS, with on-going trainee teachers. Marrying these two twin issues poses an interesting and exciting challenge.

In the sixth article, *Judicial enforcement of educational safety and security: The American experience*, William Thro argues that while education is an American constitutional value, the opportunity to pursue an education (particularly a quality education) is meaningless unless learners are able to pursue their educational rights in an environment that is both safe and secure. The author proposes that when learners are subjected to sexual and racial harassment, to physical violence, to bullying and intimidation, to a culture of illegal drugs, and/or other dangers, meaningful learning cannot take place. In such contexts, even the most outstanding instructors, state of the art equipment, newly issued textbooks, small classes, and large financial expenditures tend to become irrelevant to terror-stricken children. It is thus incumbent upon governments (both in America and elsewhere) to ensure safe and secure learning environments if the constitutional value of education is to have any substantive significance. The central hypothesis of the article is that American courts – particularly the Supreme Court of the United States – have a mixed record in this regard. It is left up to the discerning reader to decide if the situation is any different in South Africa.

In their article, *Securing provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders: The views of parents*, Catherine Tissot and Roy Evans provide a strong think-piece on the focus of the United Kingdom (UK) government on parental involvement in the process of determining provision for children with disabilities. The authors argue that a discussion with parents/guardians on their perspective of the process of securing provision and eventual placement of their child is missing from this laudable focus. The authors conducted a national survey throughout the UK, requesting parental comment on their personal experience of securing educational provision for their child with autistic spectrum disorder. The data provided responses to four key areas: parental opinion on obtaining provision, satisfaction with the process, working relationship with the educational provider and the effect that this process had on the family. The authors identified the process as very stressful for most families and conclude with an exploration of the data to identify key variables that indicate areas for focus by agencies wishing to support parents. Indeed, the phenomenon of marginalising voices such as those of parents of learners with "disabilities" is not limited to the UK and an article of this nature has a rightful place in any contemporary South African educational journal.

Notions of transformative learning partly derive from critical social theory which was developed by thinkers and philosophers who were influenced by Marxist theory. Educational research which draws on this theory focuses on a discussion of the empowerment of learners and the transformations which learners and schools can undergo to become sites of independent and liberating learning. It is now recognised globally that inclusive schools must be familiar with and respond to the needs of learners regardless of any difficulties or difference they may have. In the same way, the South African Constitution (1996) requires education to be changed and democratised in keeping with the values of (e.g.) human rights and dignity, equity, freedom, non-racism and non-sexism. Against this background, our last article *Including the silent minority* by Janet Collins has particular significance in South Africa in the 21st millennium. Collins draws on research carried out in the UK to explore issues related to social inclusion and educational participation in the classroom. Based on a socio-cultural view of learning which emphasises that communication between learners and teachers is a vital part of the educational process, the author argues that learners who do not have a voice in the classroom may be educationally disadvantaged.

In conclusion, may I encourage you to submit contributions that will further kindle debate and promote scholarship on education in South Africa. Please help us develop and expand the existing network between scholars in South Africa, in the SADC region, but also elsewhere in the world. If you have suggestions for improving the quality of *PiE* and for making the journal even more useful to our readership, I invite you to contact the *PiE* Office (kobus.maree@up.ac.za).

Having received accredited listing from the Department of Education in South Africa, IBSS (International Bibliography of Social Sciences) and the international Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) quite some time ago, it gives us great pleasure to announce that, to an ever-increasing extent, *PiE* is receiving extensive international reaction from diverse corners of the world to its articles. We thank you for having helped us to attain this level of scholarly status of the journal; something we feel particularly proud to share with our authors and subscribers. Thank you for your contribution in this regard. Enjoy reading this issue and send in the manuscripts.