

---

# Editorial

---

## Dennis Francis and Volker Wedekind

---

### The road to Didima

This special edition of the *Journal of Education* derives from the Kenton Educational Conference for 2004, “Masikhombe phambili nomlando” (“Looking to the future with the past in mind”), hosted by the School of Education and Development and School of Adult and Higher Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Significantly, the theme also marks a decade of democracy in South Africa, and therefore marks an interesting moment in South African scholarship. The call for papers challenged educationists to look back and reflect on what has been achieved and learnt and at the same time question ‘Where do we go from here?’ and ‘What is the role of research in transforming education?’

Interestingly, the conference was held in a beautiful physical environment, KZN Conservation Service’s Didima Camp, within the Ukhahlamba World Heritage Site. The presence of the mountains and new, vibrant and lavish architecture formed an ideal ambience. Added to this, was a sense of abundance – the food, wine, company, talking at tables and laughing. In contrast, it was easy to forget the road to Didima – somewhat depressing, denuded hills, livestock, poverty and desolation. Along the road one passed examples of rural schools with minimal facilities, and overcrowded classrooms. The surrounding area has a long history of low intensity conflict, and very high prevalence of HIV infection and AIDS. Undoubtedly a high proportion of the youth and adults are out of school, unemployed and illiterate. In many ways, the disparity between the conference venue and its surrounds captures the typical landscape of South African life over the last ten years. But Didima is also the site of ancient rock art from some of the earliest inhabitants of southern Africa and highlights the fact that ten years is both a very long time for those that live through it, but also a rather short period within the wider scheme of things. And Didima has been built to cater primarily for international tourists, linking this corner of South Africa to a much wider world that shapes it.

The articles in this special edition examine this landscape by opening up debates for new conceptualisations of ‘reform’, ‘transformation’ and

‘democracy’. They address variously the past and the future, the inner and the outer, the macro and the micro dimensions of education in South Africa and the wider world. They focus on all aspects of education, from childhood through to higher education, and from the intensely personal/biographical to the systemic. Thus, while this edition cannot provide a comprehensive review of the past decade, nor fully explore the trajectories into the future, it does capture, much like the road to Didima, the contrasts, contradictions, challenges and beauty of both the past and the future in South Africa.

The first paper is by **Nelly P. Stromquist** who delivered the keynote address at the conference. Stromquist provides a wider context within which the reflections on South Africa need to be located. Her focus on globalization and gender reminds us that, in reflecting on the first decade of democracy, we need to avoid the trap of assuming South African exceptionalism and focusing solely on race. This is a challenge that a number of authors have addressed through use of comparative data. Stromquist presents a cross-national analysis of the state of gender in education in the context of wider globalizing processes. She argues that the two concepts must be examined together in order to understand contemporary society – globalization processes shape the social world, and gender underpins most social relations. She provides an overview of different forms of globalization and then proceeds to examine how these affect education and gender. Her conclusions are not encouraging – the increasing marketisation of education is excluding the most marginal (people all over the world not unlike the rural poor around Didima). But she does point strongly to the role of the organic intellectual, non-governmental organizations and adult education as key sites for contestation of these trends.

This links directly to the second paper by **Astrid von Kotze** which reflects on the place and space of university adult education over the past two decades. Adult and non-formal education movements have had clear linkages with social movements and civil society more generally. Their space on the margins of universities has provided the opportunity for precisely the kinds of activities that Stromquist sees as holding potential for change. However, university adult education is subject to the same globalization pressures that have already been identified, and there is an increasing shift towards vocationalism and market values in much of their work. Von Kotze argues that adult and popular education is in danger of becoming divorced from the purpose and alliance that gave it meaning in the past. However, she argues that there are ways in which it can remain wedded to broader social justice agendas, and key amongst these is a commitment to activism within the academy.

**Piet Naude and Elize Naude** begin, like Stromquist and Von Kotze, with a focus on globalization. Unlike Stromquist, who distinguishes between technological and economic forms of globalization and focuses on the latter, Naude and Naude are interested in globalization as a powerful cultural force. They are concerned with the homogenizing force of globalization, and the violence this does to local specific identities. Naude and Naude's focus is also on higher education, and how this has become reshaped by the forces of globalization in ways that contribute to the homogenization, and thus is a player in the cultural injustice of 'forcing people to surrender the taken for granted'. Naude and Naude believe, with Von Kotze, that there are sufficient spaces for contestation, and they conclude with strategies for incorporating into the curriculum mechanisms for affirming local identities.

**Hasina Ebrahim and Nithi Muthukrishna's** article draw on their research with children under four in two early childhood centres in KwaZulu-Natal. They signpost four sense making moves – the complexities of researching children as social actors, the potential of participatory techniques for researching children's knowledge, the tensions inherent in the altering of power relations between researcher and children and the challenges of working through situated ethics. As a way of transforming the landscape of research with young children they suggest the need for the practice of responsive research where multiple sense making moves are adopted in order to engage with the complex circumstances that shape young children's lives.

The next two papers focus in on classroom research and on pedagogy and learning more particularly. This is a critical area of research that has been desperately underdeveloped within South Africa over the past decades, where policy and critique have dominated. But these papers each open up possibilities for further research and question existing practice in our classrooms. **Cheryl Reeves and Johan Muller** focus in on the mathematics classroom, but they are asking a bigger question, namely whether pedagogic style or opportunity-to-learn (OTL) make the real difference? OTL is understood as the degree of overlap between the content of instruction and that tested, and has been shown in a number of cross-national studies to be the only significant variable in predicting performance. It is thus an issue of considerable importance in a country where curricular reform has often focused on pedagogic style. Reeves and Muller discuss the methodological challenges of researching OTL, and argue that it is possible to develop instruments that capture the dimensions of OTL, namely 'content coverage', 'content emphasis' and 'curricular pacing'. The paper then proceeds to

illustrate the usefulness of this framework through analysis of data from Grade 5 and 6 classrooms, and even this preliminary analysis yields results that suggest that the curriculum support given to teachers needs a far greater emphasis on pacing than is currently the case. Reeves and Muller provide an implicit challenge to the research community to focus more on the stuff of education, the teaching and learning.

The second paper that focuses on pedagogy and classroom issues is **David Rose**'s contribution. Like Reeves and Muller, Rose believes that the key challenge does not lie in changing pedagogic styles (learner centred vs teacher centred) but rather with the learners' capacity to engage with texts. He reports on a methodology, developed in Australia, which rapidly improves reading and writing for educational access. The model draws on Vygotsky, Halliday and Bernstein, and demonstrates the importance of theoretically informed practice. Borrowing policy or practice from other contexts is both widespread and often problematic, but Rose's work clearly addresses one of the greatest hurdles to access and success and thus deserves serious interrogation.

Moving away from the stuff of classrooms, **Kai Horsthemke** uses recent calls for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on education in South Africa as a basis for a critique of much of the communalist emphasis in the literature on reconciliation. The TRC was a significant feature of the first decade of democracy and arguably led the process of confronting the past, but in this paper it is problematised rather than celebrated. Horsthemke argues that a TRC on education is dependent on it being linked to concepts such as ubuntu, communalism and the common good. He examines each of these 'partner concepts', and finds them wanting. Instead, he argues for a rights-based approach as the only way in which individuals can be safe-guarded, and thus proposes that this should be the backbone of redress and reconciliation. Horsthemke's approach is potentially controversial in a country where group identity remains a dominant frame for viewing the social world. It thus opens up spaces for dialogue (not least with other contributors) that signal an increasingly mature democracy.

The argument for the defense of individual rights over the collective is further developed in the next article. In her contribution, *In defence of minimalism: beyond a robust approach to citizenship education*, **Veerle Dieltens** argues the need for citizen education that takes seriously the development of individuality, while at the same time contributing to the democratic project that seeks the common good. Dieltens challenges the maximal account of

citizenship and argues that it is in an education towards a minimalist citizenship that offers a way of achieving both these educational objectives.

Two papers in this edition draw on personal narrative accounts, albeit in very different ways, that explore transformational possibilities. **Alette Delpont** opens up the area of personal history that has generally been bypassed in the study of change of South African society. She uses Nussbaum's cognitive elements of emotions to examine the process of transformation of the inner, personal self within the context of a changing South African landscape. Her use of Nussbaum's assertions on emotion is perhaps necessary, as it pulls her away from a narrowly South African reading of the narrative. In contrast, **Yusuf Waghid** draws on a narrative account of his teaching and learning, to explore how education, imagination and forgiveness can be reconciled. Drawing on Hannah Arendt and Maxine Greene, Waghid argues that imaginative action in teaching and learning encounters in university classrooms not only prompts in people an awareness of the multiple voices and perspectives of others, but also urges them to focus on others' multiple realities and searching for possibilities of social justice and forgiveness.

Overall, the articles in this special edition collectively do flag the key issues of the past decade, and implicitly set out an educational agenda that is both a call to arms (to fight the damaging dimensions of globalization and discrimination), a call to work (to deepen the research that can examine the past, present and future), and a call to teach (literacy, numeracy, values). Like the road to Didima, education over the past decade has twisted and turned, and passed through a landscape that has the best and worst of this country. The challenge for the future is the harnessing of the ideas from the conference in ways that ultimately make a difference to lives of the people that live along that road. Hopefully this special issue of the journal can be a small part in that process.

---

Dennis Francis  
Volker Wedekind

[francisd2@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:francisd2@ukzn.ac.za)  
[wedekind@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:wedekind@ukzn.ac.za)