

# International Journal of Educational Development in Africa

Vol 1 • No 1 • April 2014

ISSN 2312-3540

---

## CONTENTS

### Editorial

*Vusumuzi Mncube and Clive Harber* ..... 1

### Articles

Language of instruction in Africa – The most important and least appreciated issue

*Birgit Brock-Utne* ..... 4

Reconceptualising the role of narrative in education and development in Africa: Lessons from the field

*David Stephens* ..... 19

Educational leadership: The audience creates the text

*Michael Samuel* ..... 31

Modernisation theory, prismatic society and educational decentralisation in Uganda

*Clive Harber and Dan Emmanuel Oryema* ..... 46

Democratic school governance, leadership and management: A case study of two schools in South Africa

*Vusi Mncube, Lynn Davies and Renuka Naidoo* ..... 59

Towards culturally contextualised pedagogies in African schools

*Michele Schweisfurth* ..... 79

Examining servant leadership in effective school governance

*Hester Nienaber* ..... 88

Human capital theory and educational policy strategies in sub-Saharan Africa: A retrospective overview

*Moses Oketch* ..... 96



We are pleased to be able to introduce the *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa* (IJEDA), a new journal focusing on the role of education in the social, economic and political development of African societies. Here we want to thank the national and international editors as well as the authors who have contributed for helping to produce the first edition of the journal and Unisa Press for agreeing to publish the journal.

In the second edition of the journal we shall be publishing an editorial essay, which discusses in more detail how we understand ‘development’ and its relationships with education. Here we want to state briefly what the journal means by ‘Africa’. Defining ‘Africa’ is always difficult and fraught with controversy given that it is a huge and diverse continent. However, as Ferguson (2006: Introduction) argues, in terms of both international discourses and perceptions discourses and perception within Africa itself, Africa as an entity has a meaningful existence and that even though this may be artificial in many ways, it is nevertheless ‘powerfully real’ (2006: 6). In terms of the geographical scope of the journal, Africa is seen in terms of the entire continent from north to south, including attendant islands such as Madagascar and Mauritius. Undoubtedly there have been certain continent-wide, though not necessarily universal, patterns such as colonialism, independence, the influence of world religions such as Christianity and Islam, authoritarian governments and transitions to democracy and the economic issues of structural adjustment. But perhaps the main coherent feature of Africa of relevance here is that (with the possible exception of Libya), all African countries are seen by the United Nations as ‘developing’ in some way. In the 2013 Human Development Index all sub-Saharan African countries were in the medium and low human development category with Botswana the highest at 119 out of 186, and 18 of the bottom twenty being in sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of north Africa, Libya was 64<sup>th</sup>, Algeria was 93<sup>rd</sup>, Tunisia 94<sup>th</sup>, Egypt 112<sup>th</sup> and Morocco 130<sup>th</sup> out of 186 (UNDP 2013).

The journal wishes to encourage submissions of articles on education in Africa. These could be on education in individual African countries or articles that compare across African countries. We especially encourage authors to write articles on individual African countries, giving a wider African context in the introduction or literature review where possible. As South Africa already has a thriving culture of journals that focuses specifically on education in South Africa, we would strongly encourage writers on education in South Africa either to set their articles firmly in a wider African context or to compare education locally with another African country or countries. While preference will be given to such articles, we will also publish articles purely on South Africa, not exceeding two per edition.

The journal consists of articles that have been peer reviewed, amended where necessary and published.

Major themes to emerge from this first volume of the journal are those of the quality, culture and context of education in Africa.

Brock-Utne in her article makes the salient point that quality in classrooms depends very much on the language of instruction – if children cannot understand, or can only partially understand, the medium of instruction then learning quality will be low. All too often in African education systems, she argues, the language of instruction from quite an early age is the ex-colonial language rather than the indigenous languages. Many children have difficulty with this, which harms classroom teaching and learning.

Stephens emphasises the need to foreground the importance of culture and context in studying education in Africa. He says in his article on using narrative and life histories to help to understand education in Ghana and South Africa that ‘If education research is about “what” happens to people it is also concerned with “where” that happens in terms of place, setting and context’.

Samuel is concerned with the theme of quality in examining how educational leadership styles that could enhance school quality are often ignored in practice by educationalists in South Africa and Mauritius in favour of hegemonic styles based on more narrow concerns of performativity and measurable outcomes.

Harber and Oryema in their study of the ‘prismatic’ cultural context of educational decentralisation in Uganda provide further evidence of the barriers that national and international educational policy initiatives can face at the local level in Africa.

In recent years many educational practitioners have become increasingly concerned with democracy as an important goal for education. Mncube, Davies and Naidoo examine both the positive role of school governing bodies as a tool for promoting democracy in two schools in South Africa and their current limitations.

Schweisfurth examines the difficulty of implementing good quality, learner-centred education in African schools given that such ‘travelling policies’ face a range of traditional, colonial and contemporary (contextual and resource) factors that are resistant to them. She calls for more realistic, culturally contextual approaches to learner-centred pedagogy in Africa in order to increase the chances of success.

Nienaber examines the role of educational institutions in relation to quality, focusing on school leadership in South Africa in particular. She raises issues of whether the school governance structures in South Africa are too complex and whether training for them could be improved to put more emphasis on ‘servant leadership’ to greater empower those involved in school governance.

Oketch examines the history of human capital theory and its different manifestations from the 1960s to the present day, focusing on its influence on education policy in Africa and its gradual movement away from purely economic or labour market concerns.

Ultimately, quality has to be judged on what education is trying to achieve. A good quality education is one that achieves what it sets out to do. Despite the many different possible goals for education, in the eyes of many parents and learners the definition of a quality education is whether or not it leads to employment.

*Vusi Mncube and Clive Harber*

## REFERENCES

Ferguson, J. 2006. *Global shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order*. Durham: Duke University Press.

UNDP. 2013. *Human development report*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

# LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN AFRICA – THE MOST IMPORTANT AND LEAST APPRECIATED ISSUE

**Birgit Brock-Utne**  
University of Oslo  
birgit.brock-utne@iped.uio.no

## ABSTRACT

This article deals with the language of instruction, also called ‘the least appreciated of all the major educational problems’. It shows how little attention is paid to this issue in donor policies as well as in the recent ‘World Bank education strategy 2020’. Donors to education in Africa seem to focus on learning outcomes but they do not see that in order to improve learning outcomes, a key focus must be on support to the development and use of the most appropriate language of instruction and literacy from the learner’s perspective. The article discusses the ‘quality’ of education and the point is made that quality of education cannot be separated from the important question of which language should be used for education. Retaining the former colonial languages as languages of instruction may serve a small elite but works to the disadvantage of the majority of Africans. The language of instruction is a powerful mechanism for social stratification, increasing inequalities. Towards the end of the article the myth of the many languages in Africa is discussed.

Keywords: language of instruction, multilingualism, quality of education, learning outcomes, donor policies, increasing inequalities

## THE MAJOR LEARNING PROBLEM IN AFRICA

There seems to be general agreement that children learn better when they understand what the teacher is saying. In Africa this is not the case. Instruction is given in a foreign language, while children and teachers alike speak African languages. The foreign language, in most countries the language of the former colonial master, and in Africa often called the ‘national’ language, is a language neither pupils nor teachers master well and do not normally speak outside school.

In 1980 Pai Obanya, who was then the director of the Unesco office in west Africa, Breda in Senegal, noted that:

It has always been felt by African educationists that the African child’s major learning problem is linguistic. Instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in his immediate environment, a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands and uses well enough (Obanya 1980: 88).

Obanya is using an educational argument. He is concerned with facilitating learning, with communication between teacher and pupils. If the African child’s major learning

difficulty really is a linguistic problem, and I tend to agree with Obanya that it is, then all the attention of African policy makers and aid from Western donors should be devoted to a strengthening of the African languages as languages of instruction, especially in basic education. The concept 'education for all' becomes a completely empty concept if the linguistic environment of the basic learners is not taken into account.

In 1982 the Ministers of Education in Africa met in Harare in Zimbabwe to discuss the use of African languages as languages of education. They stressed that

there is an urgent and pressing need for the use of African languages as languages of education. The urgency arises when one considers the total commitment of the states to development. Development in this respect consists of the development of national unity; cultural development; and economic and social development. Cultural development is basic to the other two .... Language is a living instrument of culture, so that, from this point of view, language development is paramount. But language is also an instrument of communication, in fact the only complete and the most important instrument as such. Language usage therefore is of paramount importance also for social and economic development (ED-82: 111).

As we see here, the Ministers are not only concerned about retaining African languages in order to preserve culture, but they are also using educational arguments. Language is more than culture.

Having English (in the so-called Anglophone), French (in the so-called Francophone) or Portuguese (in the so-called Lusophone countries) as the language of instruction does not promote understanding of what is learnt in the majority of schools in Africa. As Ayo Bamgbose (2005: 255) correctly observed:

Outside Africa, no one questions why the languages of countries with smaller populations in Europe should be used as a medium, even up to and including the university level. What seems to be lacking in many African countries is the political will to break away from the colonial policy and practice of limiting mother tongue education to lower primary classes. Where such a will exists, much can be done in a short period of time.

## THE LEAST APPRECIATED OF ALL THE MAJOR EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

Reflecting on the World Crisis in Education, in the 1980s, Phillip Coombs (1985: 256) contended:

The issue of what language or languages to adopt as the medium of instruction at successive levels of education is one of the pedagogically most difficult and politically explosive political issues faced by schools in a great many countries. Paradoxically, however, the choice of language of instruction is also one of the least appreciated of all the major educational problems that come before international forums.

This least appreciated problem is neither taken seriously in the new World Bank strategy that is supposed to move the international discussion from ‘Education for All’ to ‘Learning for All’, nor in the preparation for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Neither is the biggest educational problem in Africa taken seriously in the 2014 Global Monitoring Report. The international discussion on education, spearheaded by the donors (who now like to call themselves ‘development partners’) has moved from a great concern about access to schooling to a concern about quality. But this quality discussion lacks a language component. How can any education be of quality when teachers and pupils have difficulties communicating?

## FROM ‘EDUCATION FOR ALL’ TO ‘LEARNING FOR ALL’

In 2011 the World Bank (2011) released its Education Strategy 2020 called ‘Learning for all: Investing in people’s knowledge and skills to promote development’. One would think that the move from Education for All to Learning for All would signify a move from the teacher, the educator to the pupil, the learner. I had expected that this change in phraseology would also lead to an analysis of why so many students, especially in sub-Saharan Africa drop out of school, repeat grades or sit year after year hardly learning anything. The World Bank group also admitted: ‘What matters for growth is not the years that students spend in school but what they learn’ (World Bank 2011: 2).

In the new strategy the World Bank notes that for many students more schooling has not resulted in more knowledge and skills necessary for job creation. According to the World Bank group:

Several studies illustrate the seriousness of the learning challenge. More than 30 per-cent of Malian youths aged 15–19 years who completed six years of schooling could not read a simple sentence; the same was true of more than 50 per-cent of Kenyan youths (World Bank 2011: 6–7).

The first thing I asked myself when I read this sentence was: In whose language could the youth not read a simple sentence? In their own language or a language foreign to them, a language that they hardly hear around them. In an article on illiteracy in Sierra Leone, Kingsley Banya (1993) wrote:

Only about 25% of the country’s population were (in 1961) literate in English, which is the official language. However, most people are literate in Krio, which is the lingua franca of the country ... in absolute numbers there has been a tremendous expansion in the number of illiterates. As the population has increased, the number of literate people has not kept pace; 85 out of every 100 Sierra Leones are now illiterate (Banya 1993: 163).

Banya classified as illiterate those Sierra Leoneans who cannot write and read English even though they may read and write Krio, the lingua franca of their country! If a native



Englishman who reads and writes English, but not any other language, were likewise classified as illiterate, there would be many illiterates in the English-speaking world.

## ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN AFRICA

Millennium Development Goal 2 (MDG2) requires the world to ‘Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling’. In 2010, 61 million children of primary school age were out of school. More than half of them (33 million) were in sub-Saharan Africa. In whose language were these children required to learn? With more children completing primary education, the demand for secondary education is growing. African children speak African languages while instruction is given in an exogenous language. How is it possible to give quality education for all in a language mastered by few?

A re-visioning of education and development for the post-2015 period would mean outlining a policy where languages that children master comfortably are made the languages of instruction. This problem has not been tackled by the international community. Africans are multilingual in African languages and it would be possible almost everywhere in Africa to use the bigger cross-border languages as languages of instruction up to the highest level of schooling.

In order to investigate the best ways forward for the European Union (EU) in supporting the education sector, the European Commission (EC) commissioned a study on donor policies, practices and investment priorities in education (Mercer 2013a). The study relied on a mixed set of methods, including a review of about 160 documents and articles, data analysis and some complementary semi-structured interviews. It examined the overall development policy or strategy documents of 18 OECD DAC countries, three multilateral agencies and Unicef and their education policy documents that deal with the sector as a whole from early childhood education and development through to higher education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and, in some cases, non-formal education. The period covered was mainly from 2005 to 2012, although some reference was made to earlier policies and strategies. For the discussion of investment priorities, all OECD-DAC countries were included and a comparison was made between data from 2002–2003 and 2009–2010. Data from the OECD DAC database was used as adjusted by the Unesco Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) team in preparation for the GMR 2012.

## PRIORITY TO AFRICA

Donors have at several high level events, such as the UN MDG summits and the Gleneagles G8 meetings, manifested their commitment to achieving the MDGs in Africa by giving priority to the region in the allocation of aid resources (Mercer 2013a). In June 2005, the member states of the European Union agreed to double aid between

2004 and 2010, and allocate half of the increase to Africa. The commitment to Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, was re-confirmed in 13 of the 22 development policies under review, with seven donor governments stipulating that Africa should receive the highest priority in development cooperation.

## EDUCATION AS A PRIORITY

For 17 of the 22 donors making up this study, education was highlighted as an important area for development cooperation. In 12 cases the word ‘priority’ or the phrase ‘key sector’ was used when education and training were considered a priority. Some donors are more specific about the importance of education within their overall development policy. For example, as a core element of refocusing its development policy, Germany stated that it will be ‘combating the causes of poverty by investing in education, economic development, crisis prevention and health’ (BMZ 2011). In the UK, ‘changing children’s lives through learning’, alongside specific targets, is specified as one of eight main areas of DFID’s work (DFID 2011). Similarly, the Asian Development Bank has set out to refocus its operations into five core specializations, one of which is education (AsDB 2008).

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Mercer (2013a: 8) noted that there is a sense of urgency regarding the low quality of education in developing countries with all donors stressing the need for quality improvements and giving extensive attention to the topic. There appears at the same time to be great awareness of the complexity of the issues involved. Improving the quality of education lies at the heart of DFID’s education strategy (DFID 2010) in the conviction that improved cognitive skills for more children combined with an appropriate number of years of schooling can contribute towards an annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) and that improving the learning outcomes of poor performers in school helps to reduce income inequality.

He found by analysing the many donor policies on educational quality that no strategies mention the crucial matter of which language children learn best in. He concluded:

To improve learning outcomes, therefore, a key focus must be on support to the development and use of the most appropriate language of instruction and literacy from the learner’s perspective. Allied to that could be a strategy to support the well qualified teaching of foreign languages in school (Mercer 2013a: 8/9).

The best way to improve the learning outcomes of poor performers in school would be to have them learn in the language they know best and normally speak. It is a sad finding that none of donor policies on educational quality discusses this most important and least appreciated educational challenge.

On the 23rd of May 2013, the European Union hosted a high-level international conference to discuss the global opportunities and challenges in education and development (European Commission 2013). Speakers at the conference called for a stronger global movement to push for progress in getting children in to school and giving them the opportunity to learn. They noted that education should be at the centre of a global development agenda ‘because of the contribution it makes to many development areas, including employment, health, environmental sustainability, peace building and food security. Education also contributes to broader democratic governance and citizenship’ (European Commission 2013: 3).

If the international community is really serious about reducing the multiple barriers to access for marginalized communities and improving the quality of education so that children are learning when in school, it is important to look at the language children are learning in. There can be no democratic governance if important papers and laws are written in a language citizens do not master well, speeches and political messages given in languages people do not normally speak.

## THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION

In 2000 the National Council for Kiswahili, BAKITA, organized a two-day conference on the language of instruction and quality of education in Tanzania. Martha Qorro, at that time the Head of Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at the University of Dar es Salaam, and with a doctorate in the teaching of English, was present at that conference. On the second day of the conference the Minister responsible for Education, a professor of science by profession, was invited to give some closing remarks. Qorro reported that his final comment on the issue of language of instruction was that the Government did not have money to do experiments and ‘waste’ the few resources on the language of instruction. ‘The little money that is available will be spent on improving the quality of education and not on the language of instruction,’ he concluded, and declared that the conference was closed. From the Minister’s remarks, one gathers that the language of instruction is seen as separate from the process of delivering quality education. The Minister even considered spending funds on the language of instruction as a waste of resources. Some of those who participated in the heated discussion were left with questions unanswered. Martha Qorro (2009:60) asked:

For example, did the Minister understand the meaning of language of instruction? How does the language of instruction relate to education, and quality education for that matter? Is it possible to improve the quality of education without addressing the issue of language of instruction? If, for example, the conference had been on electrification of a number of schools, would the Minister have said that there was no money to “waste” on copper wires and that the little money available would be spent on supplying electricity to the schools! How else is the electrification process to take place if not through copper wires? Or, suppose the issue under discussion had been supplying water to the schools,

would the Minister have said that there was no money for pipes and that the little money available would be spent on supplying water to the schools, but no money to “waste” on pipes!

The language of instruction is the vehicle through which knowledge is transmitted. When discussing the language of instruction issue in Africa, one often hears that it would be too costly for the African countries to switch the language of instruction from an ex-colonial and foreign language into a familiar African language that the child masters well. One hears arguments such as books have to be developed and published, new terminology created. Sometimes these arguments do not hold water. In Tanzania, for instance, a project based at the Institute for Kiswahili Research has developed textbooks for the whole of the secondary school system (Mulokozi *et al.* 2008). Here there is only a matter of getting them published in large enough quantities and distributed to the schools. With the new desktop printing facilities, books and teaching materials in local languages can be produced rather cheaply (Heugh 2006; Kosonen 2010).

There are, however, other economic consequences of this choice that are under-researched. These are the costs involved in having children sit year after year in school, hardly learning any subject matter but learning that they are less capable, having to repeat classes, dropping out of school, getting low grades because they simply do not master the language of instruction. Parents are spending lots of money on school fees, school uniforms, transport costs and might have needed their children at home to do useful chores. Having the foreign, though often termed official language as the language of instruction prevents the students from really grasping the subject matter the teacher wants to convey, from developing their own language and from learning the foreign language. They lose out on three fronts. Together with a young economist from Zimbabwe, I once worked on a research proposal to investigate the cost of not using a familiar African language, often termed a national language as the medium of instruction (Brock-Utne and Nota 2010).

## WHEN THE MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL QUESTION IS OVERLOOKED

There is little doubt that the systematic but frequently ignored differences between the language and culture of the school and the language and culture of the learner's community have often resulted in educational programmes with only marginal success at teaching anything except self-depreciation (Okonkwo 1983: 377).

The Nigerian sociolinguist Okonkwo (1983) is concerned about the fact that both the language and the culture of the school are foreign to the African child. He is concerned with the simultaneous learnings going on in classrooms where the pupils do not understand what the teacher is trying to teach them. One always learns something in an educational situation but it may not be what the teacher had planned as intended

learning outcomes. In a classroom where children do not understand what the teacher is saying, they learn that they are stupid, that school learning is nothing for them, that they should stop dreaming of higher education but be satisfied with their place in life. The ‘education for all’ strategy formulated at the important educational conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, was meant to target the poor (Brock-Utne 2000; Brock-Utne 2005a; Brock-Utne 2005b). In an article on ‘education for all: policy lessons from high-achieving countries’, Santosh Mehrotra (1998:479) draws our attention to what he sees as the most important characteristic of those developing countries that really target the poor and have the highest percentage of the population with a completed basic education: ‘The experience of the high-achievers has been unequivocal: the mother tongue was used as the medium of instruction at the primary level in all cases.’

Yet in the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar there was, according to Dutcher (2004), no mention of the language issue in the plenary sessions of the conference. There is also little consideration of the language issue in the resulting documents from the Forum. There is limited reference in official documents to the fact that millions of children are entering school without knowing the language of instruction. Many of these children are in Africa. The only type of formal schooling available to these children is in a language they neither speak nor understand. Nadine Dutcher (2004:8) said:

It is shocking that the international dialogue on Education for All has not confronted the problems children face when they enter school not understanding the medium of instruction, when they are expected to learn a new language at the same time as they are learning in and through the new language. The basic problem is that children cannot understand what the teacher is saying! We believe that if international planners had faced these issues on a global scale, there would have been progress to report. However, instead of making changes that would lead to real advancement, the international community has simply repledged itself to the same goals, merely moving the target ahead from the year 2000 to 2015.

With the help of expatriate consultants, teacher guides are being worked out and teacher training courses given to have African teachers become more ‘learner-centred’, to help them activate their students and engage them in critical thinking and dialogue. Teachers are asked to abandon a teacher style where students just copy notes from the blackboard, learn their notes by heart and repeat them at tests. Little thought has been given to the fact that this teaching style might be the only one possible when neither the teacher nor the students command the language of instruction.

From a socio-political aspect, the use of African national languages in the educational process represents, for those African states making the option, a sign of political sovereignty with regard to the old colonial power, as well as an assertion of their cultural identity, denied in the past by the colonialists through the harsh relegation of African languages to the inferior status of ‘vernaculars’.

The 2014 Global Monitoring Report is called ‘Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all’ (Unesco 2014). The language that teaching and learning are going to take

place in is hardly mentioned at all. At a launch of the report in Oslo on the 3 February 2014, none of the panelists spoke about the language issue. Answering a question from the floor about the language of instruction, Asma Zubairi, research officer from the GMR team, said that the GMR 2014 mentions that there is a great need for teachers who speak minority languages. When the language of instruction is mentioned at all, it is precisely as a minority language. One paragraph has the heading, ‘Speaking a minority language can be a source of disadvantage’. Here is a quote from the text that follows:

Being born into a minority ethnic or linguistic group can seriously affect not only children’s chance of being in school, but also what they learn once there .... Language and ethnicity are deeply intertwined. While the language a child speaks at home is often a crucial element of personal identity and group attachment, language can be a potent source of disadvantage at school because in many countries children are taught and take tests in languages they do not speak at home. Their parents may also lack literacy skills or familiarity with official languages used in school (Unesco 2014: 198).

In Africa this situation does not concern minority languages only. It concerns also majority languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Amharic, Oromo, Fula, Akan and Shona spoken by millions of people. The minority languages in Africa are English, French and Portuguese. These languages are spoken at home only by a tiny minority. More than 100 million people in Africa speak Kiswahili. Yet Kiswahili is not the language of instruction in any secondary school.

## RISING INEQUITY

The May 2013 Report of the High Level Panel, established by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015 (United Nations 2013) underscored that rising inequity is a growing worldwide concern. The report deals with all of the millennium goals, notes to what extent they have been achieved and outlines what still has to be done. The high level panel claims that education planners have to look beyond counting the number of children sitting in classrooms and start to focus on learning. They refer to a study of 28 countries in Africa that found that more than one out of every three pupils (23 million primary school children) could not read or do basic maths after multiple years of schooling. No mention is made of the language in which the children could not read or do basic mathematics. It is most likely a foreign language, a language children do not normally speak or hear around them. The language of instruction is a powerful mechanism for social stratification, increasing inequalities (Brock-Utne 2012a).

Watkins (2013) writes about the impoverished teaching going on in African classrooms, taking Sokoto in Nigeria as an example where the children will be on the receiving end of a monotone recitation geared towards rote learning. Not that there is much learning going on. One recent survey found that 80 per cent of Sokoto’s Grade 3 pupils cannot read a single word. They have gone through three years of zero value-



added schooling.

Watkins does not make any mention of the language in which the pupils cannot read a single word. Ayo Bamgbose (2005) has shown that pupils who were allowed to study in their native language, Yoruba, did better in all subjects, including English, than those pupils who were forced to study through English, a foreign language for the majority of Africans in so-called Anglophone Africa.

When development partners are writing and talking about equity and not tackling the language of instruction issue, they are not going to the bottom of the educational problem in Africa. Unesco and Unicef (2013: 794), writing on the post-2015 development agenda, note: ‘Inequality remains a big challenge, and poverty and exclusion the major markers of disadvantage.’

Using a foreign language as the language of instruction is creating greater inequality, exclusion and social division (Brock-Utne 2012a; 2012b). The children of the elite will survive in a system where the former colonial languages are used as the languages of instruction because their parents can afford private tutoring, expensive private schools, the purchase of books and DVDs, trips to countries with native speakers of these languages. The children of poorer parents will not get these opportunities.

Unesco and Unicef (2013: 794) write about the ‘inadequate focus on teachers, who are the key agents for quality education’. In an evaluation of a quality education project in Zambia and Zimbabwe, a team of researchers (Brock-Utne *et al.* 2014) found that teachers who had been trained in action research and reflective teaching did not beat pupils any more. They gave more individual help and they had a better communication with parents. Their pupils also got significantly better grades than pupils whose teachers had not got such training. Several of these trained teachers told the evaluation team that they blamed the learning difficulties children had not on the individual pupils but on the use of a foreign language as the language of instruction. ‘If I had explained in Shona instead,’ one of the teachers in Zimbabwe told the team, ‘that particular pupil would have had no problem understanding.’

In a study in Tanzania where the same teachers taught the same topic to different secondary school classes, one day in Kiswahili and another day in English, the research team found that teachers punished the pupils only when they taught in English, never when they taught in Kiswahili (Vuzo 2007, Mwinsheikhe 2007; Brock-Utne 2007). When this was pointed out to the teachers, they were surprised. They had not been aware of this fact.

## LANGUAGES IN AFRICA

There is not a single secondary school or university in sub-Saharan Africa where the language of instruction is an African language, with the exception of the use of Afrikaans in some universities in South Africa. But Africa is not Anglophone, Francophone or Lusophone. Africa is Afrophone. Africans speak African languages (Prah 2009a; 2009b). In the so-called francophone countries, only about 5 per cent of the population speak

French well, in the so-called Anglophone countries about 5 per cent master English well (Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009). One often hears that there are so many languages in Africa. It is difficult to choose one or a few to use in higher education. We shall return to this argument.

The debates in parliament in Tanzania are conducted in Kiswahili. Most of the newspapers in Tanzania, especially the interesting ones, are written in that language. Yet, the language of instruction in secondary schools as well as in higher education institutions is English, the language of the former colonial power of Tanzania. This has at least three grave consequences, consequences the European countries using more and more English in higher education, also need to consider:

1. New intellectual terms in the language people normally speak are not created, the academic vocabulary is not developed
2. The language of instruction becomes a barrier to the access of knowledge
3. Mastering of the exogenous language stratifies society and becomes a social marker creating an elite versus a majority who cannot access that language as easily

## THE MYTH OF THE MANY LANGUAGES IN AFRICA

Most Africans speak several African languages, among them usually a regional one that could well be used as a language of instruction in higher education. Africans are multilingual in African languages (Prah and Brock-Utne 2009). A Tanzanian school inspector tells how he grew up with three different languages (Kimizi 2009). He would speak one of them with his father's clan, another and very different one with his mother's clan – they all lived in the same compound – and Kiswahili with his friends. He could not say which one was his mother-tongue or first language. Adama Ouane (2009), from Mali, the former director of the Unesco Institute of Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, also tells that he grew up with three different African languages simultaneously and, like Kimizi, cannot tell which one is his 'mother-tongue' or first language. Africans are now increasingly moving within and between countries and are as a result becoming more and more multilingual in African languages. Prah (2009a) found that in Nima, Ghana, 69% of those interviewed spoke at least four languages, 41% spoke five languages or more.

The Centre for Advanced Studies (Casas) is a Cape Town-based non-governmental organisation that promotes African languages all over the continent apart from the Arab-speaking regions. The scientific focus of Casas is linguistics. Its aim is to harmonize written forms of African languages, which, because of the heavy influence of western missionaries, have been written differently. Casas's research shows that 90% of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa could be grouped into 23 language clusters; in fact 12 to 15 such languages would suffice for 75% to 85% of the population (Prah 2005;



2009b; Brock-Utne and Mercer 2013).

If the international community were really serious in addressing the growing inequity in African education and designing quality education for all children in Africa, avoiding the language issue would not be possible. As Coombs (1985) noted, it is a politically explosive issue since it deals with a redistribution of power and learning opportunities between the elite and their children and the majority of Africans. Making larger African languages national languages and using them for communication in the mass media and for political discourse would also lessen the grip of donors on the development of Africa. This may be the reason why the question of what language should be used as the language of instruction is one of the least appreciated of all the major educational problems that come before international forums. But Africa as a continent cannot develop without the majority of its people being part of the development. No country has developed on the basis of a foreign language.

## REFERENCES

- AsDB. 2008. *Strategy 2020: Working for an Asia free of poverty. The long term strategic framework of the Asian Development Bank 2008–2020*. Mandaluyong City: Asian Development Bank.
- Bamgbose, A. 2005. Mother tongue education: Lessons from the Yoruba experience. In Brock-Utne, B. and R.K. Hopson (eds.), *Languages of instruction for African emancipation: Focus on postcolonial contexts and considerations*, 231–257. Cape Town: Casas. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota. Oxford: African Books Collective. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Banya, K. 1993. Illiteracy, colonial legacy, and education: The case of modern Sierra Leone. *Comparative Education* 29(2): 159–171.
- BMZ. 2011. *Minds for change – enhancing opportunities*. Bonn: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- Brock-Utne, B. 2000. *Whose Education for All? Recolonization of the African mind*. New York: Falmer Press (reprinted in 2006 by Africanabooks).
- Coombs, P. 1985. *World crisis in education: View from the eighties*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brock-Utne, B. 2005a). Language-in-education policies and practices in Africa with a special focus on Tanzania and South Africa – insights from research in progress. In Lin, A.M.Y. and Peter Martin (eds.), *Decolonisation, globalisation, language – in education*, 175–195. Clevedon/ Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Brock-Utne, B. 2005b. The continued battle over Kiswahili as the language of instruction in Tanzania. In Brock-Utne, B. and R.K. Hopson (eds.), *Languages of instruction for African emancipation: Focus on postcolonial contexts and considerations*, 51–88. Cape Town: CASAS and Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota.
- Brock-Utne, B. 2007. Learning through a familiar language versus learning through a foreign language: A look into some secondary school classrooms in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development* 27(5): 487–498.
- Brock-Utne, B. 2012a. Language and inequality: global challenges to education. *Compare* 42(5): 1–21.

- Brock-Utne, B. 2012b. Language policy and science: Could some African countries learn from some Asian countries? *International Review of Education* 58(4): 481–503.
- Brock-Utne, B. and I. Skattum (eds.). 2009. Languages and Education in Africa: A comparative and transdisciplinary discussion. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Brock-Utne, B. and F. Nota. 2010. The economics of language of instruction in Africa: Examples from Tanzania. Paper presented at the Africa in the Age of Globalization: Conceptions and Misconceptions Conference, October 28–30, in Ontario, Canada.
- Brock-Utne, B. and M. Mercer. 2013. Using languages that children know as the languages of instruction – a post 2015 challenge and the work of CASAS. Paper presented at the UKFIET International Conference on Education & Development Post 2015: Reflecting, Reviewing, Re-visioning. Oxford, 10–12 September, 2013.
- Brock-Utne, B., D. Banda, B. Matafwali and C. Dirwai. 2014. From blaming to reflecting. An evaluation of the Quality Education Project (QP) in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Oslo: Save the Children.
- Coombs, P. 1985. *World crisis in education: View from the eighties*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DFID. 2010. Learning for All: DFID's education strategy 2010–2015. London: Department for International Development.
- DFID. 2011. *UK aid: Changing lives, delivering results*. London: Department for International Development.
- Dutcher, N. 2004. *Expanding educational opportunity in linguistically diverse societies*. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- ED-82/MINEDAF/REF.5. 1982. The Use of African languages as Languages of Education. The 1982 Harare Meeting of Ministers of Education in Africa, 111–131.
- European Commission. 2005a. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee. EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa's development. COM(2005) 489, Brussels.
- European Commission. 2005b. The European consensus on development. 2006/C46/01, Brussels.
- European Commission (2013) EU High Level Conference on Education and Development: From Challenges to Opportunities. Conference Report. Brussels, 23 May 2013. <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/educ-conf-final-report.pdf> (accessed 8 September 2013).
- European Commission. 2013. EU High Level Conference on Education and Development: From Challenges to Opportunities. Conference Report. Brussels, 23 May 2013.
- Heugh, Kathleen. (2006.) Cost implications of the provision of mother tongue and strong bilingual models of education in Africa. In H. Alidou, A. Boly, B. Brock-Utne, Y. Satina Diallo, K. Heugh, and H. Ekkehard Wolff (eds.), *Optimizing learning and education in Africa: The language factor. A stock-taking research on mother tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa*, 138–56. Paris: Association for the Development of Education in Africa.
- Kimizi, Moshi M. 2009. From a Eurocentric to an Afrocentric perspective on language of instruction in the African context: A view from within. In Prah, K.K. and B. Brock-Utne (eds.), *Multilingualism – An African advantage. A paradigm shift in African language of instruction policies*, 195–219. Cape Town: CASAS.
- Kosonen, K. 2010. Cost-effectiveness of first language-based bilingual and multilingual education.

Paper presented at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, March 1–5, in Chicago, IL.

- Mehrotra, S. 1998. Education for All: Policy lessons from high-achieving countries. *International Review of Education* 5/6: 461–484.
- Mercer, M. 2013a. Donor policies, practices and investment priorities in support of education, and post-2015 prospects: A review. Paper presented at UKFIET Conference on Education and Development – Education and Development Post 2015: Reflecting, Reviewing, Re-visioning. Oxford, 10–12 September 2013.
- Mercer, M. 2013b. Donor policies and priorities in support of education over the past decade: Some questions for the post-2015 agenda. NORRAG NEWS.49.
- Mulokozi, M.M., Y. Rubanza, F.E.M.K. Senkoro, K.K. Kahigi, and Shani Omari. 2008. Ripoti ya warsha ya tatu ya uandishi wa vitabu vya kiada vya sekondari kwa Kiswahili iliyofanyika katika kituo cha Amabilis [Report from the third workshop on writing of textbooks for secondary schools in Kiswahili which took place in Amabilisi], Morogoro, 14–17 November 2008, TUKI/TATAKI.
- Mwinsheikhe, H.M. 2007. Overcoming the language barrier: An in-depth study of Tanzanian secondary school science teachers' and students' strategies in coping with the English/Kiswahili dilemma in the teaching/learning process. Ph.D. thesis, University of Oslo, Oslo.
- Obanya, P. 1980. Research on alternative teaching in Africa. In Yoloye, E.A. and Flechsig (eds.), *Educational research for development*, 67–112. Bonn: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung.
- Okonkwo, C. 1983. Bilingualism in education: The Nigerian experience re-examined. *Prospects* 13(3): 373–379.
- Ouane, A. 2009. My journey to and through a multilingual landscape. In Prah, K.K. and Brock-Utne, B. (eds.), *Multilingualism: A paradigm shift in African language of instruction policies*, 52–62. Cape Town: CASAS.
- Prah, K.K. 2005. Languages of instruction for education, development and African emancipation. In Brock-Utne, B and Hopson, R.K. (eds.), *Languages of instruction for African emancipation: Focus on postcolonial contexts and considerations*, 23–51. CASAS, Cape Town: CASAS; Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota; East Lansing: State University of Michigan Press.
- Prah, K.K. 2009a. A tale of two cities: Trends in multilingualism in two African cities – The cases of Nima-Accra and Katatura-Windhoek. In Prah, K.K. and Brock-Utne, B. (eds.), *Multilingualism: A paradigm shift in African language of instruction policies*, 250–275. Cape Town: CASAS.
- Prah, K.K. 2009b. Mother-tongue education in Africa for emancipation and development: Towards the intellectualisation of African languages. In Brock-Utne, B. and Ingse Skattum (eds.), *Languages and education in Africa: A comparative and transdisciplinary discussion*, 83–105. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Prah, K.K. and Brock-Utne, B. (eds.). 2009. *Multilingualism: An African advantage: A paradigm shift in African language of instruction policies*. Cape Town: CASAS.
- Qorro M. 2009. Parents' and policy-makers' insistence on foreign languages as media of education in Africa: Restricting access to quality education. In Brock-Utne, B. and Ingse Skattum (eds.), *Languages and education in Africa: A comparative and transdisciplinary discussion*, 57–82. Oxford: Symposium Books.

- United Nations. 2013. A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development. Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. New York. Retrieved from <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf> (accessed 8 September).
- Vuzo, M. 2007. Revisiting the language of instruction policy in Tanzania: A comparative study of geography classes taught in Kiswahili and English. Ph.D. thesis, University of Oslo, Oslo.
- Watkins, K. 2013. Too little access, not enough learning: Africa's twin deficit in education. This is Africa Special Report, Access +: Towards a post-MDG development agenda on education. Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/01/16-africa-learning-watkins> (accessed 8 September 2013).
- Unesco and Unicef. 2013. Envisioning education in the post-2015 development agenda: Thematic consultation on education in the post-2015 development agenda. Compare 43(5) December: 790–800.
- Unesco. 2014. *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2014*. Paris: UNESCO.
- World Bank Group. 2011. *Education strategy 2020. Learning for All: Investing in people's knowledge and skills to promote development*. Washington DC: World Bank.

# RECONCEPTUALISING THE ROLE OF NARRATIVE IN EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

**David Stephens**  
Education Research Centre  
University of Brighton  
d.stephens@brighton.ac.uk

## ABSTRACT

There has been a major 'turn' towards narrative, biographical and life history approaches in the academy over the last 30 years. But whereas some significant narrative research has been carried out in the West, such approaches are in their infancy on the African continent. This article explores narrative at three levels from the influence of Western meta narratives to the national and more personal narratives of teachers and students. Drawing on two periods of narrative field work in Ghana and South Africa, the article concludes with a discussion of three important lessons to be learnt from the field: that the relationship between 'grand' hegemonic narratives and individual life histories needs to be re-thought; that context and culture provide the hermeneutic 'glue' that provides meaning to the field narratives; and that narrative research can provide alternative sources of evidence for policymakers.

Keywords: narrative, life history, international education, sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

The European in Africa sees only part of it, usually only the continent's exterior coating, the frequently not very interesting and perhaps least important part of it. His vision glides over the surface, penetrating no depths and refusing to imagine that below everything a mystery may be hidden, and within as well. But European culture has ill prepared us for these excursions into the depths, into the spring of other worlds and other cultures – or our own, for that matter (Ryszard Kapuscinski 2001).

The aim of this article is two-fold: first, to take a theoretical excursion into reconceptualising the role of narrative in generating knowledge of Africa's educational and development landscape; and second, to reflect upon the experience of using narrative and biographical approaches to education research in two sub-Saharan African national settings.

Prepositions are important. In discussing narrative in, rather than of, education, this article will argue that narrative operates in a number of ways and at a number of levels. Narrative has been defined as

the relationship between what is being told i.e. its content, how it is being narrated i.e. its form; for whom it is intended i.e. its audience; and where it is occurring i.e. its context, bearing in mind the context may shift from the original location of the generation of the narrative to a new location where it is being read or heard (Stephens and Trahar 2012: 59–60).

Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, narrative research has been defined as ‘an umbrella term that covers a large and diverse range of approaches, the result of a rapid expansion of the area of inquiry over the past dozen years’ (Mischler 1999: xv). Broadly speaking, it is a form of qualitative research that involves the gathering of narratives – written, verbal, oral, and visual – focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide ‘insight that befits the complexity of human lives’ (Josselson 2006: 4). Narrative is therefore composed of a dialectical relationship between knowledge, or possibly what Bruner (1996) calls knowing, audience and context.

Narrative also occurs at three different epistemological and theoretical levels: first at the meta or ‘grand’ level in which fields or traditions of enquiry are defined and legitimated; second at the meso or intermediate level in which national or regional narratives are espoused and again legitimated; and finally at the micro or personal level in which individuals give a narrative account of their lives. Let us examine the three levels, first with a brief discussion of the meta hegemonic narratives that have shaped much that has occurred in African education and development over the past fifty years.

## WESTERN ‘GRAND’ NARRATIVES IN AFRICAN EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1979 the concept of the ‘grand narrative’ was coined by the father of postmodernism, Francois Lyotard. For Lyotard, these narratives are characterised as ‘totalising’ or explanatory narratives purporting to embody ‘universal essential truths’. Because of their suggested universality they also tend to delink or decontextualise knowledge and knowledge production from context or culture. These are ‘grand’ in that they seek not only to describe and explain the world but also to legitimate it. These narratives, Lyotard argues, are not ideologically neutral, but rather, as Odora Hoppers and Edward Said, suggest problematic and complex competing knowledge systems established and constantly nourished by Western hegemony.

In his thought-provoking yet controversial *Culture and imperialism* (1993), Edward Said traces the roots of imperialism in European culture to the popular literature of the 19th Century, arguing that Conrad’s *Heart of darkness* and T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven pillars of wisdom*, for example, did much to cement the idea of Africa not only as the ‘other’ in terms of Western colonial development, but also to deny it a voice in the generation and legitimation of alternative narratives and discourses.

The twin economic and educational development narratives of Africa since the Second World War can be characterised as ‘grand’ in that they not only reflect the ‘totalising’ explanations of what constitutes education or development but are also legitimated as sole narratives, brooking few if any counter-discourses. As Tiffin (1995: 98) notes:

Post-colonial counter-discourse strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of its imperially subjectified local.

Field narratives, which are ‘local’ and ‘subjective’ when analysed in relation to national and meta narratives, can, therefore, contribute to the construction and legitimation of counter development and educational discourses.

The economic development meta narrative was established shortly after the Second World War as a default reflection of the powerful nations who had emerged victorious from the conflict, convinced that global reconstruction – and what would come to be called ‘development’ – would best serve the interests of all, not least the West who would foot the bill. By presenting ‘development’ as a set of technical measures outside the realm of political debate (utilization of scientific knowledge, growth of productivity, expansion of international trade) it became possible for a liberal – and from the mid-1980s – neoliberal agenda to be advanced as the ‘only story in town’. It articulated, in other words, a set of politically neutral, technical goals to be achieved for a deserving poor. The discourse within the story: victims, modernity, the role of private capital, and a sense of linearity, espoused by Walt Rostow in *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto* (1961), is a powerful account and ‘grand’ in its claims of universality and neutrality, though it can be argued that some effort was made to provide a counter narrative at the time by African leaders such as Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah.

Vincent Tucker (1999) goes further and argues that ‘development’ has moved from being regarded as neutral and technical to a western ideology, meta narrative that has gained the status of myth. For him, the myth of development is a central myth of Western society.

Drawing upon the ideas of Gilbert Rist (1990), he says:

“Development” is not a natural process, although it has been accorded such a status in the mythology of Western beliefs. Regarded as natural it is accepted without question because it bears its own legitimization. It is rather, a set of practices and beliefs that has been woven into the fabric of Western culture and is specific to it. “Development” is not a trans-cultural concept that can claim universal validity (Tucker 1990: 2).

For Rist, despite the transfer of goods, gadgets, capital, technology, hospitals and roads, the economic policies and socioeconomic accomplishments of the West cannot



be replicated in the global South because whereas from the material point of view, everything is set to go, the ‘symbolic engine is missing’ (Rist 1990: 18). Interestingly while researching the interplay between Western modernity and traditional education in northern Nigeria in the late 1970s, I discovered a significant body of indigenous radical opinion (which I termed the young Turks) arguing for a return to a ‘pure’ form of Islam as a counter-discourse to what they saw as the ‘empty materialism’ of Western development. It is no surprise to find the emergence of groups such as Boko Haram that reject dominant development discourses but can only offer alternatives that are inarticulate and nihilistic. In many ways the education narrative is predicated on neo-liberal models of schooling, which in turn echo the familiar discourse and practices of a western-educated urban elite: instruction in a global second language, no room for indigenous knowledge, the introduction of ‘user’ fees, increased privatisation, and a distrust of state-owned public services. The flight from state to private in education has also been hastened by a toxic mix of inefficient state management, government underfunding and outdated models of schooling (Bloch 2009; Harber 2009).

Within the education narrative is nested another, the epistemological. Here it is possible to identify two distinct ways of viewing the generation of knowledge – paradigmatic and narrative knowing, each reflecting the larger meta narratives.

Paradigmatic knowing is rooted in scientific modes of thought, and represents the world through abstract propositional knowledge. Narrative knowing, by contrast, is organised through the stories that people recount about their experiences. For Bruner (1996) although both ways of knowing are essential facets of the human capacity to make sense of the world, relatively little is understood about the narrative mode (McLeod 1997). This matters because educationists and development economists in particular, in attempting to be scientific, have focused almost entirely on the generation of paradigmatic knowledge, and have, ‘dismissed narrative knowing as irrational, vague, irrelevant, and somehow not legitimate’ (McLeod 1997:26). In an earlier book (Stephens 2007), I reflected on the fact that culture and a cultural approach to education and development are treated in very much the same way because of the hegemony of positivist science, and I would suggest economics, over the disciplines in question.

But an opportunity also exists for narrative – with its universal strengths and recognition as a ‘different’ way to generate knowledge or knowing – to provide a bridge between individual stories of experience and the social meanings and ‘spring of other worlds and cultures’.

Before looking at these micro or personal narratives drawn from two sub-Saharan research settings, let us briefly survey narrative research in education at the meso or national level in Africa and discuss the role context plays in embedding those narratives.



## NARRATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATION IN AFRICA: THE STORY SO FAR

Considering the potential narrative research has for generating new knowledge about many of the enduring problems facing education across the continent, it is surprising to find only a handful of studies adopting a narrative approach. The 700-page *Routledge handbook of narrative theory* (2005), for example, includes just two pages on ‘African narratives’, and although one or two journals (for example, *Compare* 38(3) June 2008) have devoted a special issue to narrative research in international and comparative education, it is still very much in its infancy.

There are, however, a few examples of African narrative and biographical research in education. Most are small-scale studies often exploring issues of teacher identity and agency. Cross (1996) investigated the life histories of three African postgraduate students studying at her UK university; Osler (1997) has researched the career biographies of Kenyan teacher advisers; and Barratt (2006) carried out research in Tanzania that used teacher narratives to re-position her respondents as ‘thinking, feeling and doing’ human beings rather than people on the receiving end of policy or victims of a difficult environment (Barratt 2006: 123). Baxen (2008) utilised teacher narrative data to develop a hermeneutic understanding of HIV/AIDS in South Africa; and teacher identity was explored in two other South African studies, Smit and Fritz (2008) taking a symbolical interactionist perspective in their analysis of two African teacher life histories, and Graven (2012) re-examining notions of teacher identity by asking respondents to ‘re-author’ their professional life histories to allow for greater personal empowerment and agency. An exception to this body of work on teacher narratives is Robert Serpell’s (1993) anthropological study of pupil ‘life journeys’ drawn from his extensive involvement in one Zambian village. Serpell used the micro narratives of village children to critique the Western meta narratives of Piagetian psychology and Western models of development. As he says in his conclusion:

The extent to which the project of the Enlightenment is appropriated by Africans for the promotion of a genuinely developmental form of education (developmental both for the individuals and for society as a whole) will depend in large part on the extent to which the bicultural graduates of a largely alien curriculum are willing to share their critical understanding of Western culture with those of their fellow citizens (be they grandparents, parents, contemporaries or children) who have not had the opportunity to sample it in depth. Out of such a sharing could arise a radical redefinition of what constitutes a modern education, incorporating the best of both cultures, a synthesis born of egalitarian discourse (Serpell 1993: 278).

Serpell’s contribution was to provide an analysis that weaves together local and national stories with a critique of ‘grand’ narratives that have shaped development, education, and in the case of his study traditional explanations of child development.

The relationship between culture and context plays an important role in providing the hermeneutic ‘glue’ that gives wider meaning to the individual life stories. Let us look for a moment at this relationship.

To understand the important role narrative knowing can play in generating narrative knowing, it is important initially to make a conceptual distinction between a story and a narrative.

Polkinghorne (1998) suggests that narratives are ‘stories with a plot’, while my colleague, Ivor Goodson (2010), further elaborates by stating that:

Narratives are stories with an organising principle by which the contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed and articulated ... plot is important for providing the narrator with a criterion for the selection and organisation of life events Goodson (2010: 11).

When a story is told it becomes a narrative when it draws upon its context and culture for its significance both for the narrator and listener; which is one of the reasons why the life narratives of teachers and students discussed later in this article can only be meaningfully understood when analysed in relation to both the immediate context of the teacher or student and the broader contexts that are regional, national and global.

In a recent book (Stephens 2009), I have argued that despite the advances in qualitative research methodology there is still a tendency to view ‘context’ as a backdrop or background to the research enquiry, and that this background needs to be fore-grounded for any narratives to be meaningful.

Narrative meaning is to be found in the interpretations brought to the narrative both by the researcher and the researched, an interpretation that is grounded in what Dilley (1998) calls the ‘problem of context’. As he says, context is about making connections and, by implication, dis-connections that are construed as relevant to someone, to something or to a particular problem, this process, ‘yielding an explanation, a sense, an interpretation for the object so connected’ (Dilley 1998).

Paraphrasing the great philosopher, Wittgenstein, he suggests we focus less on what context ‘means’ and more on how it is ‘used’. Context can indeed be used to help frame the research problem. It can also be used in theory as well as in practice, connecting (or disconnecting) us to ideas and concepts across a range of academic and professional disciplines. Perhaps we can apply the same approach to narrative research? I would go even further and suggest that building connections in a constructivist sense between the constituent parts of the narrative is actually more useful than establishing a research question and then looking for an answer. This construction draws heavily upon hermeneutics.

The relationship of the part to the whole – or the ‘hermeneutic circle’ – is central to an understanding of the relationship of context, interpretation and narrative. Or rather what matters is that the process of interpretation occurs in context: research findings or ‘new knowledge’ being initially interpreted in the context from which they derive; the

findings then allowing for a subsequent re-interpretation of that context in the light of the analysis of the data. Interpretation and context are key players in the dramatic story unfolding during the research project. They shape not only the content of the research but, I would argue, the methodological tools used in the research process. For example, Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2011: 24), in writing about how they ‘teach’ narrative inquiry to students from all over the world, highlight how conventional Aristotelian notions of narrative genres, such as tragedy and comedy, get disturbed by participants with quite different canonical story genres. Western ideas about the centrality of self-narratives to individual lives are put in question by participants from the global South, in particular for whom more collectively framed narratives are often much more important in their research.

## STUDYING TEACHER AND STUDENT LIVES IN TWO AFRICAN CONTEXTS: REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

What follows is a discussion of two extensive periods of research fieldwork carried out in Ghana (1975–1976) and South Africa (2012) in which individual micro narratives and life histories of students and teachers were analysed in relation to the larger meta and meso narratives discussed earlier.

The two studies can be summarised thus:

### Girls and basic education: A cultural enquiry (1994–95)

(Published as Stephens, D. 1998. *Research monograph No.43*. London: Department for International Development: London)

Research was carried out in two locations in northern and southern Ghana with a view to examining the issues and experiences of 89 women teachers, head teachers, and girls in and out of school. The northern context can be characterised as mainly rural, economically poor, largely Islamic, and patrilineal; the southern richer, largely Christian, economically more prosperous, and matrilineal.

Three ‘background’ contextual domains were foregrounded: the economic, the school and the home, domains of enquiry establishing interrelated contexts within which the life stories of the female teachers and students could be meaningfully be analysed. Life stories became life histories, what Goodson calls ‘genealogies in context’ (Goodson 2013), personal accounts of ‘what happens to people’ embedded in local, national and global contexts.

Of importance too was Ghana’s national development narrative characterised by a growing export-led economy, World Bank structural adjustment policies, political stability, and efforts by the government and donor partners to improve the quality of basic education, particularly with regards to improving the access and retention rates of girls throughout the education system. The experiences revealed by the female teachers

and students were significant in a number of ways, not least the interplay between the home, school and economic domains and the larger national and global narratives.

In the domain of the home, for example, the life histories of successful women teachers and drop-out girl students revealed kinship, descent (patrilineal or matrilineal) and the extended family to be deciding factors in whether school was worthwhile. The narrative for many girls was framed around not only the 'drawing of water and the hewing of wood', but also critical turning points when a father offered financial or moral support or a particular female teacher took a young girl under her wing.

The economic domain provided the strongest evidence for the impact of structural adjustment and fiscal reform upon some of the poorest sectors of society. Reasons for dropping out included, 'I needed just my exam fee of 40 pence', 'I was sent home for paying no school fees, so my mother said stay and help me' and a belief that 'being poor' was the fault of the individual child or family.

In school it was the perennial issues of poor quality pedagogy, an outmoded curriculum little changed since colonial times and a teaching profession under-resourced and no longer respected.

An important purpose of this research, however, was not just to present the experiences of women teachers and students but to analyse the experiences for policy implications. We shall return to this relationship between narrative research and policy in discussion of the lessons to be learnt from the two research projects.

## Life-histories of two generations of teachers in the Eastern Cape, South Africa (2012)

(Published as Stephens, D. 2014. *International education and development: A narrative approach*. Routledge: London.)

This research was conducted in the spring of 2012, while the researcher was a senior visiting research fellow at Rhodes University in Grahamstown in South Africa's Eastern Cape. The aim of the research was different from the Ghanaian study in that, rather than focus upon an education policy issue such as girl drop-outs or the quality of teaching and learning, the focus was more broadly concerned with the experiences of two generations of teachers, the older who had directly experienced teaching during the apartheid years and the younger who had been schooling since 1994 and were about to enter the teaching profession.

Twenty five in-depth life history narratives were collected from both generations of teachers with participants drawn from the white, black and coloured communities. In terms of fore-grounded contexts, it soon became clear from previous research, the local newspaper archives, and from the participants themselves that geo-political and historical contexts shaped and continued to shape the experiences revealed through the life histories.

The experiences of these two groups of teachers were similar in many ways to the Ghanaian participants in the recounting of positive and negative experiences of early

family life, successes and setbacks at school – especially for black students – and the struggles and critical decisions taken in pursuing a teaching career. A characteristic of many of the life histories was the importance of a mentor, often a teacher or a colleague; a sense of determination to succeed, which was evident across all the racial groups; and for the white teachers working during the apartheid years, a slow realisation of what was actually happening across the country outside the traditional enclaves of white South African communities. For the younger teachers, schooled since 1994, the narrative on the one hand is more optimistic, with references to the ‘rainbow nation’ but becoming more hesitant when considering life in post-Mandela South Africa. Disillusionment with politics in general and the African National Congress (ANC) in particular is also a feature of the life histories of both generations.

The two approaches to narrative analysis discussed above, that is, a dissection of the field data and re-assembled thematically for policy purposes in the Ghana study, as opposed to a more holistic treatment of the evidence in the South African research, remind us of the importance of audience and purpose in the design and analysis of narrative research.

There are three major lessons to be learnt from carrying out narrative and biographical research in education in Africa.

## RECONCEPTUALISING NARRATIVE RESEARCH: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

- Re-thinking the relationship between ‘grand’ meta narratives and individual life stories

Education is about what happens to people, how they learn, and significantly how they respond to the large challenges we all face. What is striking about the education development story is the continuous predominance of a ‘grand’ narrative that seems to take little account of this, preoccupied by a macro-economic discourse in which children can still be referred to as ‘human resources’ and the justification for improvements in schooling being phrased in terms of cost-benefit analysis or economic returns on investment. Recent research into the contribution of indigenous knowledge (Breidlid 2012) and the failure of traditional development models to solve some of Africa’s enduring educational problems has, however, provided some liminal space for the development of counter-discourses.

The generation of narrative knowing through individual life histories also reveals the impact of structural forces, which are hegemonic in character, upon individuals and communities, particularly the economically poorer ones.

This impact creates deeply ethical and ideological issues around researcher positioning, interpretation and selection of evidence, power inequalities between researcher and researched (particularly if the researcher originates from the economically richer West) and the question of the authority and valorising of the narrator’s voice (Fox

2008). This raises challenges not only in the design and carrying out of narrative research in Africa but where and how the research is funded, disseminated and published.

- Fore-grounding culture and context in analyses of education in Africa

If education research is about ‘what’ happens to people it is also concerned with ‘where’ that happens in terms of place, setting and context. The life history research reported in this article is grounded in two broad sets of contexts: first the geo-cultural intersections between home, school, and the economy; and the broader ideological and political contexts that shape international education and development. These historical, global and hegemonic contexts not only impact on the development of education policy but in the case of apartheid in South Africa or structural adjustment in Ghana, for example, the day-to-day lives of teachers and students.

In fore-grounding context and culture in the research process, we are doing more than just asking for setting be given greater prominence, rather we are proposing that the kind of disaggregated positivistic research found in much of the grey literature of the development and government agencies be complemented by studies that are literally grounded in African time and place.

- Providing an alternative approach to policy-driven research

The two pieces of research discussed in this article reflect two contrasting approaches to the generation of narrative evidence. In the first – the Ghanaian study – the purpose of the study was to use life history data to provide policy directions for an enduring educational problem, namely reasons why girls did not attend or when they did, dropped out of school. The policy-driven nature of this research lent credibility to an approach that paid less attention to the analysis of holistic life histories and more to what the individual voices said about the problems and solutions for improving schooling. This was achieved by ‘pouring’ the narrative data into three inter-related domains of enquiry that seemed to frame the problem under investigation. This approach, although innovative in its use of life history as a research method, was more traditional in its focus on generating policy useful knowledge.

In the South African study, on the other hand, a decision was taken to place the individual life narratives rather than the research problem centre stage. Here narrative was approached from a methodological stance with an attempt made to generate a sense of individual and community knowing through the vehicle of individual life histories. Such knowing, I would argue, can contribute fresh understandings of how education and development is experienced and lived by two generations of people residing in a particular cultural and contextual landscape, but divided by time, ‘race’, traditions and gender. Such evidence, rich in voice and experience, particularly of the marginalised, offers policy makers an opportunity to engage with teachers and students in the search for stronger connections between decision making and schooling-as-experienced.



## CONCLUSIONS

In 2011 a number of my colleagues at the University of Brighton organised an international symposium to explore new directions in narrative research (Goodson, Loveless and Stephens 2012). At the conference a Bristol colleague and I presented a paper titled 'Just because I'm from Africa, they think I'll want to do narrative'. In the paper we articulated a number of concerns about narrative research in education, among them the possibility that narrative or life history might join the long list of research approaches and tools exported uncritically from the West to the global South. Learning from our experience of carrying out narrative research in Africa and in encouraging students from Africa to consider such approaches, we concluded that by acting ethically and mindfully, it is possible – and necessary – to create liminal spaces in which advances in research can be deliberated and the put to good use by all researchers working in education and development in Africa.

## REFERENCES

- Andrews, M., Squire, C. & Tamboukou, M. (eds.). 2011. *Doing narrative research*. London: Sage.
- Barrett, A. 2006. African teacher narratives in comparative research. In Trahar, S. (ed.), *Narrative research on learning: Comparative and international perspectives*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Baxen, J. 2008. Using narratives to develop a hermeneutic understanding of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. *Compare* 28(3): 307–321.
- Bloch, G. 2009. *The toxic mix*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Breidlid, A. 2012. *Education, indigenous knowledges, and development in the global South: Contesting knowledges for a sustainable future*. London: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. 1996. *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cross, B. 1996. *Sounding out the silences: Narratives and absences in African higher education. Occasional Paper No. 59*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Centre for African Studies.
- Dilley, R. 1998. *The problem of context*. New York; Berghahn Books.
- Fox, C. 2008. Postcolonial dilemmas in narrative research. *Compare* 38(3) June: 335–349.
- Goodson, I. 2013. *Developing narrative theory: Life histories and personal representation*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Graven, M. 2012. Changing the story: Teacher education through re-authoring their narratives. In *The Routledge international handbook of teacher and school development*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Harber, C. 2009. *Toxic schooling: How schools became worse*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.
- Herman, D. et al. 2008. *Routledge encyclopaedia of narrative theory*. London: Routledge Press.
- Josselson, R. 2006. Narrative research and the challenge of accumulating knowledge. *Narrative Inquiry* 16(1): 3–10.
- Kapuscinski, R. 2001. *The shadow of the sun*. London: Penguin.
- McLeod, J. 1997. *Narrative and psychotherapy*. London: Sage.

- Mischler, E.G. 1999. *Storylines: Craft artists' narratives of identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Odora Hoppers, C. 2002. *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems*. Cape Town: New Africa Book.
- Rostow, W. 1960. *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ostler, A. 1997. Teachers' biographies and educational development: a Kenyan case study. *International Journal of Educational Development* 17: 361–371.
- Rist, G. 1990. 'Development' as part of the modern myth: The Western socio-economic dimension of 'development'. *European Journal of Development Alternatives* 2(1): 10–21.
- Ryszard Kapuscinski. 2001. *The shadow of the sun: My African life*. Penguin: London.
- Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Said, E. 1993. *Culture and imperialism*. Knopf Random House: New York.
- Serpell, R. 1993. *The significance of schooling: Life journeys in an African society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smit, B. & Fritz, E. 2008. Understanding teacher identity from a symbolic interactionist perspective: Two ethnographic narratives. *South African Journal of Education* 28: 91–101.
- Stephens, D. & Trahar, S. 2012. 'Just because I'm from Africa, they think I'll want to do narrative'. *Explorations in narrative research*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Stephens, D. 1998. *Girls and basic education: A cultural enquiry. Serial No. 23*. London: Department for International Development.
- Stephens, D. 2009 *Qualitative research in international settings: a practical guide* London: Routledge Falmer
- Stephens, D (2007) *Culture in Education and Development: Principles, Practice and Policy* Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Stephens, D. 2014. *International education and development: A narrative approach*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Tucker, V. 1999. The myth of development: A critique of a Eurocentric discourse. In Munck, R. and O'Hearn, D. (eds.), *Critical development theory: Contributions to a new paradigm*. London: Zed Press.



# EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: THE AUDIENCE CREATES THE TEXT

**Michael Samuel**

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Samuelm@ukzn.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

Alternative conceptions of educational leadership that challenge the performativity culture do not appear substantively to alter the trajectory of practitioner's everyday choices. This article uses as data the responses from three different audiences to a presentation on such alternative conceptions. The three groups were academics attending an educational leadership conference, circuit managers as part of a post-project workshop, and a group of aspirant school rectors in a training diploma programme. The first two groups were South African and the third a Mauritian audience. The audience responses show how they subverted, re-interpreted and jettisoned the message of the presentation. Three vignettes constitute the analysis of the audiences' foregrounding of the lived complexities of making alternative leadership choices. The article suggests we need to be aware of how and why practitioners will choose or not to become alternative proponents of the dominant discourses around 'educational quality'.

Keywords: performativity, educational leadership, servant leadership, self-study research, narrative methodology

## INTRODUCTION

This article does not intend to advocate alternative conceptions of educational leadership that expands beyond a simple adherence to meeting the requirements of a performativity culture. The respected theorists of invitational leadership (Muijs and Harris 2007; Novah 2009), servant leadership (Russell and Stone 2002; Frick and Harris 2003) or distributed leadership (Davies 2009; Bush, Bell and Middlewood 2010) have already made significant strides to shift the discourse about being an educational leader. This article will explore how alternative discourses about educational leadership are comparatively heard and re-interpreted within the context of three different audiences. It questions the feasibility of alternative discourses within the dominant hegemony of educational leadership.

I was privileged to address three different audiences to deliver my interpretation of what leadership means to me. I felt fraudulent in some respects since I do not have any formal disciplinary training in the field of educational management and leadership. I chose to focus on how the agenda of leadership is understood, re-interpreted and practised among my peers above, below and alongside me. I reflected on the way

leaders select their mission, the values and their goals. What guides their selections? From where do values of moral or ethical considerations emanate, if they choose such? I have been an educational manager/leader for about the past twenty years and this was perhaps an opportunity to reflect on my personal conceptions of leadership. My intention is to explore, despite the obvious (to me) merits of alternative conceptions of educational leadership being available, how and why many of the audiences choose to re-interpret its message as an 'exotic other', sitting on the fringes of the 'real discourse' of what is the role of an educational manager or leader.

The conceptual paper I presented to these audiences draws on the studies of the inspirational leadership offered by persons such as Nelson Mandela (Kalungu-Banda 2006). In recent times political analysts have increasingly been critical of the shifts away from the goals of social justice, freedom and democracy present in the general public discourse in South Africa (Tutu 2012; Chikane 2012). We are becoming increasingly like our materialist colonial cousins who prefer conceptions of self-advancement over conceptions of service to humanity. I drew on examples of leadership as demonstrated by theorists who shift the discourse towards schools being spaces where imagination, creativity and innovation are celebrated (Robinson 2011), and where conceptions of leadership are executed not only outside, but inside the classroom (Forde 2010). I concluded the paper with examples of the student formations that have inspired me as a dean of a Faculty of Education involved in the development of prospective teachers. I presented the paper to three audiences within approximately a period of one month (July-August 2012). The first audience was of academics who research the conceptions and practices of educational leadership in the context of its association's annual international conference. The second was a group of largely circuit managers in a professional training project workshop. The group was reporting back to the Department of Education, their foreign sponsors and the university higher education designers of the curriculum of their project of capacity building. The first was in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and the second in Limpopo province in South Africa. The third audience was a group of senior teachers who were engaged in a Teachers Diploma in Education Leadership, which trained future school rectors (principals) in the context of Mauritius. The context of both national (South African) and international (Mauritian) contexts has comparative value examining the sustainability of alternative conceptions of educational leadership.

The data for this article consisted of my changing PowerPoint slides, the presenter's notes and my observation notes on the programme during the course of the three occasions. After the delivery of my presentation I wrote reflective notes on the responses to my presentation. Participants also offered oral and/or written feedback on their experiences of the presentation of the paper and the audience's reactions. Drawing on the tradition of narrative inquiry (Johnson and Golombeck 2002; Clandinin 2007; Dhunpath and Samuel 2009), I elaborated these reflective notes into narrative accounts in the form of three vignettes reflecting the subtleties of the engagement with the presentation. The analysis

of these narratives (Reismann 1993; Mischler 1995; Polkinghorne 1995; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Gee 2011) constitutes how the agenda of servant leadership, invitational leadership or distributed leadership was interpreted by the audiences. This methodology draws on self-study inquiry that points to the self as a source of epistemological development (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell and Moletsane 2009). Self-study research recognises the powerful positionality that the researcher occupies in social settings and the reflexive role of the researcher himself/herself is therefore regarded as a productive source of data and theorising. Three narratives constitute the data of this narrative self-inquiry. The analysis of the narratives (Polkinghorne 1995; Gee 2011) constitutes a form of discourse analysis reading at close level of the relationship between the text (the delivered oral paper) and the context (the audiences listening to the text).

## THE NARRATIVES: DATA FINDINGS

### Vignette 1: Be the change: Voices in an academic conference

The challenges facing education leaders are overwhelming. KwaZulu-Natal is the largest of the provinces in the country, where 9 of the 12 districts are rural. Whilst the country spends about 25% of its national budget on education, most of this resource (75%) is going to pay the personnel salary bill. We would need R75 billion alone simply to address baseline physical resource provisioning: classrooms, laboratories, libraries, toilets, running water and school security. Surely the Education Department should not be dealing with the infrastructure issues of building schools: this is the mandate of the Public Works Departments! I, as a senior head of department official of education should be concentrating on building the capacity of the teachers to enact the quality of the curriculum change for the benefit of the learners.

The speaker was strident in his challenge to the Education Management Association of South Africa conference (July 2012). “How can academia help to generate the development of a leadership in education which will take bold decisions? Please come and let us policy makers know.”

The problem is about definition: we have to understand the role of a manager, the role of a leader,” argued a strong proponent of the discipline of study of educational management and leadership.

We should critique the kind of paper-chasing qualifications (“diploma disease”) that most “want-to-be” school managers embark on. Do these qualifications add any value except to promote the expectation that being certified is adequate to being a good leader? We should think of alternative means of collaborative partnerships between industry, the department of education, schools, communities, teachers and learners –yes, and the district officers – who will assist in joined-up thinking around active research projects to enhance the quality of schooling.

The academic yielded that there were many different kinds of qualifications and it was perhaps premature to tar brush all higher education institutions as being involved in a quick-fix or an entrepreneurial agenda in aligning themselves to departmentally sponsored leadership development programmes targeting existing and prospective leaders.

Do we have enough space for many more models of educational leadership? The academic conference context that explored the phenomenon of educational leadership was rich and varied. I choose that my paper ('Leadership for, in and through education') will focus on the issue of the moral responsibility towards development of the quality of education, addressing aspects of the schooling system as a laboratory for producing conceptions of social justice, democracy and equity. How teachers conduct themselves within their classrooms and school settings produces conceptions of being educated, or to being active responsible citizens. Education is a responsibility towards greater realisation of one's capabilities, one's inner growth and offering of potential to the development of the society. Educational leadership cannot, I argued, be simply about careerism. The role models of careerism are rampant in those who seem to have betrayed the struggle. Materialism is replacing ethical, moral and social values.

This has implications for whom we chose as our role models. Most inspirational leaders offer direction to their followers. Leadership is about how one relates to others. Leadership is about being an integrated being. Leadership is about engaging in small acts of generosity and respect for one's fellow human beings. It is not about making large heroic actions that draw attention to one's self. Our research methodologies must embrace this complexity showing how leadership is not about power and control over others; it is about collaboration and support of those with whom we meet.

The listening audience responded that they did not agree with my challenge that the discipline of educational management had reached its expiry date. They argued that the discipline could engender an alternative worldview and outcome: its many theories themselves were demonstrative of this. They argued that we should not be dismissive of the career aspirations of leaders since this was an incentive for their choice to become leaders. They agreed with the need to pursue alternative conceptions of leadership. But how? Is it a conscious choice to select theoretical models of leadership? We need to be careful that we do not become simply academics who parade theories of Antonio Gramsci or Paulo Freire, or other critical theorists.

After all, it was an academic conference with all its attendant controversies, upsets and provocations. But what are the policy and practice implications?

## Vignette 2: Beyond blame: Circuit managers exercise their muscles

You have got to speak to our Circuit Managers Improvement Programme (CIP). You know the entire saga about the lack of delivery of textbooks in the Limpopo province.

You should speak to us about the moral and ethical characteristics of being an educational manager. These circuit managers are individuals who have been on a departmentally-directed programme of capacity-building supported by Irish Aid.

This invitation to address a group of department officers was appealing. The group represented the interface between the intentions of the policymakers in the Department and the ‘chalk-face’ of the schools and teachers in the classrooms. Where do these officers’ accountabilities lie: upwards to their bosses, horizontally among their peers, or downwards to the communities in which they work?

The measures of success of a Department circuit seemed already clearly circumscribed: increase the pass rates at the school exit level. These monitoring mechanisms have also filtered into the primary schooling system. The circuit managers seemed to have been framed as the scapegoat for under-development or non-performance. But do they have sufficient clout to exercise influence over the system? Are the problems beyond their control? The CIP was specifically aimed at developing competences to understand the situated contextual problems, to engage in systematic analysis, inquiry and monitoring. The six modules that they had engaged were proudly displayed on the podium on the stage of the workshop as follows: ‘Education transformation in South Africa’; ‘Data-driven circuits and districts’; ‘The roles of districts and circuits’; ‘Circuit office administration’; ‘Performance management and development systems’; and ‘Interpersonal skills, mentoring & coaching’. Present in the conference were invited members of the Departmental officials who sanctioned the roll-out of the targeted three-year programme, the funding agency representatives and the appointed service providers of non-governmental agencies who had worked collaboratively with the Department of Education (DoE) and the university to deliver the programme modules. Representatives of each of the circuits were proudly present to demonstrate through their reflections the benefits of the programme. School principals from primary and secondary schools involved in the development action projects also rendered their positive conceptions of this collaborative venture. The circuit managers summarised their innovative strategies. I contemplated this assemblage of voices and vanities as I took the platform for my address.

How will these departmental officers, school principals and about-to-be-graduated/trained circuit managers respond to my critique that the concept of management was being sidelined by a misguided sense of opportunistic, obsequious careerism? I had re-titled my presentation delivered at the academic conference ‘Amandla gawethu: Amandla gawami’ to reflect Frank Chikane’s (2012) lamentations of the hijacking of the struggle against apartheid. In his speech tracing the legacy of Nelson Mandela he suggested that we are replacing the struggle slogan ‘power to the people’ with a conception of self-absorbed power: ‘the power is mine’. The argument intended to suggest that circuit managers need to be absolutely focused on our role as brokers of quality education. It was not simply about feeding into the system false conceptions of achievement, such as manipulating the scores that our circuits offer as semblances of progress. We need to be

truthful about whether equity, democracy and social justice were being achieved for all of the learners. I again was making a case for a servant leadership, not in a capitulation to the ‘master’. I was prepared for a barrage of questions. My presentation did not go very well, I thought: the relatively silent audience throughout my presentation spoke volumes.

The first question was fired from a DoE officer: what is the difference between ‘leadership for service’ and ‘leadership for achievement’? Embedded in this critical question is the tension that our South African system is grossly under-performing; our learners are not acquiring the desired level of competences and that we should be forcefully tackling under-performance. I responded that we often may become seduced by data that suggest improvements in the system, for example the improvement in many individual school exit-leaving results. It is easy to feign ‘improvement’ or ‘achievement’. We know how to look good. But in doing so we are demonstrating hidden messages to teachers, learners and parents that it is okay to beat the system, it is okay to cheat, it is okay to manipulate the powers that be. I also acknowledged that I am increasingly concerned about those competent teachers who are seen as the victims by their own peers who attempt to pull them down if they attempt to rise above the mediocre norms. Acceptance of mediocrity is regarded as a false sense of egalitarianism. This we know as the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ where those excellent shining stars are cut down to size.

The second question I interpreted as an attack on the system of the higher education institutions (HEIs) of teacher education. Or was it another attempt to raise the debates that ‘former Colleges of Education were producing far better pragmatic and practical teachers who knew how to enact the school syllabus and were good in the classroom’? The question was ‘so what are you doing in the higher education system to produce good leadership?’ This reminded me of the repeated critique that higher education institutions are ivory-towered, disconnected from the real world of schooling. My response suggested that it was unnecessary to resort to a ‘blame culture’ since there was enough for all of us to learn from one another. The universities were not, as presumed, simply producing newly qualified graduates. They were also involved in in-service programmes, upgrading and reskilling the work force, engaged in curriculum research and policy development. We all need to embrace the shared responsibility of supporting the continuing professional development of teachers when they enter schooling after graduation. Our role as HEIs is to be autonomous knowledge producers, not just technicians of the State. How schools and HEIs dialogue with one another is important to establish a continuity of purpose and direction.

The school principals and district/circuit teams then proceeded to point to the many lessons they had learnt in completing the CIP intervention. Yes, this was a celebration, but I kept asking myself the question whether the presence of the close watchful eyes of the project co-ordinators, the dedicated service providers, the higher education institution and the departmental officials tasked with overseeing the project had all contributed to the nature of the discourse. Were this project’s outcomes sustainable beyond the shelf-



life of the project? How will the officers and leaders behave in the absence of the gaze of the evaluators of the project, the assessors of the assignments for the qualifications? One circuit team represented a cogent analysis of their definition of leadership: 'leadership is what happens when no-one is looking'.

I was impressed with the different presenters' displays of their new interest in a data-driven, evidence-driven analysis of the improvement in their schools. Many still grappled with the technological apparatus of doing a PowerPoint presentation, which I presumed was a requirement of the programme. 'I was born before technology', complained one presenter, but he persisted and conveyed a powerful message.

A repeated refrain was about the toothless circuit manager who was increasingly being laden with new responsibilities to activate change in his/her zone of jurisdiction. It was simply asking too much: too many expectations, too many demands; too expensive beyond what the DoE or the project could sustain; despite the expressed conception of devolution of authority to the district. The officers were repeatedly experiencing the directives as being driven from above. 'We lack the financial muscle to really do what we know we could do,' concluded one team. There were hints of a kind of mutiny by one speaker from the floor who received thunderous applause from the about 150-member audience. He complained that much was expected, but little support was offered financially to circuit managers to exercise their responsibility. Travelling costs alone to access the schools were prohibitive, he suggested in a veiled request for increased financial input. The ruling from the chair was most informative: she reminded the circuit managers that they were 'public servants' and that they did not have the latitude for this mobilising action against the department, least of all within an occasion such as this.

My presentation on moral accountabilities had long faded into the background.

### Vignette 3: Leaders and followers

I am tired of academics from abroad telling us what to do in the Mauritian context. We simply cannot do what they expect us to. You know the real world of Mauritius is very different from that of the outside world. Here we have to abide by the wishes of our government. We have to ensure that we follow what the policy expects us to do, even if we don't agree with what the government wants us to do. We have to follow them.

This was the lonely voice who dared to offer a critique of my presentation on servant leadership and a morally guided conception of the education system. She was the only practising secondary school rector in the group of about 50 aspirant school managers. Did her power silence the others? With only about 120 primary and 250 secondary schools in the country, being a school rector was indeed a prestigious job in an island in a population of approximately 1.2 million.

I waited for another response. Silence. Had the last speaker crossed the floor of the politeness hospitality culture afforded to visitors?

‘Do you agree with this point of view?’ I challenged. I waited.

‘You know, we do believe what you are saying is right. We know that the demands being made on the children in the schooling system are too much, but ...’

‘Mauritius wants to be a world leader. We are already producing good results when compared internationally. So we should try and maintain this.’ I read this to mean that Mauritians were better off than some other developing world countries. Was this perhaps a critique of the under-performance of South Africa in international comparability studies?

‘But is everyone achieving the quality of education achievements that you claim? Or is only a small minority of people: of a particular race, or a particular class, or from particular geographic areas achieving the high output of quality?’ I seemed to have provoked a response as there was a stir in the classroom.

The audience was Teachers Diploma in Educational Leadership (TDEL) students in a teacher upgrading programme. The presentation I had given was a guest lecture on conceptions of education leadership. I was asking them what lessons can be learnt from my examples. The title chosen by the course leader was ‘Using qualitative research methodologies in educational leadership’.

Yes we know that it is mostly the rich who can afford to give their children good education. They are really succeeding in education here in Mauritius. But what can we do? That is what the government wants us to do.

You know that this examination for primary schools is causing so many problems amongst parents here in Mauritius. Parents are stressed out because if their children don’t get 4 A’s in the examinations they will not be able to access the good secondary schools. So the parents are really pushing the children. It is not really right. But we want to see children get ahead. We want our children to succeed. Otherwise their life is over.

Can we challenge these conceptions of what the government wants? Do we want different ideas about what it means to be an educational leader in Mauritius?

It seemed that my question was rhetorical.

Yes, we would like to have different understandings about what it is to be a leader, but that is not what is valued by our authorities. So we must be what they want us to be.

Tell me, ma’am, are there examples of people whom you consider to be inspirational in your life: an aunt, an uncle, a neighbour?

I asked to provoke some dialogue about whether the conception of servant leadership or distributive leadership was indeed a foreign concept.

The respondent then explained that she knew exactly the persons who had inspired her in her life. They were indeed humble, focused on respect, dignity and were morally upright.

This was the spark that opened up further input. Yes, the concept of service as leaders was not really foreign, but it is not a valued quality of the public school system



in Mauritius. Yes, individuals themselves respected peers in leadership positions who demonstrated these admirable qualities. Yes, it was true that many Mauritian people in authority like to look down on those not in positions of power. We need to develop more respect for everyone. Yes, we can look more closely at how we relate to our peers when we organise and collaborate. Yes, we know that leadership is not about showing how much power you have. Yes, we can share power. But if we did this, we would be regarded as weak leader! We won't get promoted by the authorities.

The discussion seemed to rotate to the original position.

I had reached the length of my time allocation and the chair thanked me for opening up the debate. As I prepared to exit the room, the first speaker came up to me and said that she had been reading some article by a South African author, Jonathan Jansen, on 'Curriculum reconstruction in post-colonial Africa: A review of the literature'. I heard later that she in fact was a part-time lecturer at the Mauritius Institute of Education, lecturing on the Teacher Diploma in Educational Leadership programme. Moreover, she was the rector of one of Mauritius 'star schools'. She informed me that the group had opened the course by watching the film *Invictus* about the role Nelson Mandela played in national reconciliation through the way in which he chose to relate to the rugby sporting culture. South Africa emerged as the winners of the Rugby World Cup. How inspirational leaders can be!

Should the change come from above?

## READING THE VIGNETTES: DATA ANALYSIS

### Titles

It is noteworthy that the title of my presentation shifted in relation to the target audience. An original PowerPoint slide presentation and presenter's notes constituted the first draft outline of the structure of the paper. The intended audience was both academics and practitioners who were teachers and managers. I was keen to emphasise that I was not within the discipline of educational leadership or management, but that my years of being surrounded by the discourse as an education leader encouraged my reflections.

The first title of the paper was 'Leadership for, in and through education'. The paper was arguing that we need to examine how to prepare leaders for the education system (a training imperative), through examining what goes on inside schools (an operational practice analysis), but that through education we could be developing conceptions of leadership itself (a moral and cultural responsibility). This had the necessary ring of an academic discourse drawing on my conceptions of teacher professional development literature that sharpens our thinking about how teachers acquire a fully fledged identity as a professional. The strongly academic tone infuses this representation of a paper.

About a week later I was invited to deliver the same address at the Polokwane workshop for the development of circuit managers. The draft written paper was now constructed, but I chose to title the presentation 'Amandla Gawethu: Amandla Gawami'

followed by the original academic title. I realise now that the political overtone embedded in this title was driven by my expectation that many of the intended audience were highly charged within the climate of the political accusations confronting the provincial Department of Education at the time. Textbooks, eight months into the academic year (August) had not been delivered. Accusing fingers pointed to the sense of financial scandals association with the awarding of the tenders for delivery of the textbooks. There were suggestions that the educational leadership of the department were failing the society, the parents and the learners. I was concerned that the situation illustrated a misguided notion of what education leadership entails. My paper title hinted at restoring the quality of education systemically. The presentation was not going to lay blame on the circuit managers and I was presenting the option for them to choose to be different from the dominant outputs-driven performativity cultures. But why was I afraid of staring the elephant in the room?

The third presentation title was influenced by the purpose of the presentation within a capacity building programme. The Mauritius Institute of Education was keen to expand the repertoire of qualitative research methodologies amongst the school head teachers. Their very practical interest to produce a “research project” perhaps lay at the back of the minds of the organisers of the guest presentation. The title advertising the presentation read as follows: “Using qualitative research methodologies in education leadership”, emphasising a research-oriented tone.

## The presence of the education officials

The three presentations were conducted in the ‘presence’ of departmental officials, in varying degrees of their immediacy. Despite the KwaZulu-Natal official (Vignette 1) being the most receptive of an influence of the academic input of the conference into the world of policy, he was not able to remain throughout the deliberations of the conference, having only presided over the opening ceremonial perfunctory spaces.

The CIP workshop in Polokwane (Vignette 2) was presided over by a provincial departmental official who had many years of ‘struggle credentials’ as a teacher union activist who now led and was an acknowledged advocate of the capacity development programme for circuit managers. He remained throughout the conference, ever-present and contributing to shaping its discourse. His presence as a listener was felt markedly by the audience who saw the opportunity of the workshop to reflect back their views of their challenges. The chair interestingly interpreted her role as protective of any verbal attacks on the speakers whether they came from inside or outside the Department of Education.

The third vignette (Mauritius) did not have any physical presence of a Department official. However, this ‘absent official’ was perhaps the most present in the discourse of the participants. Perhaps the smallness of the island state produced a kind of intimacy of presence of the officials of the Department (for an analysis of the intimacy of small

islands, see Crossley, Bray and Packer 2011). The aspirant rectors were in my view silenced by the ‘presence’ of the official position about the role and identity of school rectors. There was no latitude for innovation or critique. The absent officer was the most present. The presence of an acclaimed school rector too may also have been interpreted as the phantom department officer.

It should be noted that the KwaZulu-Natal officer invited critique but was not present to hear it; the Polokwane official invited critique and stayed to hear it; and the Mauritian officials were ‘not there’ but set bounded parameters of what could be said (at least in the audience’s opinion). The audience was choosing how to listen to the paper and interpret how the Department would listen.

## The audience

The three vignettes reflect the co-production of the discourse activating a relationship between the (oral or written) text and its context within which it is received. The audience listens through the filter of their positionalities; their understandings of the message are produced by their associations with the schematic worldviews already within their own experiences. In this sense the text only has potential for meaning and will be understood quite differently by different audiences. The academic audience of Vignette 1 largely was interested in the text as a means to contribute to the development of the field of the study of educational management and leadership. They were keen to establish discursive spaces between different participants for the department, business, academic and practitioners. Notably Vignette 1 was still dominated by the academic theoretical and research methodological discourse.

Vignette 2 (Polokwane) points strongly to the capacity development discourse. Circuit managers were going to grind their axes about the lack of support to execute what they understand as the role of circuit managers. They wanted assurances of a sustainable prolonging of their project. The academic paper I delivered was really shifting responsibility too closely towards an internal self-reflection on why and how managers were choosing their agendas. This is not really what they wanted to hear. Instead they were there to celebrate what they had learnt about practically collaborating with school principals, institutions of higher learning and school teachers. They wanted to hear that the Department would continue to support these projects of education collaboration. An academic paper about the values underpinning their decision to be an educational leader in my view was less important.

Vignette 3 (Mauritius) is to be understood in the discourse of resistance to the importation of epistemologies from outside the island context. Too often Mauritius is on the receiving end of ‘development discourses’ claiming to bring new modes of salvation from abroad. Mauritians were comfortable that they had enough inner resource to design their own appropriate responses to maintaining education quality. However, I think that the choices for educational quality they were executing ironically were simply

disguised mantras of econometry and performativity drawn largely from the western world. Of course the disease of econometry is perhaps more easily spread in a small island context where normative influence is easier to pervade their landscape. Their discourses with the presentation were being produced in relation to their confidence in the official growth and development strategy.

## The role of principals

All three audiences believed that the discourse of ‘quality’ was being produced elsewhere and that they were merely the instruments to abide by its values. Performativity ironically was seen as here to stay. Even the relatively more free academic discourse of Vignette 1 still operated circling around the expectations of outputs-driven mantras. Vignette 2’s hidden discourses were about the conception that leadership is about providing data-driven evidence of what is or is not working, so that it can be fixed to produce the output achievements. This is after all what educational leadership was expected to do. The teachers of Vignette 3 perhaps displayed an expected capitulation to the discourse of econometry. What they were, however, able to articulate was that this was not necessarily a discourse they fully embraced at a personal level: they knew that some of the discourses were producing more angst and stress. But they were not prepared to resist it since they feared that their own self-advancement would be threatened. Their co-opted silences assist produce the econometric discourse.

## Performativities

Measured academic achievement outputs permeated all three contexts. The ever-present Performativities of success of either academics (or their students); circuit managers (and researchers of the education system) and aspirant school rectors dominated the audience discourses. Deeper realisation of the personal, social, moral and ethical growth of their leaders was perhaps regarded as too far removed from being a measurable goal of the education system. It was an ideal they saw as valuable, but were not the yardsticks of their authorities. They were thus less likely to support alternative measures of quality performance.

Repeatedly the audience were arguing (even in their silences) that they knew what was an alternative mode of operation as a leader; they even could provide examples of those who have been inspirational, but they were not willing to deeply and personally engage with being a campaigner of alternative discourses. Partnerships across the sector were possible, as long as the dominant partner (business, industry, the academia, or the department) called the shots. Educational leaders themselves feel simply too much on the margins to execute any deep change. In this context it was easy to resort to a blame culture: finding sources of responsibility for the choices that they themselves are making. The participants all alluded to the possibility of innovative ways of recognising inspirational leaders and the quest to find new ways of reflecting the complexity of their

contexts and situations. But were they prepared to challenge the system? There was too much working against them to do so.

So the text of the paper was re-interpreted by the different audiences: the message is good for others, but not for me. The audience rewrote the text that an econometric development discourse was the most powerful way of self-advancement. Developing the economic growth industry through education was the role of the educational leader. Educational leadership in their view can be about realising moral capabilities, but in practice was about promoting performativity cultures.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper questions the academic pursuit of elaborating the theoretical alternative conceptions about educational leadership. Most existing or aspirant leaders know the propositional content of these alternative discourses. Disappointingly, they suggest that they are unlikely to embrace this alternative practice. However, many disciplinary academics are indulgent in this pursuit of expansionist theoretical building, but are failing to affect any substantive inroads into alternative practical enunciations of these moral, social and ethical worldviews. How will educational leader practitioners make use of these alternatives in their everyday lived complex worlds of the school system? How do we engage 'productive leaderships' in relation to the multiple levels of complexities and competing agendas? Inspirational leaderships, servant leaders or any other forms of leadership that challenge the econometric of performativity cultures remain a theoretical mirage in the desert horizon of a powerful hegemonic control. How do we engage educational leadership as a form of social action, not only of knowing but also of relating to our contexts, of being the change we desire? Surely there is more than simple capitulation to prop up semblances of quality education? The audience is reading the text of alternatives as a moral guide for their personal belief system, but not as a set of practices they will engage in their present school environment.

This suggests that as developers of educational leaders, as researchers of the discipline of educational leadership, we need to find different ways to activate the hope of practice. Increasingly as global forces choose to examine the mantras of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the targets of Education for All (EFA) in their local national contexts, it can be seen how the achievements in quantitative terms (in many contexts) are being valued. Is sufficient attention being directed towards the social, moral and ethical quality of education? What are the unintended consequences of chasing these external measures of success? Our concerns must be directed to understanding the complexity of how educational agendas are being interpreted, re-interpreted and perhaps even subjugating the originally intended goals for which the targets had been declared at regional, national and international level. Our concern must be on how the education leadership discourse is being read, being re-created by the audiences. Who sits within and outside this audience is of primary importance.

There is hope: after all the audience writes our texts.

## REFERENCES

- Bush, T., Bell, L. and Middlewood, D. (eds.). 2010. *The principles of educational leadership and management* 2nd edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Chikane, F. 2012. DNA of ANC leaders. *Sunday Tribune* 22 July 22: 23. Edited extract from a keynote address by the Rev Frank Chikane at the colloquium titled The Treasure in the Legacy of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.
- Clandinin, D.J. (ed.). 2007. *Handbook of narrative inquiry. Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publishers.
- Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F.M. 2000. *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Crossley, M., Bray, M. & Packer, S. 2011. *Education in small States: Policies and priorities*. London: The Commonwealth.
- Davies, B. 2009. *The essentials of school leadership*. London: Sage.
- Dhunpath, R. and Samuel, M. 2009. *Life history research: Epistemology, methodology and representation*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: SENSE Publishers.
- Forde, D. 2010. Hearts and minds: Exploring the role of the teacher as a leader of pupils in the classroom. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Forde, D. 2012. (personal communication), Durban, 7 August 2012.
- Frick, D.M. & Spears, R.C. (eds.) .1996. *On becoming a servant leader*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Frost, D. and Harris, A. 2003. Teacher leadership: Towards a research agenda. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 33(3): 479–498.
- Gee, J.P. 2011. *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*, 3rd edition. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. and Golombek, P.R. (eds.). 2002. *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kalungu-Banda, M. 2006. *Leading like Madiba: Leadership lessons from Nelson Mandela*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
- Mischler, E.G. 1995. Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 5(2): 87–123.
- Muijs, D. & Harris, A. 2007. *British Education Leadership and Management Association (BELMAS)* 35(1): 111–134.
- Novah, J.M. 2009. Invitational leadership. In Davies, B. (ed.), *The essentials of school leadership*. London: Sage.
- Omar, S. 2009. School leadership: Principal's experiences of change and reward. Unpublished D.Ed. thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C. & Moletsane, R. 2009. *Making connections: Self-study and social action*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. 1995. Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J.A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (eds.), *Life history and narrative*. London and Washington: The Falmer Press.
- Reissman, C.K. 1993. *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Robinson, K. 2011. *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative*. Chichester, West Sussex: Capstone Publishing.
- Russell, R.F. & Stone, A.G. 2002. A review of servant leadership attributes: Developing a practical model. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 23(3): 145–157.
- Tutu, D. 2012. Interview on SAfm. Morning Talk on the occasion of the birthday of Nelson Mandela, 18 July 2012.



# MODERNISATION THEORY, PRISMATIC SOCIETY AND EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALISATION IN UGANDA

**Clive Harber**

University of Birmingham  
C.R.Harber@bham.ac.uk

**Dan Emmanuel Oryema**

Uganda Management Institute  
danoryema@googlemail.com

## ABSTRACT

This paper revisits modernisation theory in relation to the nature of education in Africa. It examines how schools actually operate in 'prismatic' societies in general before focusing on a study of educational decentralisation in Uganda. The study used interviews, observation, documentation and filed notes to explore the ways in which a policy of educational decentralisation actually played out. From the study eight themes emerged illustrating how educational policy established at national and international levels can be interpreted and distorted by local cultural values and behaviours.

Keywords: modernisation, Uganda, decentralisation, culture

## INTRODUCTION

And the history of developing societies in the last 30 years suggests that it would be foolhardy to ignore some of the insights of that large body of theoretical and empirical scholarship on modernisation (Leftwich 1996: 21).

Modernisation theories of development were at the height of their influence in the 1960s and 1970s. Modernisation theory see all societies as moving from less complex, undifferentiated and agrarian social systems to modern, industrial societies. Wealth and economic growth are linked to the degree of development along this continuum. If societies are poor or 'underdeveloped', it is because they have not evolved the social, cultural, economic and political structures for industrialisation and economic take-off. An institution seen as central to the process of modernisation or becoming modern was the school.

A key critique of modernisation theory was its Eurocentricism – its assumption that all societies needed to develop in the same historical manner and direction as

Western Europe and North America. However, while this remains a serious criticism of modernisation theory in general, the introduction of formal schooling through European colonialism in Africa was nevertheless the introduction of an essentially western and modern form of organisation into less modern societies. The postcolonial period has witnessed an enormous expansion of this organisational form of learning. This article explores whether this organisational form of education actually operates in the modern way in which it is supposed to by drawing on both ideas of a 'prismatic' society and form of organisation and empirical data on educational decentralisation in Uganda.

## Modernisation, education and prismatic society

According to modernisation theory, a modern society is one that has such features as an ethic of science and rationality, industrialisation, urbanisation, bureaucratisation, differentiation and specialisation of social structures, the principles of individualism and political stability (Leftwich 1996: 6–11). Peet and Hartwick (2009:122) put it that

in the economic sphere, modernisation meant specialisation of economic activities and occupational roles and the growth of markets; in terms of socio-spatial organisation, modernisation meant urbanisation, mobility, flexibility and the spread of education; in the political sphere, modernisation meant the spread of democracy and the weakening of traditional elites; in the cultural sphere, modernisation meant growing differentiation between the various cultural and value systems (for example, a separation between religion and philosophy), secularisation, and the emergence of a new intelligentsia. These developments were closely related to the expansion of modern communications media and the consumption of the culture created by centrally placed elites, manifested as changes in attitudes, especially the emergence of an outlook that stressed individual self-advancement ....

Of particular concern for present purposes are the characteristics of individual modernity – how is a 'modern' person different from a 'traditional' one and how does that change take place? The work of Inkeles and Smith (1974) focused on individual modernity, what a modern individual might look like and which socialisation agencies most contribute to individual modernity. They set out the key differences as follows,

### **Traditional**

Not receptive to new ideas  
Rooted in tradition  
Interested only in immediate things  
Denial of different opinions  
  
Uninterested in new information  
Oriented towards the past

### **Modern**

Open to new experiences  
Change oriented  
Interested in the outside world  
Acknowledgement of different opinions  
Eager to seek out new information  
Punctual; oriented towards the present

Concerned with the short term	Values planning
Distrustful of people beyond the family	Calculability; trusts people to meet obligations
Suspicious of technology	Values technical skills
Places high value on religion and the sacred	Places high value on education and science
Traditional patron-client relationships	Respects the dignity of others
Particularistic	Universalistic
Fatalistic	Optimistic

(Source: Peet and Hartwick 2009: 126)

A book on the sociology of education in Africa (Blakemore and Cooksey 1981) adds further differences: that a modern person is more individualistic as opposed to putting the family and group before the individual; is rational (seeks scientific explanation) rather than believing in magical and religious explanations; has a need for personal achievement as opposed to emphasising habit or custom; is punctual and relies on the clock as opposed to being not regulated by precise units of time; favours urban living and working in large organisations as opposed to rural living and distrusting large organisations; sees occupation as the main determinant of status and life's purpose as opposed to traditional or religious positions being more important.

The key organisational form that embodies the emphasis in rationalism in modernisation (Peet and Hartwick 2009) is bureaucracy. For Inkeles, for example, the modern state and society are 'suffused with bureaucratic rationality' (1969a: 1122). Indeed, the organisational model most commonly used to describe the school is a bureaucracy or rule by officials. Max Weber, a key exponent of rationalism in sociological thought, argues that bureaucracies had the following characteristics:

1. Staff members are personally free, observing only the impersonal duties of office
2. There is a clear hierarchy of offices
3. The functions of the offices are clearly specified
4. Officials are appointed on the basis of a contract
5. They are selected on the basis of a professional qualification, ideally substantiated by a diploma gained through examination
6. They receive a money salary and usually pension rights. The salary is graded according to position in the hierarchy. The official can always leave the post and under certain circumstances it may also be terminated.
7. The official's post is his or her sole occupation
8. There is a career structure and promotion is possible either by seniority or merit and according to the judgement of superiors

9. The official may appropriate neither the post nor the resources that go with it
10. The official is subject to a unified control and disciplinary system  
(Albrow 1970: 44–45).

In his empirical work, Inkeles found education to have the strongest relationship of all variables to the possession of modern (i.e. bureaucratic) attitudes, values and behaviour. This is partly because the pupil at school learns new skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic so that he or she will be able to ‘read directions and instructions and to follow events in the newspaper’, but also because of the bureaucratic nature of the hidden curriculum:

School starts and stops at fixed times each day. Within the school day there generally is a regular sequence for ordering activities: singing, reading, writing, drawing, all have their scheduled and usually invariant times. Teachers generally work according to this plan .... Thus, principles directly embedded in the daily routine of the school teach the value of planning ahead and the importance of maintaining a regular schedule (Inkeles and Smith 1974: 141).

Two other writers on the role of education in modernisation and industrialisation argued in a similar vein with a more critical perspective. Marten Shipman puts it that:

Punctuality, quiet orderly work in groups, response to orders, bells and timetables, respect for authority, even tolerance of monotony, boredom, punishment, lack of reward and regular attendance at place of work are the habits to be learned at school (1971: 54–55).

Whereas Toffler argues:

Mass education was the ingenious machine constructed by industrialism to produce the kind of adults it needed ... the solution was an educational system that, in its very structure, simulated this new world ... the regimentation, lack of individualisation, the rigid systems of seating, grouping, grading and marking, the authoritarian style of the teacher – are precisely those that made mass public education so effective as an instrument of adaptation for its time and place (1970: 354–345).

This modern, largely bureaucratic, organisational model of schooling was introduced to most developing countries, including those of Africa, through and during colonialism (Altbach and Kelly 1978; London 2002; Molteno 2000). As Booth (1997: 433) puts it: ‘In post-colonial Africa, the school is the ultimate example of a transported alien institution designed to create change.’ Indeed, Kendall (2009) argues that this now near-hegemonic, bureaucratic model of formal, Western-style and state-provided schooling defines and constitutes ‘education’ for development in the twenty-first century – as sanctioned at the global Education for All conferences at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990 and Dakar in Senegal in and as inscribed in the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. The

essential features of this taken-for-granted model of modern education are that children learn primarily from adults about high stakes academic subjects, on a fixed schedule, in an indoor setting that includes particular features (desks, chairs, chalkboards, written teaching and learning materials). Moreover, there is an imagined linear development model from informal, family-provided education concerning daily tasks and survival skills to ‘modern’ schooling systems:

The international development model of education posits that mass, state-sponsored schooling is: (1) central to the creation of a “modern” nation-state; (2) central to the development of “modern” workers and families ; and, thus (3) central to a state’s “modern” economic growth and international acceptance. The general conceptualisation of education and development has received critical attention since its inception, but has yet to be significantly challenged (Kendall 2009: 422).

Fuller (1991) argues further in some detail in relation to Malawi that the push to expand schooling as a visible and tangible symbol of bureaucratic modernity in the post-colonial period has helped to legitimate the relatively new and often fragile state, despite the regular failure of schools to actually deliver learning outcomes such as literacy and numeracy. Indeed, this failure to achieve learning outcomes in Africa (see, for example, Verspoor 2008) starts to suggest a major problem with modernisation theory in relation to education. This concerns the reality of school organisation in developing countries in general, and Africa in particular. In practice, social organisations such as schools tend to reflect the actual values and behaviours of their surrounding society rather than perfectly match an ideal type, imported Weberian bureaucracy. So it would be surprising if schools in developing countries were to act autonomously as modernising change agents independently of their society, that is, if the society is marked by non-modern structures and behaviours then why should schools be any different?

Riggs (1964) describes developing countries as having ‘prismatic societies’. Riggs (1964) uses the analogy of a fused white light passing through a prism and emerging diffracted as a series of different colours. Within the prism there is a point where the diffraction process starts but remains incomplete. Riggs suggests that developing societies contain both elements of traditional, fused type of social organisation and elements of the more structurally differentiated or ‘modern’ societies. He argues that the societies of most developing countries, and the organisations that exist within them, are a synthesis – though not always a harmonious one – of traditional, long-lasting indigenous values and practices and relatively new ones imported during and after colonialism. They are neither fully modern nor fully traditional. As a result, within the form or facade of modern, bureaucratic organisation, much that happens in schools will reflect older priorities and needs emanating from family and village as well as newer ones emanating from the Ministry of Education. For example, a basic tenet of modernity is regular attendance at a place of work and punctuality. However, staff and student absenteeism and lack of punctuality are marked problems in schools in developing countries where harvests, markets and family responsibilities can take priority over schooling.

So, not only can there be cultural conflicts of expectations for schooling between the home and the school (see Booth (1997) on Swaziland), but evidence from a range of developing countries, including many African ones, suggests that schools themselves primarily reproduce the values and behaviours of the existing 'prismatic' society rather than acting as independent and self-contained agents of modernisation (Harber and Davies 1997). The net result is that teachers and schools exhibit what is regarded as unprofessional behaviour in a modern institutional setting. For example, in a more traditional and ethnically homogeneous setting such as a village, favouring one's own ethnic or clan group member for some sort of post of responsibility is normal, but once this is moved into a modern state setting such as a school or education system it becomes nepotism. In a traditional setting, giving priority to harvesting the crops at a certain time of year is fine but in a modern setting such as a school it becomes student or teacher absenteeism. A final example is that in a traditional rural/agricultural setting, very precise time measurement is far less important but move this into a modern setting such as a school and this imprecision become student and teacher lateness.

In a study of Tanzanian schools, for example, Van Der Steen (2011: 162) found the following examples of practices at odds with modern bureaucratic principles:

- A teacher being physically assaulted by an education officer at the municipal office when complaining about a work-related issue
- A teacher reportedly not being paid salary for five months as she refused to pay 'commission' to the accountant in charge
- Teachers ordered to carry out demographic surveys in their neighbourhood on behalf of the municipal office without financial compensation
- The monthly payment of teacher salaries rarely being on time
- A teacher using her influence in the municipal education office not to be transferred to a school she did not want to go to
- Reporting of inaccurate information of progress such as exaggerating the provision of education to disadvantaged children and the number enrolled in schools
- Punitive action against a head teacher who refused to use school funds to provide visiting officials with meals
- Bribery in the allocation of secondary school places to primary school leavers

This is also an issue in South African schools where schools are often criticised for being 'dysfunctional' and teachers unprofessional, and which may well be exhibiting 'prismatic traits'. For example, a research report of 2007 noted that educator attendance varies widely between schools but is known to result in significant loss of learner time. Apart from arriving at school late and leaving early, reasons for educator absence include strikes and stay-aways, examinations and sporting events and municipal

activities. The report also noted that loss of learning time will undoubtedly adversely affect achievement, outcomes and progression (Motala *et al.* 2007: 58–59).

The South African Human Rights Commission report on the right to basic education in 2006 describes a dysfunctional schooling system for the majority and a privileged, functional sector serving a minority. The report followed public hearings in October 2005 on a litany of problems that schools face, including low teacher morale, lack of accountability and non-attendance of children. Teacher absenteeism and lack of enthusiasm also remain as problems (Hunt 2007; Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005). Moreover, various forms of corruption are also not unknown in South African schools (Harber 2001; Fataar 2007).

In their research in schools in three provinces of South Africa, Hammett and Staeheli (2011) note:

On multiple occasions during our work at a township school in Cape Town we witnessed educators either arriving late or leaving early from class or even remaining in the staffroom for the duration of the teaching period (despite being timetabled to teach). ... On a number of occasions at other schools, it appeared that educators were drunk. At many schools, educators used learners to run personal errands – primarily to fetch food or drinks from the school tuck shop or neighbouring street traders (2011: 275).

In a sustained analysis of what he terms ‘dysfunctional’ schools, Bloch (2009) relates in some detail evidence of poor educational outcomes in South Africa to poor internal organisation. Acknowledging serious problems of infrastructure in schools in relation to the supply of electricity, libraries, laboratories, computers, clean water and suitable toilets, he also notes the enormous difficulty of recruiting of competent heads to manage the 27 000 schools in South Africa. As a result, Block states:

Schools are often not well organised, timetabling is poor, institutional process is arbitrary and ineffective. At a teaching level, haphazard planning and time management are often reflected in a poor ability to plan and timetable teaching plans for the curriculum over the year (2009:82–3).

A study of educational decentralisation in Malawi (Davies *et al.* 2003) found that local contextual realities, including the context of poverty, changed the way in which policy was implemented at the district level. However, the remainder of this article is concerned with a hitherto unpublished qualitative study of educational decentralisation in Uganda by Oryema (2008) who used the idea of prismatic society to link certain traditional cultural traits to actual behaviour that fell outside a modern, rational-bureaucratic framework of policy-making to explain how and why educational practice in Africa can differ significantly from policy intentions.



## EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALISATION AND PRISMATIC SOCIETY IN UGANDA

The study by Oryema used interviews (e.g. with civil servants, politicians, district and town council officials, school staff and pupils), observations (of school facilities, of teachers present, of supervision and inspection), documentary evidence (policy documents, national minimum standards indicators, inspection reports), and field notes/diary to gather triangulated data in a case study that cut vertically from the Ministry of Education and Sports down to two primary schools in Lurabeni local education district, ‘nesting’ (Borgan 1997) along its path different levels of administrative units (schools, sub-county, county, district and national). The case study was used to trace the local realities in the process of the implementation of the educational decentralisation policy. The two schools were from different contexts – one urban and one rural – to explore whether this aspect of context had any impact on decentralisation. The findings of the study illustrate well how certain traditional ways still continue to coexist with and influence the modern values embraced and enshrined in Uganda’s devolution policy. Here we shall analyse the findings according to eight themes:

- family size and structure: the unavoidable burden;
- blood link solidarity: the who, where and what questions;
- superstition and witchcraft: the invisible intimidation;
- perceptions of authority: the cock of the village;
- specialisation problems: a jack of all trades and master on none;
- who is who? gender issues;
- the documentation and records vacuum: are witnesses sufficient? and
- precision and the danger of proximities.

### Family size and structure

In interviews, respondents said that they saw the traditional polygamous, extended family as a burden rather than the proper basis of social life. This was partly because of Western education, partly because of exposure to different ways of life from other parts of the world and partly because of the financial implications. However, the respondents also acknowledged the impossibility of achieving their ideal of a nuclear family because of pressures from relatives and in-laws, which they described as the ‘unavoidable burden’. Relatives and in-laws want to be supported or even accepted to live with the family and it is difficult to say no because of social pressures. The resulting burden takes

the form of the payment of school fees for relatives to gifts, clothing and supporting social events such as weddings and funerals – all of which have to be paid for in addition to responsibilities for the immediate nuclear family.

The consequences of these pressures for educational decentralisation were in terms of both facility provision and trained teachers. In terms of facility provision, the large, extended family meant that there was a constant search for more money – 39 out of the 40 respondents interviewed said this was a key reason for corruption among politicians and civil servants. The losses incurred by contractors building schools and the theft of other building materials were also linked to supporting the extended family. They also affect teacher training and teaching quality as well for a number of reasons. First, because of extended families many teachers cannot afford even the most minimum costs of in-service training such as transport and personal effects, so they fail to take advantage of the training opportunities. Second, as the breadwinner for the family, the teacher finds it difficult to leave the children at home while training. Third, the family burden means that teachers have to find other sources of income as well as their salary. This compromises their school attendance and their preparation of lessons at home. Finally, extended family responsibilities make most teachers resistant to transfers, which makes it difficult for District Education Officers to be able to address quality or disciplinary problems in certain schools.

### Blood link solidarity

Interviews suggested that who you are and where you come from continue to be more important in determining opportunities than what you are and what you offer. This shows itself in favouritism and nepotism in regard to the award of contracts for school buildings, opportunities for teacher training and in teacher recruitment. Respondents in the Inspectorate reported the influence of ‘blood link’ in the favours expected by some teachers because they were related to them. The District Inspector of School noted his own experience when his uncle, who was given a contract for classroom construction, but did it poorly, expected him in his official capacity to defend him. The Chief Administrative Officer related similar experiences of how people from his own place of origin had been putting him under pressure to favour them in many opportunities in the district. However, on a more positive note, in terms of community participation in the construction of schools blood links had strengthened commitment.

### Superstition and witchcraft

Belief in witchcraft continues in this society and is a form of invisible intimidation that has effects on education. For example, the incoming chair of the council suspected the outgoing one of placing ‘deadly charms’ in the office and buildings, requiring the meagre district funds available to pay for a new office, new furnishings and the means of transport to get there and back from his home every day rather than directly

on educational provision. Moreover, one head teacher explained how frightened she was to take disciplinary action against teachers suspected of witchcraft because of the possible harmful consequences. It was also reported that a number of business people were involved in occult practices as they believed it would increase their business opportunities and contracts. Whether true or not, the consistent raising of such issues reflects how belief in witchcraft persists.

### The cock of the village

Traditionally, authority in Lurabeni society has always been highly respected without opposition – he was the ‘cock of the village’, as some respondents called it, with no-one to challenge his or authority in making decisions. However, there is a hangover of these attitudes with some local leaders seeing themselves not as representatives of the people but wanting their word to be final and not subject to opposition. Such an authoritarian attitude led to conflict between the council chairman and the council, resulting in an expensive commission of enquiry, using funds that could have been used on education if there had been more use of modern democratic practice. The teachers interviewed said that supporting teachers to obtain further qualifications was not supported by those in authority in the district because they wished to remain at the top alone and did not want competition from more highly qualified teachers. Moreover, despite some councillors admitting that corruption was being practised by the leader of the council, there had been no attempt by the councillors to use their power to dismiss him, their reluctance to take such steps suggesting the persistence of traditional attitudes of obedience and subordination.

### Jack of all trades and master on none

Modernisation theory emphasises lack of specialisation as one the characteristics of traditional societies (Riggs 1964; Peet and Hardwick 2009). In a traditional society one person carries out different functions, which in a more modern, differentiated society are carried out independently by different people. This manifested itself in this educational district in a number of ways. For example, the provision of facilities is the responsibility of the school project committee in the decentralised education system. Without being given any kind of training, the government has entrusted this committee with the responsibility of monitoring the day-to-day construction work at the school site. In many areas this committee consists of ordinary people with no experience of modern construction. In the two case study schools this was the situation with the result that they were not able to see faults and problems, and the result was poor construction. In terms of inspecting schools, any civil servant can be sent out into the field, irrespective of department, to inspect schools. A veterinary, agricultural or forest officer can be used to do school inspections in the decentralised system. While maybe helping to meet a general shortage of educational personnel, this reliance on lack of specialisation

nevertheless has negative implications for efficiency and quality in the development of a modern educational system.

### Who is whom?

The impact of traditional gender roles is noticeable in relation to the performance of teachers at school. The traditional role of women is that of homemaker, domestic worker, baby sitter and mother with the man in authority in the household. Female teachers interviewed explained that they often came to school late because they first had to provide warm water for their husband to bathe in the morning, prepare breakfast and get the children ready for school before they themselves could prepare to go to school. Interestingly, although male teachers were more punctual at coming to school as a result, the female teachers were still better prepared for their lessons. The head teachers in the two schools (both females) highlighted the difficulties they have in dealing with male teachers because they tend to ignore or underestimate them, having difficulty in acknowledging their leadership because of traditional gender roles.

### Documentation and records vacuum

Traditional education in Africa did not impart writing and reading skills. This made documentation and record keeping problematic and required more of a reliance on memory and witnesses. However, despite the fact that many people now know how to read and write, in this prismatic society the culture of documentation and written record keeping is still weak. For example, the school management and/or project committee indicate that they are not in the habit of recording their observations or compiling reports about building work going on in the school but continue to rely on observation and memory. This provides room for inaccurate reporting, especially when it comes to precise figures, dates and times, which in turn means debates, denials and self-defence when quality complaints arise. While teachers were quite good at keeping written records of their schemes of work and student progress, there were nevertheless many gaps in the written records. In the head teachers' offices documentation was scanty and not very well organised, although the heads tended to blame this on previous regimes. Supervision and inspection done by the heads in their own schools were generally not reported, the assumption being that physical presence was sufficient and the problem teachers were known. In both schools the inventory of school property was not comprehensive and land documents were missing. During the research phrases such as 'Even so and so was present and can testify; if my memory serves me right' were commonly used.

### Precision and the danger of proximities

The people of Lurabeni traditionally tended to be imprecise in many regards, for example, in measurement and time keeping. In relation to time, because there were

no watches, people relied on the position of the sun and times of appointments were approximate, for example, sunset or sunrise. Thus in a society where construction was traditionally done in poles, mud and grass, measurements need not be that precise and estimates could be done by eye assessment rather than scientific measurement. There was evidence of this in the poor quality of building work in the schools. Among teachers and the inspectorate precise time keeping was a problem and there were many instances of lateness. One teacher noted that, 'When a meeting I scheduled to start at 2.00 pm, be prepared to start at 4.00 pm. When you expect a meeting to last for an hour, be prepared to sit for three hours.'

## CONCLUSION

My friend Chimtali, age 14 ... recently entered a government boarding school to pursue her secondary studies .... While Chimtali obviously enjoyed becoming modern, she had not suspected that the secondary school would require such deep changes in daily habits (Fuller 1991: 96).

These traits of Lurabeni society reveal the complexity of operating in the prismatic space between two broad worlds, the traditional and the modern. In the decentralised educational setting, because the people in control are all local and working for local people in a local context, there is a tendency to accommodate contradictions and problems rather than to solve or correct them. This attitude, if not handled carefully, can, as we have seen, put quality in the modern educational sector in danger. While there are no easy or rapid answers to these problems, this article has highlighted the need to understand complex local contextual realities prior to policy making and implementation, whether by governments of international agencies. 'Prismatic analysis' of this kind does, however, help to provide a long-term agenda of the issues that need to be addressed if the aim is to develop a modern, good quality system of schooling. 'Modern' systems such as schools will not function well without relatively 'modern' people in them but this itself requires some long-term social and cultural change. Paradoxically, the only catalyst for this is education and training itself, begging the question of where the modern trainers, leading by example, are going to come from?

## REFERENCES

- Altbach, P. and Kelly, G. 1978. *Education and colonialism*. London: Longman.
- Blakemore, K. and Cooksey, B. 1981. *A sociology of education for Africa*. London : Allen and Unwin.
- Bloch, G. 2009. *The toxic mix*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Booth, M.Z. 1997. Western schooling and traditional society in Swaziland. *Comparative Education* 33(3): 433–451.
- Borgan, O. 1997. *Two contributions to the update of the Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences: Nested case – control sampling and counter-matched sampling*. Blindern: University of Oslo.

- Davies, L., Harber, C. and Dzimadzi, 2003. Educational decentralisation in Malawi : A study of process. *Compare* 33(2): 139–154.
- Fataar, A. 2007. Educational renovation in a South African township on the move: A social-spatial analysis. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(6): 599–612.
- Fuller, B. 1991. *Growing up modern*. London: Routledge.
- Hammett, D. and Staeheli, L. 2011. Respect and responsibility: Teaching citizenship in South African high schools. *International Journal of Educational Development* 31(3): 269–276.
- Harber, C. 2001. State of transition: Post-apartheid educational reform in South Africa. Oxford: Symposium.
- Harber, C. and Davies, L. 1997. School management and school effectiveness in developing countries. London: Cassell.
- Hunt, F. 2007. Schooling citizens: A study of policy in practice in South Africa. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Sussex, Sussex.
- Inkeles, A. and Smith, D. 1974. *Becoming modern*. London: Heinemann.
- Leftwich, A. (ed.). 1996. *Democracy and development*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- London, N. 2002. Curriculum convergence: An ethno-historical investigation into schooling in Trinidad and Tobago. *Comparative Education* 38(1): 53–72.
- Molteno, M., Ogadhoh, K., Cain, E. and Crumpton, B. 2000. *Towards responsive schools: Supporting better schooling for disadvantaged children*. London: Department for International Development/ Save the Children.
- Motala, S., Dieltiens, V., Carrim, N., Kgobe, P., Moyo, G. and Rembe, S. 2007. *Educational access in South Africa: Country analytic review. Project report*. Falmer, UK: Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE).
- Nelson Mandela Foundation. 2005. *Emerging voices*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Oryema, D. 2008. Decentralisation policy and education provision in Uganda. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
- Peet, R. and Hartwick, E. 2009. *Theories of development*. London: The Guilford Press.
- Riggs, F. 1964. *Administration in developing countries: The theory of prismatic society*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Shipman, M. 1971. *Education and modernisation*. London: Faber.
- Toffler, A. 1970. *Future shock*. London: Bodley Head.
- Van der Steen, N. 2011. School improvement in Tanzania: School culture and the management of change. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London University Institute of Education, London.
- Verspoor, A. 2008. The challenge of learning: Improving the quality of basic education in sub-Saharan Africa. In Johnson, D. (ed.), *The changing landscape of education in Africa*. Oxford: Symposium.

# DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TWO SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Vusi Mncube**

University of South Africa  
mncubvs@unisa.ac.za

**Lynn Davies**

University of Birmingham (emeritus professor)  
University of South Africa (research fellow)  
L.Davies@bham.ac.uk

**Renuka Naidoo**

University of South Africa  
ren@primarymath.net

## ABSTRACT

This article reports on a qualitative study that investigated the functioning of school governing bodies (SGBs) as a tool for promoting democracy in two schools. Data was gathered through interviews, observations and document reviews. Findings revealed that democracy was in existence and practised at both schools and that it was characterised by shared decision making and acknowledged rights of individuals, representations, participation and equality. Two structures for promoting democracy were found to be in existence in both schools. These are school governing bodies and representative councils for learners. Such structures were found to be functioning effectively and contributing to the democracy in schools. However, although the learner voice was represented at both schools, learner participation in crucial issues in both the schools was limited. The study recommends that all teachers, learners and parent representatives on the SGBs be trained in skills such as deliberation, debate, dialogue and managing differences. Furthermore, training or capacity building related to advocacy skills and leadership development should be provided for all members of the SGBs, including teachers. The more learners, parents and staff are involved in school policy and decision making, the more there is a genuine community involvement in schools, and the more effective a school becomes. Also, schools need to move towards learner-initiated decision making where learners initiate the process and invite adults to join them in making decisions. Also, there is need for teachers to be trained in democratic ways of operating in the school and classroom, which will possibly help them learn ways of working democratically in both the whole school and the classroom.

Keywords: school governing bodies, representative council for learners, leadership and management



## INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a continual process and never achieved. Dewey (1937: 235) asserts that:

The very idea of democracy, the meaning of democracy, must be continually explored afresh; it has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized.

In short, democracy is not static and neither is it a perfect state that can be attained. Instead, it is an ideal that people can work towards. In South Africa, as in any other affirmed democratic country, it is essential to monitor the progress of democracy, including how this is played out in schools. Vigilance is needed on understandings of democracy by those in power as well as those less powerful. President Jacob Zuma recently said that minority groups have ‘less rights’ than majority groups, and that the majority prevailed – ‘that’s how democracy works’ (*Guardian Express* 13 July 2013). There was an understandable outcry from the parliamentary opposition benches, particularly as this goes against the constitutional affirmation of equality for all and constitutional prohibitions on discrimination.

The questions for this article are how democracy is currently understood by different stakeholders in schools – principals, parents, teachers and learners. Two core educational concepts can be distinguished: schooling for democracy and schools as democracies (O’Hair *et al.* 2000). The former involves preparing learners for living in a democratic society, while the latter is concerned with creating schools that are organised, governed and practised as democracies. Clearly these two are inextricably linked: students cannot learn in the abstract about democracy, but need to experience it on a daily basis for the principles to be ingrained.

Yet the concept of democracy is hugely complex and contested. After outlining the democratic values in the South African Constitution, this article briefly discusses the conventional features of democracy as they appear in the literature. It then looks at how such ideals of democracy have been applied to the school level. This is often in theory rather than practice. Authoritarian forms of organization are evident in most schools internationally. Maitles and Deuchar (2007) assert that in Scotland and across much of Europe, schools are still decidedly authoritarian. Similarly, Trafford (2008: 411) refers to the ‘widespread and persistent authoritarian tradition in schooling’. In Africa, too, hierarchical organization within schools still prevails. Karlsson and Mbokazi (2005: 11) in a case study of the ethos in two schools refer to leadership of school management at one of the sample schools in KwaZulu-Natal as ‘characterised by formality and authoritarianism’. Similarly, Grant (2006: 525) referred to the continued existence of a ‘hierarchical school organization controlled by autocratic principals’ at some South African schools.

During the apartheid era South African schools operated under a system of authoritarianism emphasizing a rigid, top-down or hierarchical approach to management. Principals were compelled to follow instructions from the Department of Education

(DoE). The advent of democracy prompted the democratization of the education system and this is captured in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA). In its preamble the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) emphasizes a new set of values and a move away from the past so as to ‘establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; lay the foundations for a democratic and open society’ (RSA 1996a: 1). It follows that the Constitution has to be supported by democratic institutions. This argument is expounded by Nkomo, Chisholm and McKinney (2004), who posit that it is essential for all social institutions working within the parameters of the Constitution to advance a society that reflects the values and principles contained therein.

The specific democratic values espoused in the Constitution are adult suffrage, with elections and a multiparty system; equity and non-racialism, non-sexism, and non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation; advancement of human rights and freedoms, including freedom from violence, freedom of religion and freedom of expression; a cooperative government, with agreed procedures and amicable dispute resolution; and accountability, responsiveness and openness. All these features and values can be translated into the school level, and a truly democratic school would be expected to demonstrate all of them, suitably adapted (such as representation and participation in decision making rather than adult suffrage).

The article therefore reports on a study of stakeholder views of democracy in two secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. It is from a larger study in these schools of experiences and practices of the principals in creating democratic schools (Naidoo 2012). The schools were selected for study as having reportedly democratic attributes, where participants would be likely to have some understandings of what democracy in society and school should look like, and which should be mirroring the Constitutional values.

## CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Yilmaz (2009) contends the various conceptualisations of democracy can be reflected on a continuum. At one end is formal, procedural democracy and at the other end a social conception of democracy. This relates to the distinction often made between ‘thick’ democracy and ‘thin’ democracy. Carr (2008a) explains that the thick notion of democracy is concerned with power relations, identity and social change, whereas the thin interpretation essentially involves electoral processes, political parties, and structures related to formal democracy. Green (1999) adds that the thick notion of democracy focuses on the characteristics and skills that are essential for individuals to become fully participatory members of their democratic society.

The nomenclature of ‘thin’ sounds negative, but Young (2000) cautions against assuming that representative democracy is incompatible with deep (thick) democracy. They are not alternatives, but perhaps different levels of operation. Ideally, everyone should be able to participate – yet in practice this is rarely possible. Representative

democracy is a compromise that allows some stake in society – in the choosing of representatives, and in ensuring that these representatives do represent the views of constituents, and that they are accountable and transparent in their actions.

Participatory democracy emphasizes involvement of individuals; however, meaningful inclusion will only be achieved when all stakeholders are able to influence the outcome of the decisions. This would imply that deliberation between stakeholders is essential, and is the heart of democracy itself (Ross 2004). Deliberative democracy then refers to a process in which individuals voluntarily engage in open discussion to share knowledge, exchange views, and understand the perspectives of others, which contributes to agreed upon policies (McDevitt and Kiousis 2004).

Sometimes decentralisation is linked to democracy, but it is not necessarily more democratic than centralised control. It depends how far governance is decentralised to different levels, and what sorts of powers are given to whom, and how they use it. There can be decentralisation of budgets, for example, right down to the school level, but if the principal is still autocratic, democracy does not flourish in that school. Participatory democracy therefore can include the notion of subsidiarity – that a matter ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralised authority capable of addressing that matter effectively. An interesting exercise done with students and teachers in work on Student Councils (Yamashita and Davies 2010) is to ask who can, should or does make decisions on various aspects of school life – uniform, discipline, teaching methods, school dinners, homework, appointment of staff. It enables discussion of when a top-down decision, or rule, is necessary and when a matter can be devolved or be part of a joint decision. At a small scale, school level, it is possible to combine representative and deliberative democracy. In South Africa, Representative Councils of Learners (RCLs) and the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are clearly both representative and deliberative structures that can work towards what Lefrançois and Ethier (2010) see as the idealized conditions of deliberative democracy.

As with Dewey's (1939) ideals of humanism and belief in the inherent capabilities of people, O'Hair, McLaughlin and Reitzug (2000) capture the notion of democracy being associated with humanism, and add that democracy as a way of living involves the open flow and critique of ideas, with an authentic concern for others as well as the common good. Based on this conception, Print, Ørnstrøm and Nielsen (2002) add that democracy is about tolerance, compromise, willingness to listen to the views of others, willingness to be influenced by the arguments put forth by others, and to accept the attitudes and opinions of others.

Hence even thick democracy is not just about deliberation but espouses ethics and empathy. The key educational point about thick, participative democracy is that it requires skills of deliberation itself and of collective decision-making. These skills have to be learned and practised.

## DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

Much has been written on the principles of democratic education, contrasting this with authoritarian, hierarchical and teacher-centred institutions. Kelly (1995) refers to the basic principles of education in a democratic society that are of significance to democratic schools, which include human rights, equality to entitlement, openness in the face of knowledge, individual autonomy and empowerment – as well as faith in individuals. Mncube and Harber (2010) state that democratic schools generally exhibit the following characteristics of democracy: rights of individuals, equity, participation and informed choice. Kensler (2010) refers to ten democratic principles within schools: purpose and vision, dialogue and listening, integrity, accountability, choice, individual and collective, decentralization, transparency, fairness and dignity, reflection and evaluation. Gore (2002) includes inclusive consultation and collaboration, equality of opportunity in representation, freedom for critical reflection and a focus on the common good.

Beane and Apple (1999: 10) explain that:

Democratic schools, like democracy itself do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts ... to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life.

These arrangements and opportunities incorporate two lines of work. The first involves creating democratic structures and processes by which life in the school is carried out; and the second involves creating a curriculum that will give young people democratic experiences (Beane and Apple 1999). They add that the conditions on which democracy is dependent are also fundamental concerns of democratic schools. These conditions include an open flow of ideas so that individuals are informed, faith in the potential of individuals to find solutions to problems, being able to critically reflect on issues, and being concerned about the dignity, welfare and rights of others as well as the common good.

One question is whether ‘being concerned’ is enough. Davies (2004: 212) proposes the notion of ‘interruptive democracy’ in schools, defined as ‘the process by which people are enabled to intervene in practices which continue injustice’. This is the disposition to challenge, to find spaces for dissent, resilience and action. A rights-based school does not simply accord rights to learners and teachers, but fosters habits in learners to stand up for the rights of others – of course through democratic means, not violently. Critical thinking and critical political or social education involve practice in the different ways to create social change in addition to the representative process, whether in community work, campaigns, lobbying, petitions or peaceful demonstrations. It is preparation for active, democratic citizenship.

## METHODOLOGY FOR EXPLORING STAKEHOLDER VIEWS OF DEMOCRACY

Given all these different dimensions of democracy, what do people inside the schools see as democracy? Which are the most salient for them? Where on the spectrum between thin or procedural democracy and thick, direct or active participative democracy do they stand? Is there congruence between what they say and what the actual practice is in the school?

This article reports on illustrative qualitative work in two South African secondary schools conducted in 2011. Secondary schools were targeted because at the heart of democratic schools are the voices of the learners; the SASA (RSA 1996b) makes provision for the RCL only in schools that have learners in Grades 8–12. The particular schools were chosen because they had some democratic features, already known to one of the researchers (Naidoo 2012). These included structural components of a functioning SGB and an RCL, known work involving the community and a reputation for a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning. These large schools were co-educational, public schools and were characterized by a growing number of black teachers. At both the schools there were teacher liaison officers and the RCL was elected through a voting system. For confidentiality, the schools are given the fictitious names of Red Star Secondary and Excell Secondary.

Three main research instruments allowed for some triangulation of data: observations (of the principal at their work, of SGB meetings, of staff meetings and staff briefing sessions); document analysis (of the agendas and minutes of staff and SGB meetings, discipline records, the incident book and notices to parents); and semi-structured interviews (with the principal, three parents, three teachers and three learners). At each school these interviewees included a teacher representative, a parent representative and a learner representative from the SGB.

The questions in the interviews were relatively open-ended, in the sense of asking people about their understandings of democracy, whether it was practised in the school, what structures there were, what the role of the principal was in developing it, and how or whether democracy was promoted in curriculum and teaching methods. Hence no particular indicators or components of democracy were given to respondents (such as rights, or equity, or collaboration, or dignity, or non-discrimination, or representation, as outlined earlier). Instead, the aim was to see what people understood by the term, and what their priorities seemed to be. It was also to identify the gaps, and whether the conceptualisation and practice of democracy were broad or narrow, thick or thin, direct or indirect.

## FINDINGS ON THE DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

The findings revealed four main areas that people identified as democratic: collective decision making and shared vision; structures for voice and representation; respect,

rights and diversity; and critical thinking and openness. From the outset it must be acknowledged that much of what people say is prescriptive, that is, saying that a democracy school 'should' have various features, rather than 'our school does this, and it is democratic'. Presumably this conceptual understanding of democracy does come from experiencing it in practice, but it cannot be guaranteed.

## Decision making

A common thread running through all the responses was the idea of all stakeholders being involved in decision making. For example, teacher 2 from Excell Secondary School stated that:

In a democratic school there is shared and collective decision-making by all stakeholders. All stakeholders are consulted ... when it comes to decision-making everyone participates and everybody's open and included in decision-making ....

Thus the teacher acknowledged the idea of shared decision-making but also emphasized the need to get all stakeholders involved in the process. This also suggests the need for inclusion. Such inclusivity was echoed by the principal of Red Star Secondary School, who explained that:

My understanding of making a school democratic is that learners, parents, staff and other relevant stakeholders be given the opportunity and space to contribute meaningfully to decision-making for the continued progress of the school.

The response from learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School was similarly that:

Decision-making should be shared; everyone involved should be allowed to make a contribution and should share their own thoughts. I don't believe that every decision should be made solely by one person. Involvement of people from outside of the school environment can help a school grow and develop.

At the same school, parent 1 echoed the notion of shared decision making:

I believe that the key component of an expressly democratic school is the opportunity for all the members of the school governing body to air their views and in so doing take part in decision making as regularly as possible. But what is even more important is the consideration these views are given. One cannot rhapsodize the merits of collective decision making without reflecting upon whether the views of teachers, or even learners, are considered in as unprejudiced manner as possible.

The above response accentuates the point that although we can enthuse about collective decision making, there is a need to consider the way in which the views of the stakeholders are received. The respondent believes that the views of all, 'even' learners, should be received with an open mind. This is a crucial point.



This notion of shared decision making that all the respondents felt strongly about is corroborated by Goodlad *et al.* (2004: 93), who aptly state that democracy is based on the idea that, ‘we each have a voice and that voice counts’. The idea of shared decision making is accentuated within the ‘every voice counts’ framework that is clearly articulated in the SASA. The platform for collective decision making manifests itself in the SASA 84 of 1996 via the formation of the SGB. Kensler (2010) argues that in a democracy it is assumed that each individual is worthy of participation; hence, we would suppose, every voice does count. The question is how to operationalize this ideal. In voting, every vote does count. But in deliberative or consultative democracy, it is more difficult to make the calculation. In the collection, *Children as decision-makers in education* (Cox *et al.* 2010), many examples were found across different countries of children’s participation in school life, but it was also found that institutional norms could restrict this, specifying arenas where such participation was not seen as appropriate – for example curriculum, or teacher recruitment. The ‘voice’ may be confined to ‘tame areas’ such as lunches or sports days rather than the central rationale for school, which is teaching and learning.

The same empirical question applies to ‘listening’. A culture of listening is indeed a prerequisite for democracy. The principal at Excell Secondary School believed that ‘it’s that listening ear that’s critical in a democratic school’. Steyn *et al.* (2004) elaborate that listening is an important element in communication, and a willingness to hear is essential. Yet the next obvious question is whether that listening actually influences decisions and actions, and, going back to bias, what happens when there are competing views and competitions for the listening ear. This research was not always able to establish whose voice would take precedence, on what criteria, and whether there were patterns.

However, the principals at the sample schools appeared to embrace the notion of shared decision making, dialogue and discussion as advocated by Bennis and Graves (2007) and Steyn (2004), and this became evident during observations of meetings. At a School Management Team (SMT) meeting at Red Star Secondary School where post-provisioning norms (PPN – this refers to the total number of state paid educator posts allocated to an institution regardless of their post level) (Naicker 2005:8) were discussed, the principal sought input from all management members. It was possible to witness first hand how the principal, who trusted his SMT, was asked to provide statistics. They also deliberated on the actual document received from the DoE. The management members were free to make inputs and regularly analyzed the statistics and the document. The principal as well as the other management members often used the words ‘we’ and ‘us’, suggesting that they were part of a team, which could also imply a feeling of togetherness. In other words, the principal tried to create a sense of unity or oneness.

In his attempts to get inputs from other individuals, the principal often asked, ‘Tell us what you are thinking’. He appeared to be overtly attempting to get others involved in



decision making. At one point he stated, ‘We need to sort this issue out’. These utterances also suggest the notion of shared responsibility with regard to decision making, hinting towards local participatory democracy. The principal appeared to be trying to get everyone to talk so that they could reach some decision. This links to November *et al.*’s (2010) ideal for principal-educators to open up channels of communication for dialogue.

At the same time, there was also useful understanding from respondents that a democratic culture is not about everyone participating in every decision at every moment. There are times when an authoritarian, instant or top-down response is necessary – if a fire broke out, or if a learner’s safety was threatened. Confidential information about a learner or a family is also rarely to be shared. Although it was clear from the responses that in democratic schools there is a move away from individual decision making, teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School commented:

You can’t on every single issue be democratic but at least wherever you can if the relevant role players can be identified and their opinions and their comments sought as to what they have to say .... I think there are times when maybe the principal would have to make a decision in a kind of autocratic way for the running of the school, for the wheels to turn. You cannot for every single issue be democratic. There are times when the principal will have to take a stand although it should be more the exception rather than the rule.

Excell Secondary School teacher 3 had a similar response:

So the leader has to lead and the leader has to be led at times. I’m just saying then that as the leader the principal has at times to make decisions all by himself and most times as a leader you have to listen to other people.

The respondent also appears to accept the idea of the principal occasionally engaging in decision making without consulting others. In line with the aforementioned argument was the response from the principal at Excell Secondary School:

[S]o sometimes if somebody has to come into my school and tell me I’m being undemocratic – I mean there may be certain cases, instances, I’m not saying no. It wasn’t done intentionally but I can tell you there were more instances I was democratic than undemocratic.

It is clearly a question of balance and appropriateness. In like vein, Harris and Chapman (2002) in their study of democratic leadership for school improvement, found that at critical times principals adopted more autocratic leadership practices. In these two South African schools there seemed to be good understanding of the limits as well as benefits of democracy.

Linked to shared decision making was the notion of a shared vision and purpose. While a feature on Kensler’s list, there would not be agreement that this is necessarily a precondition for democracy. Democracy is arguably more about the provision for dissent

and change than about the notion that all must share the same purpose. Shared vision was unsurprisingly mentioned only by principals, teachers and parents, not learners, and may relate more to management training and wanting a sense of ownership than to anything in the Constitution. However, the Red Star principal made an interesting remark. He reiterated that the school's vision should be a shared one and therefore emphasized that:

It ... is not an individual's vision but a collective vision ... people need to understand that this is a vision for the school and we are not working here for individual glory. We are not working here for our egos.

The key point would be of collective responsibility: in democratic terms it is less the vision itself as the processes by which it was achieved and crucially, how it can be operationalized in daily practice as well as how it can be revised if necessary.

## STRUCTURES FOR VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

In a largish organisation such as a secondary school, the question is of the structures in place whereby views are canvassed and decision making can be collaborative. The document review at Red Star Secondary School revealed the School Management Plan 2000 stating:

It is imperative that we move away from the farce of "democratic management" to the tremendous potentialities inherent in a structure where there is democratic participatory management. For this to occur it is vitally important that the whole staff be represented in the processes of decision-making .... "Traditional staff meetings" should essentially become "Management Council Meetings" in which members of staff represent themselves and contribute directly to decision-making (*Red Star School Management Plan 2000: 2*).

The above plan also referred to breaking up traditional hierarchies in decision making and a move towards collaborative participation in organizational decision making. Thus it is evident that the principal at Red Star Secondary School, as early as 12 years previously, aimed at promoting shared decision making. Furthermore, from observations at the school it was noted that the offices of the SMT and the staff room were moved closer to the principal's office. This close physical proximity of the offices and the staff room was aimed at increasing interaction, collaboration, consultation and communication between the teachers and SMT of which the principal was part. The principal at Red Star Secondary School commented, 'In this way management will get closer to the staff'.

Parent 3 at Red Star Secondary School went on to add another dimension:

This collective decision-making should involve the voices of all those concerned. You can't have collective decision making if individuals representing a particular group are not present. So representativeness is essential.

The interviewee alluded to the need for representation of the various stakeholders on the SGB. This idea was also captured in the response by Excell Secondary School parent 2 who aptly stated, ‘democratic schools will see to it that individuals representing the various groups like the teachers, parents and learners are fully represented’. Representation of stakeholders is clearly spelt out in the SASA. Observations, interviews and document review indicated that all stakeholders were officially represented on the SGBs at both of the schools.

Yet while parents were encouraged to contribute to shared decision making, during observation of the SGB meetings minimal participation by the learners was noted. This suggests that learners’ voices are still silenced. Mncube and Harber (2009) and Mabovula (2008) had similar findings with regard to the learner voice in South African schools. They found that learners were often used for tokenism and decoration – referring to Hart’s (1992) well known ladder of participation, where Level Two represents decoration and Level Three denotes tokenism – and where only higher levels mean real participation. In addressing stakeholder participation, Botha (2010) maintains that principals should create spaces for debate and dialogue so that there is adequate involvement of learner and parent representatives on the SGB. Interestingly, Adams and Waghid (2005) in a study in schools in the Western Cape found that despite the existence of SASA, SGBs do not seem to be conclusively democratic. Findings from their study show that although parent and learner representatives on the SGBs participate, their ‘voices are seldom heard. They participate without having the opportunity to influence decisions’ (Adams and Waghid 2005: 31). This research also was not able to discern real inclusion of learners in decision making at SGB level.

Finally, all the teacher representatives, parent representatives, principals and one of the learner representatives referred to parent apathy. The principal at Red Star Secondary School claimed, ‘the idea that parents should take ownership of the school is not as widespread as it should be’. The teacher representative at Excell Secondary School stated:

From my experience in this school here I feel the parent involvement is a major problem. I find this link between the school and home has been broken. When we talk in terms of parent involvement we expect more.

The question is whether the expectations are too high, or whether more can be done to involve parents.

Involvement may be the responsibility of those with greater power. With regard to the learner participation in the SGB meetings at Red Star Secondary School, both the learner governors were present. These learners presented a report on the events they would be hosting for the year. However, there was only one learner representative present at the meeting at Excell Secondary School. At both schools it was felt that there was not enough effort, if any, on the part of the parent or teacher representatives to include the learners in the discussion. It was only the principal at Excell Secondary

School who asked the learner for her input just once during the meeting. Discussions at SGB meetings gave an impression that the learner representatives were not consulted frequently. It is hard for those without experience or training to make an unsolicited intervention.

This finding is similar to that of Mabovula's (2009) study where learner participation in school governance in five secondary schools in the Eastern Cape was investigated. It was found that although the democratization of school governance has given all stakeholders a powerful voice in school issues through the RCLs, 'learners voices are, seemingly, being silenced' (Mabovula 2009: 219). Rubin and Silva (2003) advise that inclusion of learner voices in school governance requires offering learners realistic space and time to be included in the process of decision making. However, it was felt that perhaps this was not given much attention at the SGB meetings observed at both schools.

At Red Star Secondary School the teacher representative claimed:

[I]n terms of the learner voice I would say that it is not well incorporated .... I must emphasise that the learners are represented on the SGB and issues are often discussed with them. Maybe we should be including them more. I don't think we actually consult them on many issues. We tend more to tell them what's going on. Major issues are sorted out by us the teachers, principal, management and parents.

Two significant points can be noted from this: that learners are often 'told' rather than consulted, and that 'major' issues are sorted out by adults. The minutes of SGB meetings revealed inputs from learners on issues such as change in the school uniform (which was implemented at Excell Secondary School), the need for cutting of the grass after school and conduct of learners after school. These refer to less central issues for the school.

Is training the key? The principal at Excell Secondary School felt:

We as a school can do a little bit more in terms of training of those learners. Although we've done boot camps, leadership courses, etc. there's still room to get to that level or stage. A lot of it is about exposure. I mean it's always about improving things.

The notion of 'exposure' as well as training is interesting. Perhaps giving learners time and space to articulate their inputs will be a better way to address the issue. However, training in deliberation skills and leadership skills will always be beneficial.

It may also be that the standard representative structures are not always the best place for real deliberation and inclusion. The parent representative of Red Star Secondary School gave a significant example of involvement outside such structures:

X is a strong person with an impeccable character and despite the severe lack of time [after the three week long teachers' strike] and pressing worries felt by learners and teachers he decided to consult the learners. And so, in a forum of the grade twelve learner body and their teachers he discussed the pros and cons of various solutions and facilitated a discussion between the learners and teachers. Learners were given a chance

to decide whether they were equipped to write the departmental exam or felt unprepared. They were allowed to air their worries and vote on dates on which examinations would take place. The days following this discussion were filled with ingenious strategies to target key subjects, teaching, and more meetings during which the entire process of planning was explained to the learners and their minds put at ease.

Temporary forums can be useful places to address a pressing concern. The other forums for voice and representation are the more permanent committees and councils. Grille (2003) explains that democratic processes in the classroom include voting and the forming of committees. From observations and document review at both the schools, it was clear that there were various committees in place. Some of these included different learning area committees, committees for various codes of sport, a finance committee and discipline committee. The principal at Excell Secondary School maintained:

So as leaders we must also be mindful of empowering others. But not only empowering but giving respect .... You do not create committees and undermine it. It's a very undemocratic practice ....

This implies that he delegates power and has faith and trust in these committees such that he will not undermine the decisions made.

Our key question as to whether schools prepare students for democracy is how many are able to participate in committees, councils and forums, and what they learn from such participation. At both schools the peer mediators replaced the prefect system. The grade 11 learners were allowed to apply for the positions of peer mediators. These learners formed various committees, which included sports, environment and learner welfare. Learners then organized activities and events for other learners of the school with guidance from teachers. These learners were not only provided with opportunities for leadership roles but they were able to link the school with wider community projects such as drug awareness. Yet it has to be acknowledged that it was the teachers who selected the learners for mediators according to set criteria, rather than any direct democracy on the part of learners themselves. Key committees such as subject committees concerning the curriculum did not have any learner representation, or even any observation by the RCL, and a recommendation would be that such involvement should happen.

It was interesting that while the principal at Red Star Secondary School in his response regarding democracy included the 'committees set up by learners for numerous projects such as the school's feeding scheme and the eco project', none of the learner respondents made reference to these committees in their responses to this specific question. Perhaps they were unaware that such activity can contribute towards making the school democratic; or they felt the committees did not give participants much leverage. As has been found with pupil councils and committees in Europe (Davies and Kirkpatrick 2000), so much depends on how learners are chosen, how representatives use their role, whether they provide regular feedback to those not on councils or committees, and whether they are able to take part in major decision making.

Tokenistic committees may be fun to be on and give skills to those few people on them, but may not really foster a whole school democratic culture that prepares all pupils for active citizenship.

## RESPECT, RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY

One aspect that was frequently mentioned in relation to these structures was, however, respect – respecting the decisions made by committees. In respecting the decisions of others, the notion of trust is created. The belief that individuals have a right to be treated respectfully was a common characteristic acknowledged by respondents in both schools. This is evident in the explanation provided by parent 2 at Excell Secondary School:

Respect as I said is also important. Not only is it important to respect the opinion of others but it is important to also respect the individual. In a democratic school respecting the rights and dignity of others is necessary. There should be respect between teachers, learners and parents.

Here, respect is linked to rights and dignity as outlined in the Constitution. Snauwaert (2002) posits that democracies advance the idea that all individuals possess an equal inherent dignity or worth. Dworkin *et al.* (2003) emphasize the need for mutual respect between teachers and parents as well as mutual respect between teachers and learners.

The South African Constitution (RSA 1996a) reflects universal democratic principles such as equality, respect and accountability. Moreover, it includes a well-established Bill of Rights that outlines the rights of South African citizens. Democratic schools recognize the value and rights of each individual (Nugent and Mooney 2008). Kelly (1995) refers to human rights as a basic principle of education in a democratic society that is of significance to democratic schools. In our schools, the participants referred to the rights of the various stakeholders. For example, parent 1 at Red Star Secondary School maintained: ‘To our principal the rights and views of everyone must be taken into account, and the dignity of all parties preserved.’ Both principals emphasized respect for others as well as the need to respect the rights of others.

Such rights were recognised as relating to diversity. The Constitution recognizes diversity of culture, religion and language, and most importantly promotes respect for such diversity. Discrimination is forbidden. Parent 2 at Red Star Secondary School included the point that all individuals should be treated equally irrespective of the socio-economic background, ‘race’ or gender. Another respondent (teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School) mentioned that democratic schools embrace diversity. Learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School commented: ‘In making a school democratic a principal should be open to talk and interact with anyone of any race group, gender, or religious preference.’

The learner’s response accentuates the notion of the principal in a democratic school promoting fair and non-discriminatory practices (as of course should all members of the school). Similar thoughts are put forth by MacBeath (2004), who explains that in a

democratic school the emphasis is on the equal value of all people, irrespective of gender and background. Interestingly, the various stakeholders at both the sample schools claimed that their principal embraced diversity. One example might be that at both these schools Muslim male learners sought permission to be excused from school on specific days, so that they could memorize the holy book and both these principals consented. One might raise a query about why Muslim female learners were not accorded the same privilege, but that is perhaps a different issue. An Excell Secondary School teacher representative commented:

Well I must emphasize that our interactions are based not only on trust but there is respect for the rights and dignity of those involved. The interests of all learners always take precedence. He [the principal] reminds us that we as classroom managers are ultimately responsible for our actions in the classroom. Our principal ensures that we are all treated equitably. His belief is that we all should be treated fairly. There are equal opportunities for all members of staff to get involved in the running of the school. Even with gender equity one of his deputy principals is a female. Issues of gender bias or gender discrimination have not been an issue at our school. I would say that our principal recognizes our diversity and embraces our differences. He strives to create an environment that is free of discrimination. He embraces cultural diversity with regard to our learners and educators.

The parent representative at Excell Secondary School extended the idea of the principal embracing diversity:

He [the principal] is making every effort to ensure that the staff for example is made up of people from the different racial groups. Bearing in mind that this school was previously a so-called Indian school, he played a pivotal role in ensuring that learners of colour are enrolled from the neighbouring areas. Many African staff members have been recruited and there are also white educators who are members of staff.

Admissions policies and staff recruitment are good indicators of attempts at equity, which is one of the foundations of democracy for many writers.

## CRITICAL THINKING AND OPENNESS

Naicker (2006) elaborates how the South African apartheid education doctrine emphasized control and an authoritarian approach to teaching and learning. Thus, unlike education during the apartheid years that perpetuated separateness, the new regime was teacher centred and content driven, and outcomes-based education, according to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997), aims at developing learners into critical thinkers who would analyse, engage in problem solving and contribute to a democratic society.

An important part of participating in a democracy is the skill and habit of critical thinking. This provides the 'informed choice', which is another of the four cornerstones of democracy for Mncube and Harber (2010). Choosing representatives, voting in



elections, participating in committees, all require access to good information for that choice to be a real one, for alternatives to be weighed up critically. The respondents at both of the schools also referred to critical thinking as being necessary in a democratic school. Learner 3 at Red Star Secondary School was of the opinion that democratic schools promote critical thinking. Learners should 'question things and not just accept things the way they are ... be open to the ideas and views that others have'. The learner is suggesting that critical thinking involves considering alternative views. Learner 2 at the same school expounded:

Basically democratic schools encourage critical thinking as this is a good way to solve problems and everyone looks at the best way to solve a problem. They look at it from different angles and in that way you cover possible ways of solving the problem.

This learner is associating critical thinking with problem solving, as it involves everyone reflecting on an issue. This matches Frank and Huddleston's (2009) contention that critical thinking is a precondition for participating in democratic processes. Frank and Huddleston argue that critical thinking involves the skills of discussion and debate, including advocacy, argument and negotiation. Thinking critically exposes individuals to the views and varied perspectives held by others. This is underscored by many writers on democracy in education (Beane and Apple 1999, Inman and Burke 2002; Mncube and Harber 2010).

At Excell Secondary School teacher 1 acknowledged that a democratic school promotes critical thinking but also emphasized the need for the development of logical argument. Furthermore the teacher stated that, 'To critical thinking I would add openness and again individuals should appreciate and respect the views of others.' The respondent suggests that critical thinking encourages open-mindedness, and the notion of respecting others' views emerges again. Furthermore this teacher maintained that

trust, transparency and openness feature in a democratic school. All role players must trust each other and hence have faith in each other. Transparency is vital so that all partners are aware of what is going on as well as no-one will feel prejudiced. Transparency and openness lends itself to all individuals being treated equally .... All stakeholders must be able to share opinions, which can be debated, and outcomes accepted.

Significantly, this teacher puts together a large mix of ingredients for a democratic school: trust, integrity, faith in others, transparency and openness. In keeping with this view, Bryk and Schneider (2003) contend that integrity is an important component of trust and is the bedrock of collaboration. Integrity contributes to trust and both are vital to teamwork and collaboration. Apple and Beane (2007) point out that collaboration is the foundation of democracy itself, but elaborate that democratic schools emphasize faith in the potential of individuals to find solutions to problems (Beane and Apple 1999). Exposure to different, alternative ideas is also seen as crucial in the challenge to extremism (Davies 2008). 'Respect' here does not mean unquestioningly respecting the

sole voice of authority (whether political, religious or educational), but giving critical attention to diverse voices and solutions. This in turn entails the opportunity to hear and be exposed to these – hence transparency and the free flow of information, as McQuoid-Mason *et al.* (2004) and Kensler (2010) point out.

Clearly, this means broadening the scope of learning and interaction. Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School included community involvement. He felt that:

There should be an interaction between the community and the school because the school is an important part of the community. What is also important to note is that the school cannot function on its own as a separate entity. It has to be connected to the community in which it is located.

Ultimately in a democratic school the interrelatedness between the school and the community is accentuated and the school and the community work in tandem. However, Red Star Secondary School teacher 2 suggested that it is essential for the community in which the school is located to promote democratic practices as well. Schools need to see themselves as ‘part of a larger community with the emphasis on cooperation and collaboration’ (Mncube and Harber 2010: 617). Kluth (2005) elaborates how in democratic schools learners are not only connected to one another, but to the immediate neighbourhood and wider community. We would argue that schools can model democracy and non-violent solutions to problems for the community as well as, in turn, draw on community resources.

## GAPS AND CONSTRAINTS IN DEMOCRACY

This leads to the final question of what was not mentioned much in responses about democracy. While conventional definitions of democracy include making progress through consent rather than violence, and violence is an ever-present threat in South Africa, it was not mentioned as such by participants. One might have expected something on this with regard to codes of conduct, or the disciplinary committee.

The teacher representative at Excell Secondary School corroborated the comment about minimal learner participation at the SGB meetings by explaining:

[L]earners do not make input on all policy issues. When it came to uniform, when it came to matters that deals with the learners we had to get input from them as well so it was taken into account. When it comes to the school code of conduct for learners I must say that this is not always done ... in consultation with both parents and learners. Perhaps we need to focus on all stakeholders getting involved in formulating this document.

This might explain why behaviour is not seen by learners as part of democracy. One learner at Red Star Secondary School explained:

... the school code of conduct and the school rules are also guided by the Constitution of our country. But from my knowledge I don't think the learners really have a say in the code of conduct or school rules.

Even at Excell Secondary School the learner representative stated: 'Like school rules, we don't have a choice .... We give input only on class rules.' It would seem vital, however, that learners participate in understanding and formulating how rights and respect translate into behaviour towards others, and understand their own responsibility in conduct, rather than be subject to top-down rules. Research across different countries on learners being involved in school codes of conduct, or setting up their own behaviour panels, or tackling violence by peers (or teachers) shows conclusively that behaviour improves and that rights to dignity for all are more likely to be upheld (Save the Children 2012; Yamashita and Davies 2010) .

Also, surprisingly, within the notion of democratic schools very little emphasis was placed on the voting process. Perhaps this is because the respondents view democracy as more than just a political system, or not much voting occurred in the schools with regard to positions of power, by learners or teachers. What mentioned there was related to the notion of learner-centred learning. One learner at Red Star recounted:

There is a lot of interaction, speaking, demonstrating and having an all-round constructive lesson. We go above and beyond – thinking outside of the box. We are allowed to voice our opinions in having constructive debates and talks .... During class time when a decision is needed to be made, teachers allow us to take a vote and they do not decide for us.

Admittedly, at both the case study schools there were mixed responses with regard to the learner-centred teaching. One parent talked about 'regurgitation' with regard to teaching. At Red Star Secondary School the principal emphasized the need to complete the syllabus and assessments. He was of the opinion that these issues placed a strain on learner-centred teaching. The principal at Excell Secondary School reiterated similar feelings by explaining that the notion of learner centeredness was difficult to put into practice. Most respondents felt strongly that the current curriculum was prescriptive and the principal at Red Star Secondary School referred to the 'lack of a consultative process into curriculum design'. In other words, he was suggesting that the various stakeholders, namely the parents, learners and teachers did not engage in the design of the curriculum. The learner representative at Red Star Secondary School also added, "Like the curriculum is already set – many of our projects and assignments are already set for us."

It is clear that outside constraints of curriculum and examinations do place limits on democratic decision making in schools for teachers as well as learners. Yet this does not mean giving up. The principal of Excell Secondary School commented:

Democracy is an ideology that contributes to a culture .... A democracy is only as thriving as its people .... You nurture democracy and you protect it because if you don't protect it somebody is going to abuse it.

The protection of democracy in a school, and acknowledging that it is a constantly ongoing project, is perhaps the key principle.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the responses have revealed many similarities between the two schools. With reference to the participants' espoused notion of democratic schooling at both schools, various democratic principles were alluded to. These were seen at many points to emphasize and implement the democratic principles as mirrored in the Constitution of the RSA. From the responses, it is evident that the respondents have moved away from a narrow conceptualization of a democratic school that focuses predominantly on electoral processes and instead included aspects such as collective decision making, consultation, rights, respect and equity – the thick or social conception. Constraints on democracy would still be the traditional conceptions of the child/learner not being suitable to participate in the major decision areas of the school, for example around teaching and learning, or behavioural codes. Constraints would also include how to gain experience in democracy – that for learners in particular, there needs to be skills training, and time given to learning how to do democracy in different spaces. Yet the potentialities are there, both in the structures of representation and committee participation, and in the emphasis given to critical thinking in the classroom. The latter is important in being able to reach every learner, not just those on official bodies. These schools have shown that to understand what democracy means, we need to move beyond the abstract and practice democracy, which will imply everyone living it.

## REFERENCES

- Cox, S., Robinson-Pant, A., Dyer, C. and Schweisfurth, M. 2010. *Children as decision-makers in education: Sharing experiences across cultures*. London: Continuum.
- Davies, L. 2004. *Education and conflict: Complexity and chaos*. London: Routledge.
- Davies, L. 2008. *Educating against extremism*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham.
- Dewey, J. 1937. Education and social change. *Teachers College Record* 3(26): 235–238.
- Green, J.M. 1999. *Deep democracy: Community, diversity, and transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hart, R. 1992. *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. Innocenti Essays No 4*. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- Grille, R. 2003. Democracy begins at school: A new world trend in education. Retrieved from <http://www democratic.co.il/uploads/english/articles/DemocracyBeginsAtSchool.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2010).

- Naidoo, R. 2011. Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Ph.D. thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Rubin, B., C. and Silva, E.M. (eds.). 2003. *Critical voices in school reform: Students living through change*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Save the Children. 2012. *Breaking the cycle of crisis: Learning from the children's delivery of education in conflict-affected fragile states*. London: Save The Children.
- Yamashita, H. and Davies, L. 2010. Students as professionals: The London secondary school councils action research project. In Percy-Smith, B. and N. Thomas (eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation*. London: Routledge.

# TOWARDS CULTURALLY CONTEXTUALISED PEDAGOGIES IN AFRICAN SCHOOLS

**Michele Schweisfurth**  
University of Glasgow  
Michele.Schweisfurth@glasgow.ac.uk

## ABSTRACT

Pedagogy is a complex phenomenon and efforts to reform it in African schools have more often led to more continuities and unintended consequences than wholesale change. This article explores how global norms of good pedagogy have travelled and considers the tensions between these and local practice. It calls for contextualised pedagogies that are responsive to local cultures and resource realities, but within a shared framework of evidence-based practice and children's rights.

Keywords: pedagogy, travelling policies, culturally appropriate teaching

## INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy is a complex and important topic and one that receives insufficient attention in research, in the detail of policy, and in the framing of practice. Alexander defines it as a combination of 'the performance of teaching along with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it' (Alexander 2000: 540). This combination opens up the possibility of contradictions and competing imperatives, as what teachers do is rarely a perfect reflection of what they are trying to do. In addition, understandings of quality teaching and learning constitute an excellent example of tensions between global frameworks and local cultural and resource realities. On the one hand, an increasingly coherent and powerful global discourse about education quality is setting a pedagogical agenda, however obliquely. On the other hand, culture and resources are powerful drivers for practice, which is local in its manifestations. In sub-Saharan Africa, these resource realities are extreme in many cases, and both local cultures and classroom cultures are themselves overlaid with traditional, colonial and contemporary influences and variations (Tabulawa 2009). Teachers' actions and beliefs shape the learning outcomes and ultimately the lives of learners, and yet the complexities of pedagogy in African settings make it a moving target to study and a shape-shifting phenomenon to attempt to change.

In this article, I will explore some of these tensions between normative views of good pedagogy and the lived and aspirational worlds of classrooms in Africa. Based on my own work on learner-centred education in developing countries (Schweisfurth 2011, Schweisfurth 2013a, Schweisfurth 2013b), I will illustrate how this example

of a travelling policy interfaces with local realities and what some of the unintended consequences can be. These irresolvable tensions between the global and the local lead inevitably to calls both for guiding frameworks with universal principles and for contextualised pedagogies. Given these contradictions and the need to find a way to live with them, the article will then turn to the question of how a combination of global framework and local interpretation might be defined and operationalised, and by whom. The article draws on an eclectic range of my own and others' empirical and conceptual work on pedagogy in developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, and is exploratory rather than prescriptive in its vision of culturally contextualised pedagogy for African schools. I am not calling for a continent-wide African pedagogy – even if this could be reasonably defined in this vast and diverse continent – but there are a number of broad patterns that emerge and that demand further contextualisation in individual settings. They also have implications across the region.

## ASPIRATIONS

In this global age, policies travel, and education policies, including those that advocate particular pedagogical approaches, are no exception. In the case of pedagogy, the forces that make policies move and agendas converge include a combination of bottom-up and top-down pressures and aspirations (Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008).

At national and local levels, there is a perfectly reasonable desire for improved development outcomes both for individuals and for the nation. In terms of pedagogy, at least three different 'narratives' fuel these desires and advocacy for particular pedagogical approaches (Schweisfurth 2013b) in their promising links to development. Firstly, there is the belief that improved classroom practice will lead to improved cognitive and learning outcomes. In the case of learner-centred pedagogy, this relates to the constructivist model of teaching and learning, which focuses on learners' engagement and pattern formation in the quest for more effective learning. More effective learning by individuals will, it is argued, reap development benefits for everyone. Secondly, some pedagogies are believed to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that contribute to democratic citizenship and therefore democratic societies, through, for example, experiences of critical questioning and egalitarian relationships in class. A third narrative, increasingly popular in policy terms, is about preparation of learners for the knowledge economy. The desired outcomes are those aptitudes and skills that relate to his mode of economic production: independence, an inquiring mind and skills in research. These are also often linked to learner-centred approaches, which encourage independent learning and transferable skills rather than the acquisition of facts that decay over time.

All these narratives have some foundation in theory and evidence but this is mixed and occasionally contradictory: much of the faith in these narratives is based on ideology or on assumed relationships between particular pedagogies and learner outcomes. That is not to say that they are not true, but I emphasise again that these are narratives rather than truths and more research evidence is needed. However, ideology can be at least



as important as evidence. The evidence regarding different pedagogical strategies and better test results is mixed and depends a great deal on how the pedagogy is implemented, what the tests are assessing, and how motivated the learners are to succeed on them, but choice of classroom strategies by individual teachers is as likely to be based on beliefs as logic. On another level, the emancipatory narrative, for example, has a foundation in the ideology that human freedoms, and the development of capabilities and human rights are inherently good things and developmental in themselves. Regardless of the evidence base, this ideology demands that classrooms are run in more democratic ways – not only to ensure appropriate outcomes but in order to respect the rights of learners in the process.

These same narratives, which fuel pedagogical change within countries, are also drivers for movement of policy and, potentially, increasing homogeneity in terms of policy (and, aspirationally at least, practice). International agreements and international agencies of various kinds all reinforce the goals embedded in the narratives above. They also variously give them quasi-legal standing, global credibility, or support in the form of frameworks and advice or resources.

There are implications for pedagogy, for example, within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which almost all countries in the UN are signatories, including almost all African nations. Among the relevant articles are: Article 12, which refers to the right of each child to express their views freely in matters affecting them, Article 13, which refers to the right of freedom of access to information and expression, and Article 29, which celebrates the individuality of each child. Article 28 – rather boldly and with an unelaborated and unsubstantiated prescription – encourages international collaboration with developing countries in pursuit of ‘modern teaching methods’. The status of these articles creates pressures, at least at the level of discourse, to move pedagogy in more learner-centred directions. un agencies including Unesco and Unicef help to reinforce the importance of the UNCRC and create programmes which roll out its messages and support pedagogies which respect these rights. These include Unesco’s Associated Schools Project Network and Unicef’s Child-Friendly and Rights Respecting Schools. Unesco also has a role in the Education for All (EFA) movement, through the Dakar Framework, the Millennium Development Goals, and the annual Global Monitoring Report. While access to schooling has dominated the EFA agenda, pedagogy is embedded through the emphasis on quality, although the detail is often left to interpretation.

Additionally, a number of international non-governmental organisations and aid agencies are influential in supporting particular models of pedagogy, and therefore help to reinforce particular norms of practice or encourage change in particular directions. The International Network of Education in Emergencies, for example, lists child-centred pedagogies as a minimum standard for education in emergency and post-emergency contexts, while ActionAid’s REFLECT programme, aimed at adult learners, adopts emancipatory pedagogies based on the philosophy and practice of Paulo Freire.

At the interface of these bottom-up desires and top-down pressures, we find governments feeling pressures to be seen to be modernising pedagogies, both for the international donor community and to meet the aspirations of their own citizens. This helps to explain why in sub-Saharan Africa there has been a proliferation of national curriculum reforms with learner-centred, child-centred or outcomes-based education at their heart (Chisholm and Leyendecker 2009), all of which have profound implications for pedagogy even if policy does not engage with the implications or the challenges of their implementation.

## REALITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

There is a yawning gap, however, between these travelling and increasingly globalised norms of pedagogy, the aspirations of policy and citizens, and the reality of most learners' experiences of schooling in Africa. Profiles of classroom practice in sub-Saharan African countries bear remarkable similarities to one another. Broad descriptions, for example, from country profiles from a study of science, maths and ICT (SMICT 2005; Chisholm and Leyendecker 2009) reveal the preponderance of 'teacher-centred', 'frontal', 'chalk and talk', 'read-regurgitate-recite cycle' and 'content-driven' strategies. A baseline study from Kenya (Hardman *et al.* 2009) noted commonalities across 102 videotaped lessons, which may resonate with observations in many classrooms:

- Lessons were dominated by lecturing punctuated by question-and-answer routine, pupils copying from the chalkboard, written exercises and teachers marking pupils' work.
- The vast majority of questions were 'closed' (i.e. calling for a single response or offering facts) as opposed to 'open' (i.e. calling for more than one answer): open-ended questions accounted for only 2 per cent of the total.
- Pupil questions were rare, making up 1 per cent of the questioning exchanges.
- Boys were nearly twice as likely to be asked a question by the teacher than girls.
- Over a third of pupil responses were given by choral response.
- Paired/group work was observed in only 3 per cent of lessons.
- 96 per cent of lessons used a traditional classroom layout with desks set out in rows facing the chalkboard (Hardman *et al.* 2009: 69).

Despite the UNCRC and legislation across many countries banning forms of corporal punishment, these are also factors in many classrooms and are a part of the pedagogical landscape (Harber 2006).

In other words, the observable reality of classroom pedagogy rarely aligns with either the rights-based, or cognition-based, or preparation-based arguments, and is often not aligned with policy proclamations either. Analyses of the gaps between policy

prescriptions or suggestions for pedagogical change, and the resilience of pedagogical continuities, have proliferated in recent years. A large number of single-country studies, plus meta-analyses that note common threads between them, have been published. As I have surveyed these elsewhere (Schweisfurth 2011; Schweisfurth 2013), I will not document these threads in detail here. The sheer enormity of the challenge of change has been underestimated, it is argued, and Tabulawa (2013) posits it as a 'paradigm shift'. While being over-optimistic about the ease of implementation, policy is also accused of being contradictory in many cases – for example, by allowing the co-existence of high-stakes examinations with prescriptions for more open, flexible and learner-responsive pedagogies. When the test is life or death, teachers will teach to the test and students and parents will demand that they do. The discourse around pedagogy – policy or otherwise – is notoriously slippery, and understandings of terms such as learner-centred, outcomes-based or child-centred vary hugely, opening up space for slippage and misinterpretation (Schweisfurth 2013; Nykiel Herbert 2004), and these varying interpretations are not restricted to developing country contexts. Global norms in themselves are not consistent, with a range of agencies attempting to promote learner-centred approaches through reflective practice and the professionalization of teachers, while others argue for more scripted lessons and tightly framed goals for learning.

On the practical side, teachers point to the challenges of large classes and a lack of appropriate teaching resources as impediments to desired shifts. Among the other key factors that also function as barriers to implementation of pedagogical change at the classroom level are lack of appropriate training for teachers (for example in terms of the time allowed, or in terms of modelling desired pedagogical strategies through the training), and poor cultural fit. For example, in cultures where adult-child relationships are power distant (Hofstede 2003) pedagogy tends to reflect this, and to expect changes to teacher-pupil relationships and power balances is effectively to demand cultural change. In combination, these factors, interacting with student and parental motivations and valuing of education, become fossilised and interdependent over long periods of mutual reinforcement. Ultimately, they work together to create what Hufton and Elliott (2000) have called a 'pedagogical nexus', which is highly resistant to change and is much more powerful than policy in determining the lived experience of classrooms.

These persistent dysjunctures between policy discourse and lived experience are one reason that a number of researchers have called for the contextualisation of pedagogy so that expectations are in harmony with local cultural and resource realities, and so that good local practice is not judged unfairly against inappropriate norms from outside. The implied 'either-or' dichotomy between teacher-centred and learner-centred practice denies the possibility of fusions and the selective use of a varied menu of pedagogical possibilities. Detailed observations of practice in African contexts point to evidence of responsive pedagogical approaches that are learner-centred if seen in context. Examples include Croft's (2002) observations of how Malawian teachers use music to draw children into a lesson and encourage participation; Barrett's (2007) analysis of Tanzanian teachers' varied repertoire of practice in response to the needs

of different groups of students; and the adaptation of imported learning materials on education for democracy into learning settings in Gambia (Schweisfurth 2002). These demonstrate the thriving existence of what Vavrus (2009), from her intensive work in Tanzania over a long period, calls ‘contingent constructivism’: the use of appropriate modes and levels of learner-centred practice that fit the situation and the capacities of teachers. So, one way to get through the impasse of this policy-practice gap is to make policy more responsive to practice and the cultural and resource realities that shape it. The assumption is that attempts to improve and shape classroom practice will not fall into the traps of unrealistic expectations, misinterpretations, and intentional or unintentional resistance if these attempts are responsive to the more subtle workings of longstanding locally understood and locally experienced methods and teacher-student relationships, as well as to the limitations of large classes and shortages of resources.

There are other reasons as well for contextualising pedagogy. Sternberg (2007) uses the concept of ‘successful intelligence’ to analyse learning in different contexts and to argue for a broader understanding of what learning means and how teaching interacts with culture in shaping it. His conclusions militate against the wholesale transfer or importation of pedagogical practices or even learning materials. Some of his key observations are:

- The very act of assessing cognitive and educational performance affects that performance differentially across cultures.
- Individuals in different cultures may think about concepts and problems in different ways.
- Behaviour that is viewed as smart in one culture may be viewed as not so smart or even stupid in another.
- Students do better on assessments when the material on which they are assessed is familiar and meaningful to them.
- Children may develop contextually important skills at the expense of academic ones. So they may have developed adaptive skills that matter in their environment, but that teachers do not view as part of ‘intelligence’ (or as an important part of learning).
- When children are taught in culturally appropriate ways, their achievement increases (Sternberg 2007: 6–16).

These observations have a number of important implications for the contextualisation of pedagogy: assessment means different things to learners in different contexts; meaning is made differently; behaviours are judged in divergent ways; learners need to be personally familiar with assessed materials and so it needs to be set within their lived worlds; learning is much broader than narrow understandings of curriculum and pedagogy suggest; and, perhaps most importantly, some forms of pedagogy may be more culturally appropriate in some contexts than they are in others, and if we want

learners to achieve well, pedagogy needs to be adapted accordingly.

There is also the question of cultural rights. Some who query the appropriateness of global models of good pedagogy for all cultural contexts do so within a post-colonial frame. The argument is that imported notions of good practice are not only unsuitable in terms of learning experiences and outcomes, but are fuelled by global hegemonies that should be questioned and potentially resisted. The packaging of pedagogical norms and the influence used by actors on the global stage to promote them in African settings are seen as a form of neo-colonialism. Influences may be subtle and a question of soft power rather than conspiracy, and those promoting pedagogical convergences may be well-intentioned, and even emancipatory in their goals. However, this post-colonial framework suggests that even these good intentions are misguided from a global justice point of view. Tabulawa, for example, points to neo-liberal influences such as those exercised by the World Bank as major drivers for the import of learner-centred pedagogies to African contexts and Botswana in particular (Tabulawa 2003 and 2009).

Given these calls for contextualisation and evidence of its importance, why is policy regarding pedagogy not more contextualised, and why do many other actors such as teacher educators continue to promote convergence to global norms? The answer lies partly in the hegemonies alluded to above, and the combination of bottom-up and top-down pressures for modernisation and therefore pedagogies considered to be more modern. The fact that these are difficult to define and shifting in interpretation might have created space for contextualisation, and for indigenous pedagogies to thrive. However, the power of the discourses of modernity, the influences of international agencies, and difficulties of capacity have generally not encouraged or facilitated use of this space. There is also, as Tabulawa notes (2009), a confluence of traditional norms of adult-child relationships with colonial legacies, and so it is not necessarily easy to judge what is truly indigenous in the multi-layered realities of classroom life in Africa. Formal schooling is, after all, originally an imported and to some extent imposed structure. And as prismatic society theory (Riggs 1964) suggests, many Africans as individuals are accustomed to living with the contradictions of layers of tradition and modernity, and have adapted remarkably to these competing imperatives and co-existing contrasting worlds. Pedagogy prescriptions are perhaps another example of this fragmentation and another source of daily contradictions that teachers and learners navigate as best they can.

## TOWARDS CULTURALLY CONTEXTUALISED PEDAGOGIES

At this moment in time, we are at a critical juncture in development directions: 2014–2015 is the end of the Millennium Development Goals era and a new context of co-operation across development agencies to identify new shared goals. I am concerned that the calls for contextualisation may not be fully heeded by those who shape global governance decisions. Measurement of learning is becoming increasingly standardised. Research methodologies such as systematic reviews and randomised control trials have

space for contextualisation but the preferred outcome is inevitably a decontextualised ‘silver bullet’ solution, which can be universally applied to meet common learning goals. Again, I am certainly not suggesting that improved learning across the board is a sinister agenda – who does not want better learning outcomes for all children? However, the route there is complex, and the discourse shift to ‘learning’ instead of ‘teaching’ once again obscures pedagogy and reinforces what Alexander has described as ‘a vacuum into which are sucked a plethora of claims about what constitutes “best practice” (Alexander 2008: 2).

What would a culturally contextualised pedagogy look like, and how might it be developed? The definition of pedagogy set out by Alexander in 2000, which opened this article, emphasises both act and intention in teaching. This reminds us that understanding what a contextualised pedagogy might mean is not simply a case of observing what is happening and replicating it. It is also a case of understanding what teachers are trying to do, and why. I would argue that it is also important to capture children’s views and aspirations – their voices have been widely neglected in the literature on pedagogy in developing countries generally and in African countries specifically.

In a recent book (Schweisfurth 2013b), I attempt to set out a framework of ‘minimum standards’ for pedagogy, which is broadly but not prescriptively learner-centred. It draws on the research evidence regarding pedagogy that nurtures learning. It does so within a framework of human and child rights, as in my view these are not negotiable. In this I am not alone; the African Charter of Children’s Rights (Organisation for African Unity, entered into force in 1999) sets a salient example, celebrating and promoting respect for local cultural practices while setting a demanding rights agenda. The concept of this minimum standards framework is that within this very broad agenda – promotion of learning while respecting rights – each standard can be adapted to a national or even individual learning context in order to build on the benefits of contextualisation, both for learning and for facilitating meaningful change. The framework includes the following principles: learner engagement; mutual respect between teachers and students; building on learners’ existing knowledge; dialogue; curricular (and linguistic) relevance; the development of skills such as critical thinking; and assessment that aligns with these principles. In practice, each might look different in different contexts. For example, relationships of mutual respect might still be relatively formal rather than overtly egalitarian and unstructured. I welcome questioning of this list, as part of a process of refinement in the light of others’ experiences and understanding of aspirations. I also welcome a deeper understanding of how these or their refinements might vary between contexts, and how this might be made possible. Informed outsiders may have a facilitating role in developing these understandings, but the agenda will need to be set by cultural insiders.

The arguments for contextually sensitive pedagogies are building, as is the evidence of the need for them. However, it is as yet not a fully tested mantra. Teasing apart the global and the local and finding ways of drawing on the best of both will be a long and challenging process. However, I would argue that the process itself is a very meaningful



one and a requisite step towards the establishment of culturally contextualised pedagogy as well as the building of capacity and ownership in African learning settings.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, R.J. 2000. *Culture and pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Alexander, R.J. 2008. *Education for all, the quality imperative and the problem of pedagogy*. Brighton: Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity.
- Barrett, A. 2007. Beyond the polarisation of pedagogy: Models of classroom practice in Tanzanian primary school. *Comparative Education* 43( 2): 273–294.
- Chisholm, L. and Leyendecker, R. 2008. Curriculum reform in post-1990s sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development* 28: 195–205.
- Croft, A. 2002. Singing under a tree: Does oral culture help lower primary teachers to be learner-centred? *International Journal of Educational Development* 22(3/4): 321–337.
- Harber, C. 2002. *Schooling as violence*. London: Routledge
- Hofstede, G. 2003. *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organisations across nations*, 2nd edition. London: Sage.
- Nykiel-Herbert, B. 2004. Misconstructing knowledge: The case of learner-centred pedagogy in South Africa. *Prospects* 34(3): 249–265.
- Schweisfurth, M. 2002. Democracy and teacher education: Negotiating practice in The Gambia. *Comparative Education* 38(3): 303–314.
- Schweisfurth, M. 2011. Learner-centred education in developing country contexts: From solution to problem? *International Journal of Educational Development* 31: 425–432.
- Schweisfurth, M. 2013a. Learner-centred education in international perspective. *Journal of International and Comparative Education* 2(1): 3–8.
- Schweisfurth, M. 2013b. *Learner-centred education in international perspective: Whose pedagogy for whose development?* London: Routledge.
- Sternberg, R.J. 2007. Culture, instruction and assessment. *Comparative Education* 43(1): 5–22.
- Tabulawa, R. 2003. Pedagogical classroom practice and social context: The case of Botswana. *Comparative Education* 39(1): 7–26.
- Tabulawa, R. 2009. Education reform in Botswana: Reflections on policy contradictions and paradoxes. *Comparative Education* 45(1): 87–107.
- Tabulawa, R. 2013. *Teaching and learning in context: Why pedagogical reforms fail in sub-Saharan Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Vavrus, F. 2009. The cultural politics of constructivist pedagogies: Teacher education reform in the United Republic of Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development* 29: 303–311.



# EXAMINING SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Hester Nienaber  
University of South Africa  
nienah@unisa.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

The issue of effective school governance ensuring quality in education in South Africa is often raised in the literature. Some authors are of the view that the current form of school governance is sophisticated and complex. A question that arises is whether school governing board members have the skills to effectively discharge their responsibility. Literature suggests training as a means of capacitating members to be able to effectively do so. However, limited success is achieved with training. The question thus arises whether the training is perhaps too limited. Servant leadership is examined as an alternative to empower members of school governing bodies to effectively discharge responsibilities. According to servant leadership, all members of a group/community, irrespective of designation, can contribute to the betterment of the group/community.

Keywords: effective school governance, school governing bodies, servant leadership, South Africa, autonomy, ethical theory

## INTRODUCTION

School governing bodies, an important role player in ensuring quality in education in South Africa, often receive attention in the literature. One of the points highlighted in these reviews is challenges to the effective functioning of the School Governing Body (SGB) (see for example Heystek 2006; 2010; Mbokodi and Singh, 2011; Mncube, Harber and Du Plessis 2011; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk and Lemmer 2008; Xaba 2011). A variety of reasons are advanced for the governance challenges, which have as a central theme the capacity to govern (Xaba 2011). Effective school governance has wide ranging positive results, including improved academic achievement (Mbokodi and Singh, 2011; Mncube *et al.* 2011). Hence, it is relevant to study effective school governance.

The concept of school governance, school governance in its current form as well as school governance as a partnership between stakeholders, is not unique to South Africa (Tsotetsi *et al.* 2008). The South African Schools Act (Act No.84 of 1996) (SASA) formally provides for democratic governance, which entails the decentralisation of power to school level, through the establishment of the SGB. The SGB has considerable powers, which are prescribed by the SASA, including the composition and function of the SGB. Membership of SGB comprises the principal, co-opted members and elected members from parents of learners at the school, educators at the school, members of

staff who are not educators and learners in the eighth grade or higher in secondary schools. The parents hold a majority presentation (50% plus one member). Functions include, but are not limited to, the development of a school mission statement; adopting a code of conduct of learners of the school; act on misconduct by learners; determine the admission and language policy of the school; and support educators (principal, educators and other staff) in the performance of their professional functions. This form of school governance is described as sophisticated and complex (Tsetetsi *et al.* 2008). Hence, research raises the question whether the stakeholders in democratic governance are adequately equipped to effectively discharge their responsibility (Heystek 2006; Mbokodi and Singh 2011; Xaba 2011).

Heystek (2010), Mncube *et al.* (2011) and Tsetetsi *et al.* (2008) observed that training could play a role in equipping members of SGBs to effectively discharge their responsibilities. Some authors mentioned success achieved by training, albeit limited (Xaba 2011). The question that arises is whether training, which seems to cover only duties prescribed by the SASA, is too narrow, in view of the challenges experienced. Consequently, this conceptual article examines servant leadership as a way out of these challenges. This is achieved by a synthesis review of the literature on servant leadership, with specific reference to school governing bodies. Literature was searched by subject, specifically education, covering databases such as ProQuest, Emerald and EbscoHost. Search terms used were ‘servant leadership’ and limited to ‘school board/governing body’. A total of 180 articles were returned of which ten met the inclusion criteria of discussing the concept servant leadership and/or servant leadership in the context of a school board (governing body). These articles were mainly qualitative in nature, examining the concept servant leadership and/or the application of servant leadership in the context of school governing bodies (schools boards). From these articles it appeared that school governing bodies utilising servant leadership achieve successes.

## CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

This section briefly highlights challenges to effective school governance in South Africa. These challenges are presented in no specific order, nor is it claimed that the list is all-encompassing. Rather, the challenges presented are deemed to represent the scope of the situation. Some of the governance challenges stem from the SASA itself. These range from the ambiguity of the provisions of the SASA to members lacking requisite skills to effectively discharge of their duties (Heystek 2006; Tsetetsi *et al.* 2008; Xaba 2011). The difference between school governance and professional issues is but one example of the provisions of SASA that gives rise to challenges (Heystek 2006; Tsetetsi *et al.* 2008; Xaba 2011). It is argued that parents will not be able to support the principal if they cannot get involved in at least some professional issues, for example, questioning the frequent absence of a teacher, which may be perceived as infringing on the rights of teachers (Heystek 2006). The lack of skills, in particularly financial and policy development and implementation, is explicitly mentioned as examples of

a lack of skills (Tsetetsi *et al.* 2008; Xaba 2011). Management of school resources, in particular finances and facilities management, which relates to specialised skills and thus related to the previous point, is also cited (Tsetetsi 2008; Xaba 2011). Strained relationships between the members of SGB, emanating from differences in perceptions about the roles of and/or the efficacy with which members discharge their duties are also observed (Heystek 2006; Mbokodi and Singh 2011; Mncube *et al.* 2011; Tsetetsi *et al.* 2008; Xaba 2011). Strained relationships result in parents' non-participation in SGB activities (Mbokodi and Singh 2011; Mncube *et al.* 2011; Xaba 2011), which is not an autonomous choice. Non-participation in SGB activities, whether in the form of absenteeism or presenteeism, in effect, silences a minority voice, instead of involving everyone in decision making as well as endorsing the decisions. As a result, some members are deprived of an opportunity to develop as autonomous, rational and responsible persons, which is tantamount to disrespecting their autonomy. Consequently, democratic governance, the ultimate aim of SGB, is thwarted.

## LEADERSHIP AND THE 'SERVANT LEADERSHIP'

Servant leadership constitutes part of the leadership lexicon, which is integral to the philosophy (knowledge) of (general) management (see, for example, Grisiri 2013). In focusing on leadership, the discussions aim to understand the craft of being a leader, rather than on becoming a good leader (Grisiri 2013). Generally, leadership is associated with the top echelons of an organisation (as opposed to leading) (Grisiri 2013) and as such is ultimately charged with the responsibility for the performance of the organisation (see, for example, Nienaber 2010). It is argued in the literature that servant leadership differs from the traditional views of leadership (Parris and Peachy 2013; Reinke 2004). The traditional leadership paradigm generally emphasises hierarchical position and power based on authority and top-down relationships. Servant leadership, in contrast, holds that hierarchical position is not a pre-requisite, but rather the moral and ethical behaviour of people are paramount (Cassel and Holt 2008; Crippen 2006; Reinke 2004; Zhang and Lin 2012).

The crux of servant leadership, as conceptualised by Greenleaf (1970, in Greenleaf 1998) is a philosophy that each person can adopt to guide his or her decisions and actions in all spheres of life. Greenleaf (1970, in Greenleaf 1998: 1) defined servant leadership as follows:

The servant leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. The conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

Servant leadership is a holistic approach to work, the promotion of a sense of community and a deepening understanding of spirit in the workplace (Greenleaf 1998).

Servant leadership advocates a group-orientated approach to analysis and decision making as a means to strengthening both institutions and society (Greenleaf 1998). The central questions guiding the creation of great organisations are ‘who do you serve’ and ‘to what purpose’ (Greenleaf 1998: 10). Greenleaf wrote, ‘I prefer not to define serve explicitly at this time. Rather I would let the meaning it has for me evolve as one reads through the essay’ (Greenleaf 1998: 21). Given this statement, one can understand that Phipps (2010) observed that Greenleaf’s writings were mostly narrative in form and lacked an operational definition of servant leadership. This kind of writing leaves room for interpretation. Parris and Peachey (2013) mentioned that only a limited number of studies have empirically examined servant leadership. This observation holds equally true for the educational literature (Crippen 2006), especially those pertaining to school governing bodies/boards. Parris and Peachy (2013) also pointed out that these reviews interpret Greenleaf’s writings differently, highlighting the plurality of servant leadership. Despite the different interpretations of servant leadership, all literature includes the fundamental dimension of the willingness to serve others (Parris and Peachy 2013). The essence of servant and serving is transformation, and specifically improved performance (Greenleaf 1998), rather than servitude as suggested by Bowie (2000). Transformation results from relationships among equals, which empower a person to arrive at the common good of the group (Cassel and Holt 2008; Crippen 2006; Zhang and Lin 2012). These relationships are based on values, in particular those of trust, respect and service (Parris and Peachy 2013; Reinke 2004). The relationships are built on trust between leaders and followers and among followers (Greenleaf 1998). The relationships are also influenced by mind-sets that can enable or restrain people to use knowledge to facilitate transformation for the betterment of the community (Greenleaf 1998). This knowledge does not only reside in the ‘establishment’ but in people from all socio-economic groups. Possessing knowledge is necessary for transformation, but not sufficient. People should act on their knowledge to bring about transformation (Greenleaf 1998).

In summary servant leadership can improve organisational performance because it builds a trusting, supportive community that fosters creativity and initiative. It is characterised as ethical, including a moral component centred on a concern for followers and their needs, rejecting authoritarian (coercive) approaches. The servant leader creates opportunities for followers to help them grow to achieve their full potential to the benefit of accomplishing tasks and goals for the common good without being sacrificed/used in the process (Cassel and Holt 2008; Spears 1998; Zang and Lin 2012). Servant-leadership incorporates the ideals of empowerment, total quality, team building, and participatory decision making, and the service ethic into a leadership philosophy.

The craft of servant leadership includes, but is not limited to, the following abilities (elsewhere labelled characteristics) initially identified by Spears (1998) and accepted by the research community focussing on schools/education (see Crippen 2006; Ekundayo, Damhoeri and Ekundayo 2010):

- Effective leaders are great communicators, which command receptive listening. Good listening includes attending to one's inner voice as well as to others, dedicated to understand the communication of others. The need for silence, reflection, meditation and active listening and actually hearing what is said and unsaid is part of listening.
- Efforts to understand and empathise with others by identifying with the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others. Civility is built upon empathy. Empathy is consistent with caring especially in a supportive manner (as opposed to patronising), showing sensitivity and above all accepting the person for whom he or she really is, even though their performance may be judged critically in terms of what they are capable of doing. Empathy may lead to building trust.
- Healing, whether one's self or others on the basis of an understanding about personal and/or organisational health. Despite the risk of contamination, the spirits of others are raised. Healing can come through just quietly being or meditation.
- Awareness, especially self-awareness, which is developed through self-reflection, including listening to what others communicate to us about ourselves; being continually open to learning, in particular by making the connection between what we know and believe and our communication and action.
- Persuasion rather than coerce compliance. A person is persuaded by arriving at a feeling of rightness about a belief or action through one's own intuitive sense. In a group setting consensus is a method of using persuasion. Consensus implies participation.
- Conceptualisation – to nurture their own abilities to dream great dreams (vision); to see the whole in the perspective of history, past and future; to state and adjust goals; to evaluate and to analyse; to foresee contingencies a long way ahead. Leadership, in setting direction on the course to a vision, is more conceptual than operational. The conceptualiser, at his or her best, is a persuader and a relation builder.
- Foresight – the ability to foresee the future or merely know the likely outcome of a situation. Greenleaf (1998) deems foresight a wholly rational process, the product of a constantly running internal computer that deals with intersecting series and random inputs, and is vastly more complicated than anything technology has yet produced. Foresight means regarding the events of the immediate moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future (Greenleaf 1998).

- Stewardship – Greenleaf (1998) believed all members of an organization, irrespective of type, play significant roles in holding their institutions in trust (caring for the well-being of the institution and serving the needs of others in the institution) for the greater good of society. Each person, notwithstanding designation, has a role in contributing to the organisation in making a difference to the organisation as a whole. Stewardship encompasses personal responsibility to manage one's own life and affairs with due regard for the rights of other people and for the common welfare. As such, Greenleaf (1998) viewed the servant leader as among the people, not above/superior.
- Commitment to the growth of people by nurturing others and supporting them to achieve their full potential.
- Building community by some means, usually utilising one or more of three approaches – giving back through service to the community, investing financially into the community, and caring about one's community. These approaches suggest an active participation in community life, which promotes a democratic mode of association. Most importantly a sense of belonging defined by a shared sense of purpose does not eliminate a person's uniqueness but focuses all energies into a resilient community. This includes the cultivation of meaning, community, and responsibility and states.

These abilities as set out above are intertwined. Moreover, they resound partly with the ideas put forward by the pioneers in management as illuminated by Nienaber (2010) as well as Reinke (2004). The pioneers pointed out that leadership can be exercised by many people, not only top executives. They further called attention to the fact that individuals have a will of their own and should be treated as mature adults (equals) who can make a contribution to the organisation, rather than trying to drive them by fear. Treating people as mature adults implies treating them as equals. This involves the craft of servant leadership to a greater or lesser extent.

Servant leadership as described in this section is in line with ethical theory as proposed by Kant (1724–1804), in particular the duty theories (*Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*). In terms of the duty theories, human beings have clear, and specific, moral obligations towards one self and one another. Most importantly people should treat people as ends and not as means to ends. These means people should always be treated with dignity, which determines the morality of all actions. This implies that the autonomy of each person is acknowledged.

## CONCLUSION

Literature holds that quality in education in South Africa is threatened because of challenges to effective functioning of SGBs. The essence of the challenges is rooted



in the capacity to govern. The SASA provides for democratic governance by the decentralisation of power to school level, through the establishment of SGB. However, some authors are of the view that this form of governance is sophisticated and complex. Authors express their doubt as to whether stakeholders in democratic governance are adequately equipped to effectively discharge of their responsibility.

SGB members can be trained to prepare themselves to effectively discharge their responsibilities. The training provided pertains to the functions of a SGB, and not necessarily specialised skills or leadership. Some authors observed that training is only succeeding to some degree. The role of servant leadership in improving the effective functioning of the SGB was considered, although limited literature is available in the context of school governing bodies.

Servant leadership is interpreted differently. Only a few studies were done in the context of SGB. Nevertheless the central focus of servant leadership is service to others, without compromising the self, to the common good of the group. Service to the common good implies transformation. Transformation results from relationships among equals, which is based on values of trust, respect and service. The relationships are influenced by mind-sets enabling or restraining people to use knowledge to the betterment of the community.

To contribute to the betterment of the group requires a person to take up his or her autonomy and to act freely. Prejudice should not inhibit a person to offer his or her abilities, however modest, to facilitate transformation. Active and free participating in serving the community, to its betterment, means that the individual genuinely discharges his or her moral responsibility. In so doing the individual facilitates democratic governance and gives effect to the provisions of the SASA.

## REFERENCES

- Bowie, N. 2000. A Kantian theory of leadership. *The Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 21(1): 185–193.
- Cassel, J. & Holt, T. 2008. The servant leader. *American School Board Journal* October: 34–35.
- Crippen, C.L. 2006. Servant leadership. First to serve then to lead. *International Journal of Learning* 13(1): 13–18.
- Ekundayo, J.M.O., Damhoeri, K. & Ekundayo, S.M. 2010. Presenting the servant leadership model as a panacea to bad leadership in tertiary education in west Africa. *Academic Leadership Live the Online Journal* 8(1).
- Greanleaf, R.K. 1998. *The power of servant leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Grisiri, P. 2013. *An introduction to the philosophy of management*. London: Sage.
- Heystek, J. 2006. School governing bodies in South Africa: Relationships between principals and parent governors – a question of trust? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 42(4): 473–486.



- Heystek, J. 2010. Governing body's responsibility and power for quality education. *Journal of Education* 48: 99–118.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics. Available at <https://www.iep.utm.edu/kantmeta/>
- Mbokodi, S.M. & Singh, P. 2011. Parental partnerships in the governance of schools in the black townships of Port Elizabeth. *Perspectives in Education* 29(4): 38–48.
- Mncube, V., Harber, C. & Du Plessis, P. 2011. Effective school governing bodies: Parental involvement. *Acta Academica* 43(3): 210–242.
- Nienaber, H. 2010. Conceptualisation of management and leadership. *Management Decision* 48(5): 661–675.
- Parris, D.L. & Peachy, J.W. 2013. A systematic literature review of servant leadership in organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics* 113(3): 377–393.
- Phipps, K.A. 2010. Servant leadership and constructive development theory: How servant leaders make meaning of service. *Journal of Leadership Education* 9(2).
- Reinke, S.J. 2004. Service before self: Towards a theory of servant-leadership. *Global Virtue Ethics Review* 5: 30–57.
- Republic of South Africa. 1996. *South African Schools Act 1996, No. 84 of 1996*. Cape Town: Government Printer.
- Spears, L. 1996. Reflections on Robert K. Greenleaf and servant-leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 17(7): 33–35.
- Tsotetsi, S., Van Wyk, N. & Lemmer, E. 2008. The experience of and need for training of school governors in rural schools in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 28: 385–400.
- Xaba, M.I. 2011. The possible cause of school governance challenges in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 31: 201–211.
- Zang, Y. & Lin, T-B. 2012. Servant leadership: A preferred style of school leadership in Singapore. *Chinese Management Studies* 6(2): 369–383.

# HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STRATEGIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A RETROSPECTIVE OVERVIEW

**Moses Oketch**  
Institute of Education  
University of London  
m.oketch@ioe.ac.uk

## ABSTRACT

Human capital theory is a powerful, and yet also viewed as a narrowly conceived, understanding of the benefits of education to individuals and society. For many years since its proper formulation in the early part of 1960, during which time education has been modelled as investment leading to economic growth and development, the theory has informed government policies in education and attracted criticism and generated debate over the tension concerning who benefits from education and how education should be organised and funded. This article reviews the influence of the theory in the education policy strategies of sub-Saharan Africa from the 'manpower planning' era, through the 'rate of return' era, the 'endogenous growth and endogenous development' tenets and the debates over 'quality versus attainment'. These are all discussed in relation to educational access, expansion, finance and curriculum relevance.

Keywords: human capital theory, rate of return, educational planning, endogenous growth, sub-Saharan Africa

## INTRODUCTION

This article presents a discussion on the evolution and challenges to human capital theory (HCT) since the 1960s and how the theory, and the discipline of economics of education upon which the theory is advanced, has transformed itself in the face of criticism to make itself relevant and influential in the educational planning arena. The aim is to examine how the interpretation of HCT has changed over time and how this is reflected in the education policy strategies of African countries. The rest of the article is organised as follows. First, I trace the origins of the theory and discuss how in the theory's heyday, which coincided with the gaining of independence in much of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), it was applied in the discussions justifying investment in education and the decisions which governments took. Second, I present the dwindling influence of the theory in the 1970s and discuss why this was so, and the implication for educational planning in the subcontinent. Third, the 1980s was a difficult period in SSA, sometimes referred to as the 'lost' decade. I trace the theory through its rate

of return tenet during this period and reflect on how this affected the way education is organised and financed. Fourth, the 1990s marked a turning point in education with the Jomtien conference, which focused on placing the government back in the driving seat of educational finance and the increased attention paid to basic education. I discuss the gains and consequences of this refocusing, particularly in relation to higher education finance and quality. Fifth, the millennium era marked the arrival of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the centrality of universalising basic education. Here I trace the theory's focus on externalities and the idea of quality as driving and defining human capital theory.

In its heyday in the 1960s, human capital theory was a powerful justification for spending in education and linking education to economic development everywhere, including in the emerging independent nations of sub-Saharan Africa (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1985). The first conference of African ministers of education held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1961 clearly captured this notion in making it clear that secondary education was where the manpower needs lay, and therefore, governments regarded this as part of the national transformation agenda (Unesco 1961). Indeed, the conference neatly put it that educational expansion caused economic development, a notion buttressed by human capital theory (Forojalla 1993).

This faith in the role of education in economic transformation as argued by Forojalla led to the declaration at the conference that Universal Primary Education (UPE) should be attained by 1980. There was also a declared goal of 30 per cent transition to secondary education for those children completing primary education, and 20 per cent enrolment for post-secondary education (Forojall 1993; Thompson 1981). In any case, the African ministers of education attending the conference were aware that poverty, ignorance and disease had to be tackled, and education, seen within the manpower framework, was high on the agenda (Oketch and Rollestone 2007; Unesco 1961). Educational planning over the period of the 1960s therefore focused on expanding access, governments having clearly accepted the thinking on the economic value of education (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1985), but the link where manpower was to be found was not merely in universalising basic or primary education, but instead secondary and subsequently tertiary education as a first step of creating what was then needed manpower to replace the colonial administration with Africans (Oketch and Rollestone 2007).

In east Africa, for example, there was a direct effort to tailor educational planning with the notion that it leads to economic development. In Uganda, the focus was on secondary education, and in Kenya, while the focus was on secondary education as spelt out in *Sessional Paper No. 10*, the primary education needed in order to transition into secondary level also expanded. Fees remained a barrier in both Kenya and Uganda and the model of education that developed, clearly supply driven through the social demand model approach of the human capital thinking, was also elitist. Tanzania took a different path by focusing on basic education relevant to 'Ujamaa' philosophy, insisting that there were no jobs for secondary expansion and this level of education would not serve the needs of the mostly village-based, agricultural Tanzania (Oketch and Rollestone 2007;

Ssekamwa and Lugumba 2001).

A few years after independence many sub-Saharan Africa countries, which had followed the manpower planning model, began to debunk it due to the mismatch between the production of educated individuals and the needs of the labour market, so that the manpower planning framework influenced by human capital dominated the framework for educational planning only for a short period. Nonetheless, over the years, human capital theory has remained relevant and powerful in guiding national education planning even though at the same time attracting heavy criticism. Except for a lull soon after independence in the 1970s when the manpower planning model variant of the theory was challenged, there was resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s through an emphasis on rate of return analysis and the use of earnings profiles. This basically marked a reinvention of the economics of education after a period of challenge by those who argued that learning and curriculum was more than simply looking at education as a form of economic investment.

## HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

Human capital theory, which primarily founded the discipline of the economics of education, ruled the roost in the 1960s. As Blaug (1985) puts it, at this time, no self-respecting Minister of Education would speak on education policy without an economist as his or her right hand. It is based on the idea that investment in education is needed as a fundamental aspect of a country's strategy for achieving development. The key to economic development for a country is to see the increased education of the human workforce as a capital investment rather than a form of economic consumption. The theory was also influenced by two principles: 1) that social demand for education is a good thing and that education has to be expanded; 2) that manpower planning was a useful forecasting tool that is helpful to educational planners. These were the days, according to Blaug, of Denison's (1962) 'sources-of- growth accounting' then generally 'believed to have demonstrated the precise quantitative contribution of education to economic growth'.

But in the 1970s, this profound dominance and influence of economics of education experienced serious setbacks as the enrolment explosion in those parts of the world, which had experienced expanded education since 1945, began to see a decline and SSA, which had embraced the social demand approach, began to come to terms with its inability to cope with social demand for education and a realisation that not everyone needed to be educated and offered white-collar jobs as a result. As noted by Forojalla (1993), education was a key item on the agenda of independence and once independence was attained, a social demand had been triggered. Governments made efforts to expand access at basic levels and improve literacy. In east Africa, for example, several steps were taken including abolition of racial segregation of schools and scrapping of standard four examinations, which had been in place during the colonial time and proved a significant barrier to transitioning to the next level of grade 5. Some have argued that

this examination was used to limit the number of Africans who received education on the basis that the political economy of colonial system did not want educated Africans, and educated Africans would have challenged colonial rule itself (Bogonko 1991). The result was a merging of all the levels of education into a consolidated seven years of primary education with one examination taken at the end of year seven (Oketch and Rolleston 2007).

All these efforts led to tremendous access for Africans who had been excluded from education previously, but fees still remained a barrier. The whole notion of such policies was that expanded access to education improved literacy and that the general increase in educational attainment would spur economic growth and address social inequalities (Forojalla 1993). However, criticisms soon started to emerge. The first criticisms were that the 'earlier optimism that expansion of education would effectively equalize life chances in industrialized societies gave way to a new pessimism about the possibilities of altering the distribution of incomes by educational means' (Blaug 1985:17). In other words, rather than addressing inequality, education was now becoming the source of income inequality. In SSA, this period coincides with the realisation that governments could not cope with social demand and the promises made for education started to be challenged with large numbers of youth completing school but not being able to be absorbed in the civil service or in the modern private sector.

The first attempt at a solution was to find ways of retaining schooled youth in the rural areas so that they do not go to the cities in search of what was now clearly scarce employment in the civil service. The manpower model, led by the social demand approach, and upon which the first expansion strategy rested, began to experience cracks in sub-Saharan Africa. The first educational policy response was to advocate a more vocational education and curriculum (Oketch 2007; Foster 1961). Hence, within a few years of independence, when Ministers had attached great hope in education, vocational education was introduced and promoted as a means to addressing unemployment of the schooled and the now perceived mismatch between education and the needs of the labour market. But even this approach of vocationalisation was based on a false premise that the problem of youth unemployment was not education itself, but the curriculum that prepared youth for white collar jobs that were now in extremely limited availability.

Massive investment in vocational education in Ghana, Kenya and other places ensued in the 1960s and 1970s, but this did not stop demand for more education. The World Bank supported vocational education and provided both expertise and resources for vocational education, still under the notion of manpower planning tenet of the human capital theory (Middleton *et al.*, 1993). However, Philip Foster, based on his study of Ghanaian youths, termed this 'the fallacy of vocationalisation'. (Foster 1962) warned about the limitations of schooling in being able to change society (King and Martin 2002) and noted that those with vocational education remained unemployed longer than their counterparts who had received general education. General, academic education had a higher social value than vocational education so that, for example, the children

of the political elite were not interested in vocational education and even those with vocational curriculum saw it as a stepping stone to more general education. As a result, vocational education failed to become the solution to the collapse of the manpower planning model of human capital theory in sub-Saharan Africa due to the failure of the labour market to absorb the products of education (Oketch 2007).

Authors writing on education and inequality around this period such as Jencks *et al.* (1972), as noted by Blaug, ‘were harbingers of the new scepticism about education that now swept through the First and Third World’ (Blaug 1985: 17). Faure *et al.*’s (1972) influential report on ‘Learning to be’ faulted the existing education systems and recommended a model of learning that would ‘alternate schooling and work throughout the lifetime of individuals’. But even this recommendation did not take root and, with educational expansion becoming unsustainable, the focus shifted away from quantitative expansion to qualitative reforms. On this, economists were seen as less useful than psychologists and psychometricians, and thus the economists were less prominent in the educational planning scene in the 1970s than a decade earlier (Blaug 1985: 18).

However, as noted by Blaug (18):

Nevertheless, the economics of education did not die out in the 1970s as a field of academic study. On the contrary, the decade saw a vigorous development of the subject into new directions, such that we can now distinguish a well-defined second, as contrasted with a first, generation economics of education.

The second generation abandoned manpower projections and the idea of a social demand approach as providing sufficient basis for educational planning (Blaug 1985: 18). This is because there was a need to reconsider educational financing, which earlier had been taken for granted in the manpower approach model. More children were demanding education than available or affordable places could accommodate and international agencies such as the World Bank, which had used a manpower planning model and later on promoted vocational education, was now looking for a massive shift of focus and investment towards basic education rather than secondary or higher education. Also abandoned in the second generation was the notion of manpower-planning/forecasting as a tool for educational planning. This was, as Blaug puts it, ‘because it begs too many questions about the relationship between the structure of occupations in an economy and the educational requirements for jobs, not to mention the notorious inaccuracy of such forecasts for any period in the future that is longer than 1 or 2 years’ (18).

## RATES OF RETURN ANALYSIS

Gone was manpower planning and in its place was the ‘rate of return’ approach. A rate of return approach meant that the various levels of education were subjected to study of the extent to which they accrued benefits to society and to individuals in terms of both social and private benefits. It included in some instances earnings profiles, but mostly

looking at costs against benefits. Simply put, it began to provide the narrative that basic education was the most profitable form of investment that governments could make as a contribution to the public good, whereas secondary and tertiary education had greater personal or individual benefits in terms of lifetime earnings. To the economists and governments in SSA, it offered a tool and framework to alter how education was being funded and to justify the massive investment in basic education and the idea of universal primary education.

However, rate of return analysis was still based on the notion that education is an engine for economic growth (Schultz 1963; Becker 1965; Oketch 2006). The central argument being that investment in humans is similar to investment in other means of production. Following education, humans have enhanced economic value through the set of skills and knowledge that they acquire, and such a skills set increases their productivity as workers (Hanushek and Woessman 2008). In terms of planning, the rate of return framework is seen to offer a framework that has been applied to predict the private demand for education, and thus determining who should pay for that education. It has been used in planning to assess what is referred to as the social value of expenditure in education, and, at its peak, was the entry point of the cost-sharing planning framework that was introduced in the 1980s (Inoue and Oketch 2008).

Psacharapoulos is famous for spearheading the rate of return framework of human capital theory, particularly in educational planning when he worked at the World Bank. He produced the 1985 book together with Maureen Woodhall, which became the basis for educational investment decisions and influenced the way the World Bank engaged with sub-Saharan Africa countries on matters of educational access expansion and finance (Psacharapoulos and Woodhall 1985). He wrote a substantive work on rates of return in 1994 that made a strong case for greater social returns to basic education in sub-Saharan Africa and high private returns to tertiary education (Psacharopolous 1994). The main argument that was developed and strengthened a lot more in the 1980s and 1990s was that private benefits were higher with tertiary education and social benefits were greater with basic education. In essence, governments would reap greater benefits if they provided primary education freely (and possibly to some extent secondary education) and let individuals pay for tertiary education. The data and the arguments were highly criticised (see e.g. Bennel 1996). Several other scholars of higher education in SSA also criticised this view as it seemed to undermine government commitment and investment in higher education, providing the foundation that would later on in the 1990s dismantle the elite model of the university system that had prevailed in much of SSA. It meant that students admitted to higher education institutions such as universities were in the future to contend with loans rather than grants and the idea that a degree was 'free' became a thing of the past. This was heightened in the 1990s when governments were compelled to restructure their entire education systems following a 1988 report of the World Bank that had questioned state subsidies to higher education (World Bank 1988).

As the Jomtien conference on basic education was held in 1990, the global focus,



even in SSA, was on basic education. The idea of costsharing, which had been introduced in the 1980s as part of structural adjustment programmes to reduce greater social demand, was agreed to have been detrimental to improving national literacy in several countries, and by 1990 the Bank along with SSA countries were arguing against any form of cost sharing in basic education (Oketch and Inoue 2008). Nonetheless, various forms of fees remained but the rate of return discourse had already massively altered the financing of higher education by removing heavy subsidies to tertiary education on the basis that those who gained university education would end up with greater personal benefits in terms of higher earnings and therefore, they should contribute to this education privately, through loans and private funding of their education. These heightened tensions between the Bank and several African governments, which were not happy with annoying the 'middle' class that benefitted from publicly subsidized university education. The argument advanced by the Bank then was that this system of state subsidy to higher education was morally unjustifiable as it amounted to the large poor masses subsidising the education of the few rich students who managed to gain a place in the elite and competitive university system (Oketch 2003). There was a strong call for restructuring the funding to universities and for many universities in SSA the 1990s saw the widespread introduction of direct tuition fees and enterprise activities within universities. In extreme cases, what have been referred to as 'parallel' programmes were introduced and these were seen to provide extra revenue to the universities. Indeed, in Kenya for example, the public universities now to enrol more parallel (i.e. self-financing) students than those on government subsidy. This is another aspect in which human capital theory has influenced educational planning by shifting resource allocation between the various levels of the education system (Oketch 2003).

To sum up so far, human capital theory led to policies on education in Africa directed towards expansion of access under the social demand approach. It also made the direct case in development plans concerning the 'causality' between education access and economic development of African countries. Also, HCT became dominant in linking education to development strategies of the 1960s and 1970s through the development plans in Africa.

## THE ENDOGENOUS GROWTH MODEL

More recently, Lucas (1988) and Romer (1990) have reinvigorated the original human capital approach with a discussion on technical change and endogenous growth. Here technology is brought into the focus and there is a shift in the discourse on human capital away from attainment to quality, information communication and technology (ICT) and innovation. What matters now is not simply attainment, but innovation. Endogenous growth (or growth originating from within) highlights the diminishing returns to physical capital offset by high value innovation. ICT becomes central to productivity, and here we see many education planning frameworks in Africa incorporating ICT in their education strategy papers.

Also as diminishing returns to primary and secondary education occur though quantitative expansion and EFA such as in Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, it is no longer enough simply to have primary and secondary education. Quality becomes a major issue of concern and Hanushek and Woessman (2007) argue that Human Capital Theory can no longer be framed only in terms of access. The tension between access and quality remains a key issue in SSA (Oketch 2012). SSA countries are under pressure to improve quality and there is no doubt that expansion of access has undermined quality and that even poor parents are willing to bypass state-subsidised education in order to send their children to the sorts of schools that have been referred to ‘private schools for the poor’ for the sake of quality (Oketch *et al.* 2010; Oketch *et al.* 2011).

So, it can be said that, at the moment, human capital theory has produced the tension between expanded access and quality in several countries in SSA. There are those education economists, such as Hanushek and Woessman, who are advocating for a redefinition, which moves the notion of human capital from attainment as originally conceptualised to one that pays specific attention to quality. This debate also feeds into the role of the private sector or what has been referred to as the relative effectiveness of the private sector in education versus the effectiveness of public provision.

Another aspect of the expanded version of human capital is the inclusion of what is referred to as non-market social benefits of education. This is linked to human development through the works of Amartya Sen’s (1999) capability approach. This expanded version of human capital is a reconfiguration of the rate of return to incorporate aspects such as the contribution of education to democracy, better health, to tolerance, what are referred to as non-market benefits (Appiah and McMahon 2002; McMahon and Oketch 2010). This leads to advocacy for greater public investment in all levels of education in order to achieve not only economic but a whole range of other social benefits.

Education strategies that emphasise the role of education in youth empowerment and civic education are gaining strength and lifelong learning discourse begins to emerge in the education strategy plans of African governments. There is growth in part-time courses, on the job training, the quest for new knowledge and a greater emphasis of the provision of the skills and capabilities that would lead to greater employability and self-employability of youth. In this regard, HCT remains a powerful justification on expanding education and funding education. The debates are over whether the public funding should be extended to private provision, but not over whether education is a worthwhile investment. Thus, to date, the theory has developed in its formulation from the simple access and attainment in the 1960s around manpower planning, to the rate of return that was narrowly conceived in terms of social and personal benefits, to the endogenous growth models and endogenous development framework that seeks to recapture the wider returns or benefits of investment of education to society by spurring innovation and technical change and creating tolerant and open-minded societies. All these calls and formulation have affected how education is financed and the role that

education plays in the national psyche in terms of its contributions to individual well-being and national development.

So, a summary of human capital phases and education policy strategies in Africa would be as follows:

- 1960s and 1970s: HCT influences education in terms of attainment; manpower planning is the dominant aspect of human capital theory in African education.
- 1980s and 1990s: Structural adjustment in cost measures and rate of return analysis become a dominant interpretation and empirical focal point of HCT in Africa's education systems. The focus of finance is shifted to individuals benefiting from education.
- 1990s-2000-present: A revisitation of human capital with endogenous growth coming out strongly. Here ICT policies are added and education systems incorporate ICTs in their education strategies. There is also diminishing return to investment in basic education in terms of individual/private rates of return and the quality of education becomes a major issue. Lifelong learning incorporated.
- Endogenous development becomes a key focus and HCT now includes measures that include emphases of a social nature and political democracy and stability.

## CONCLUSION

The interpretation of human capital theory has evolved over time and Africa's education policies have adjusted to each phase by incorporating the new interpretation. This has affected how education is organised and funded. The first generation of economics of education focused on manpower planning; the second generation on rates of return; the third generation on endogenous growth and endogenous development; and the fourth generation on issues around quality and the tension between access and quality. In all these there is clear evidence that these are linked to human capital theory and we see a theory that transforms itself to address the criticisms and, in so doing, influences education strategies pursued by African governments. The contribution of the theory is not viewed in terms of economic development alone, but there is also now clear evidence of modelling investment in education on political accountability and democratic movements. Indeed, it can be concluded that, as ever, human capital theory still provides a strong framework and relevance to educational development in sub-Saharan Africa and that with the now expanded measurement of social, non-market benefits or externalities of education (McMahon and Oketch 2013), the role is no longer purely economic. As education becomes firmly accepted as an end in its own right, rather than a means to an end, the discourse of human capital will continue to evolve.

## REFERENCES

- Abdi, A. 1998. Economic liberalization and women's education: Prospects for post-apartheid South Africa. *McGill Journal of Education* 33: 71–84.
- Alexander, R. 2008. *Education for all, the quality imperative and the problem of pedagogy. Creative Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 20*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Appiah, E. and McMahon, W.W. 2002. The social outcomes of education and feedbacks on growth in Africa. *Journal of Development Studies* 38: 27–68.
- Bategeka, L. 2005. Universal primary education (UPE) in Uganda: Report to the inter-regional inequality facility-policy case study. Uganda, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Becker, G. 1965. *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bennell, P. 1996. Rates of return to education: Does the conventional pattern prevail in sub-Saharan Africa? *World Development* 24(1): 183–199.
- Blaug, M. 1985. Where are we now in the economics of education? *Economics of Education Review* 4(1): 17–28.
- Bond, P. and Dor, G. 2003. *Neoliberalism and poverty reduction strategies in Africa*. Discussion paper for the Regional Network for Equity in Health in Southern Africa (EQUINET). Harare, Zimbabwe: Canadian International Development Research Center.
- Bogonko, S.N. 1992. *Reflections on education in East Africa*. Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press.
- Carnoy, M. 1995. Structural adjustment and the changing face of education. *International Labour Review* 134(6): 653–673.
- Denison, F. 1962. *The sources of economics growth in the United States and the alternatives before us*. Washington DC: Committee for Economic Development.
- Dore, R. 1976. *The diploma disease: Education, qualifications and development*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Forojalla, S.B. 1993. *Educational planning for development*. New York: St. Martin Press Inc.
- Foster, P.J. 1965. The vocational school fallacy in development planning. In Anderson, Bowman (ed.), *Education and economic development*. Aldine, Chicago.
- Inoue, K., Oketch, M. 2008. Implementing free primary education policy in Malawi and Ghana: Equity and efficiency analysis. *Peabody Journal of Education* 83(1): 41–70.
- King, K. and Martin, C. 2002. The vocational school fallacy revisited: Education aspiration and work in Ghana 1959–2000. *International Journal of Educational Development* 22(1): 5–26.
- Klees, S.J. 2008. A quarter century of neoliberal thinking in education: Misleading analyses and failed policies. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 6(4): 311–348.
- Klopp, J.M. and Janai R. Orina. 2002. University crisis, student activism, and the contemporary struggle for democracy in Kenya. *African Studies Review* 45(1): 43–76.
- Knight, J.B. and Sabot, R.H. 1990. *Education, productivity, and inequality: The east African natural experiment*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Limage, L.J. 1999. Literacy practices and literacy policies: Where has UNESCO been and where might it be going? *International Journal of Educational Development* 19(1): 75–89.
- Little, A. and Miller, E. 2000. *The international consultative forum on Education for All 1990–2000: An evaluation*. World Education Forum, 26–28 April 2000, Dakar, Senegal. Paris: UNESCO.
- Martin, C.J. (1982). Education and consumption in Maragoli (Kenya): Households' educational strategies. *Comparative Education Review* 18(2): 139–155.
- McMahon, W.W. 1987. The relation of education and R&D to productivity growth in the developing countries of Africa. *Economics of Education Review* 6: 183–194.
- McMahon, W.W. 1999. *Education and development: Measuring the social benefits*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Middleton, J., Ziderman, A. and Adams, V.A. 1993. *Skills for productivity: Vocational education and training in developing countries*, World Bank. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mukudi, E. 2004. The effects of user-fee policy on attendance rate among Kenyan elementary schoolchildren. *International Review of Education* 50(5/6): 447–461.
- Mundy, K. 1999. Educational multilateralism in a changing world order: UNESCO and the limits of the possible. *International Journal of Educational Development* 19(1): 27–52.
- Oketch, M., Mutisya, M., Ngware, M. and Ezeh, A.C. 2010. Why are there proportionately more poor pupils enrolled in non-state schools in urban Kenya in spite of FPE policy? *International Journal of Educational Development* 30(1): 23–32.
- Oketch, M.O. 2007. To vocationalise or not? Perspectives on the current trends and issues in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development* 27(2): 220–234.
- Oketch, M. and Rolleston, C. 2007. Policies on free primary and secondary education in east Africa: Retrospect and prospect. *Review of Research in Education* 31: 131–158.
- Oketch, M.O. 2006. Determinants of human capital formation and economic growth of African countries. *Economics of Education Review* 25(5): 554–564.
- Oketch, M.O. 2003. Affording the unaffordable: Cost sharing in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. *Peabody Journal of Education* 78(3): 88–106.
- Pritchett, L. 1996. *Where has all education gone? Policy research working paper, R/1581*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Psacharopoulos, G. and Woodhall, M. 1985. *Education for development: An analysis of investment choices*. Washington, DC: Oxford University Press/World Bank.
- Psacharopoulos, G. and Patrinos H.A. 2004. Returns to investment in education: A further update. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2881.
- Psacharopoulos, G. 1994. Returns to investment in education: A global update. *World Development* 22(9): 1325–1343.
- Schultz, T.W. 1963. *The economic value of education*. Columbia University Press.
- Sen, A. 1999. *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sifuna, D.N. 2007. The challenge of increasing access and improving quality: An analysis of universal primary education intervention in Kenya and Tanzania since 1970s. *International Review of Education* 53: 687–699.

- Ssekamwa, J.C. and Lugumba, S.M.E. 2001. *A history of education in east Africa*. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers.
- Stasavage, D. 2005. Democracy and primary school attendance: Aggregate and individual level evidence from Africa. AfroBarometer Working Paper #54.
- UNECA-UNESCO. 1961. *Conference of African States on the development of education in Africa (ED/181)*. Addis Ababa: UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. 1990. *World declaration on Education for All and framework for action to meet basic learning needs*. World Conference on Education for All: Meeting basic learning needs, Jomtien, Thailand: 5–9 March 1990. Paris, France: UNESCO.
- UNESCO/GTZ. 2009. *The Basic Education in Africa Programme (BEAP): A policy paper – responding to demands for access, quality, relevance and equity*. UNESCO: Paris.
- Wolf, A. 2002. *Does education matter? Myths about education and economic growth*. London: Penguin.
- Woodhall, M. 2004. *Cost-benefit analysis in educational planning*. Paris: UNESCO IIEP.
- World Bank. 1978. *World development report*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

# International Journal of **Educational Development** in Africa

ISSN 2312-3540

---

## IJEDA'S PURPOSE AND THEMES

The *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa* (IJEDA) is concerned with the improvement of education in Africa, defined as the whole of the continent and including offshore islands such as Mauritius and Madagascar. This could be improvement in terms of educational access, process or output and at the level of whole education systems, regions, institutions or classrooms or a combination. It might concern gender issues, early childhood education, formal primary and secondary schooling, higher education, informal and non-formal education or home-based education.

The journal therefore welcomes papers on African education particularly relevant to key theories of development about human capital, modernisation, politics, democratisation, capabilities, social reproduction, inequalities, dependencies, marginalisation, social control and violence, as well as key global developmental issues affecting education in Africa such as the roles of capitalism and socialism, green or sustainable development, religion, gender, international aid, the role of international organisations and agreements (e.g. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), health and HIV/AIDS, issues of access, quality and outcomes, conflict and post-conflict contexts, private education, culture and education, vocational education and employment, poverty reduction, corruption, disasters and emergencies (and humanitarian responses), globalisation, literacy.

## IJEDA'S POLICY

IJEDA publishes original contributions in English. The following categories of contributions focusing on education will be published:

Research articles reporting on research that fulfils the criteria of a generally accepted research paradigm; review articles, intended for the professional educationists that critically evaluate the research done in a specific field in education; book reviews, that are, concise evaluations of books that have recently appeared; and letters in which comment is given on articles that have appeared in the journal. All articles submitted will be sent to referees (national and/or international) for comment. All referees will



have documented expertise in the area the article addresses. When reviews are received, an editorial decision will be reached to accept the article, reject the article, or request a revision (in some cases for further peer review).

Authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy and decency of the factual content of their contributions. A signed declaration in respect of originality must accompany each manuscript. On submission of the manuscript, the author(s) must present a written undertaking that the article has not been published or is not being presented for publication elsewhere. Author(s) must ensure that the language in the manuscript is properly edited and the name and address of the language practitioner must be supplied.

A brief narrative account/description of ethical issues/aspects should be included in articles that report on empirical findings. Copyright of all published material is vested in the International Journal of Educational Development in Africa (IJEDA) and Unisa Press. Total number of pages should preferably not exceed 15 pages ( $\pm$  5 500 words).

## IJEDA'S STYLE

### **TITLE IN BOLD, CAPITALISED AND CENTRED**

Author's Name/Authors' Names

Affiliation

Email

### **SECTION HEADING** (Bold, capitals and left aligned)

Authors should keep their language simple and formulate sentences clearly. Leave only one space between sentences. Proper and correct technical terminology should be used throughout. Numbers from one to nine should be written out in the text, except where they are followed by symbols. Where a number is to be used at the beginning of a sentence it must be written out, but best be avoided. The use of personal pronouns is acceptable. Dates are to be written out as follows: 13 June 2008. When giving a monetary value in your local currency, please also give the US\$ equivalent where appropriate and where the conversion has direct relevance to the text (in brackets). Make use of UK English, so use 's' rather than 'z' in words such as organise, recognise etc. Only acknowledged abbreviations and symbols should be used and less well-known abbreviations should be explained. All text and headings should be in 12pt Times New Roman, single spaced and left aligned. The margins should be set at 2.5 cm for the top and 3.0 cm for the bottom, left and right.

### **Sub-heading** (Bold, sentence case and left aligned)

While there is a line space between a section heading and the text, there is no line space between a sub-heading and text. At the end of both a section and a sub-section leave a line space. Try to avoid a third level of headings. Where this is absolutely necessary, third tier headings should appear in sentence case and in *italics*. Please note that section and sub-section headings are not numbered.

There is no line space between the paragraphs, just a 1.5cm indent at the start of the new paragraph. The exception, of course, is the first sentence of a section or subsection, which should be set out as shown above, and a paragraph immediately following indented text. Quotes of four lines or longer quotes should be indented at 1.5cm on the left and on the right. Note that the punctuation mark appears after the citation.

Coercion or repression is part of an arsenal of weapons used by the political class to control the civil and education movements – to weaken their struggle for change in policy or social transformation. It is the range of powers that defines the relationship of the state to the social movements (Balanan and Sayed 2002: 120).

Use only endnotes. They are generally a distraction from the main text and should be used sparingly. All citations should be included in the text as indicated in this style sheet. This includes quotations from interviews, as in the example that follows. ‘We [wrote] the letter to ... the councillors ... and now they started to put the lights .... It’s very new. It’s the first delivery’ (Makhubela interview 28 April 2006). Ellipses are used to indicate omitted text. Square brackets are used when the author changes the original wording.

When word-for-word quotations are cited, use a single set of inverted commas. For quoted material inside a quote, use a double set of inverted commas. Two kinds of references must be used, namely, short references in the text and more detailed references at the end of the manuscript. For references in the text, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parentheses in the text, e.g. (Benjamin 2004: 32). When referring to an entire publication, the page numbers are to be omitted, e.g. (McDonald and Pape 2002). Newspaper articles should be cited as follows: Those residing in hotels were more likely to be involved in drug-dealing and prostitution (*Sunday Times* 10 November 1997). When citing material from interviews or focus groups in the text, please use the following format: According to Willems (Interview 17 January 2007), the danger is that ‘organisations in the south don’t speak the donor language’, which may jeopardise their chances of receiving funding. Frans argues that many of the issues dealt with by Sasco ‘stem from the legacy that white people were resourced and black people were not resourced, and these things still affect the black students’ academic lives’ (Focus group 12 December 2003). For information obtained via emails or similar correspondence: (Gemson, Personal communication 29 August 2008).

Additional details about sources referred to in the text must appear at the end of the manuscript (after the notes, if any) under the heading ‘References’. The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors. Please note the use of capitals, punctuation marks and italics in the following examples:

## REFERENCES

- Education, Department of. 1999. *Regulations regarding control over the sale of textbooks in South Africa*. Pretoria: Department of Agriculture. Retrieved from <http://www.nda.agric.za> (accessed 12 May 2012).
- Balanan, R. and Sayed, A. 2002. Language in crisis: The case Urdu. In R. Balanan (ed.), *The genocide of indigenous languages*, 112–143. Connecticut: Kumarian Press.
- Beinart, W.J. 2001. *Twentieth-century South Africa*, 2nd edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. 2000a. *The rise of the network society*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M. 2000b. Globalisation, identity and the state. *Social Dynamics* 26(1): 5–17.
- Deeckson, P. 1999. Back to the bad old days. *Daily Mail & Guardian*, 23 June. Retrieved from <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/news/99jun2/23jun-land.html> (accessed 20 August 2003).
- Heugh, M. 2005. Education for change. Unpublished MA Dissertation, Lunds Universitet, Sweden.
- Hemson, D. and Dube, B. 2004. Water services and public health: The 2000–2001 cholera outbreak in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Paper presented to the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Environmental Health, 22–27 February 2004, Durban, South Africa.
- Sapa. 2009. Students held over violent protest. *Sowetan*, 27 August: 8.

## Interviews, personal communication and focus groups (these should be alphabetically incorporated into the References).

- Anonymous. Community Library, Khutsong, Gauteng, 14 April 2002. Translated from Sotho by Makgafela Thaka.
- Mugabe, P. Community activist, Harare, Extension 1, Zimbabwe, 30 March 2007. Participant in focus group with Harare residents.
- Abasanjo, S. His residence, Lagos, Nigeria, 10 August 2009. Translated from Yoruba by Jacob Nongwe.
- Shandu, N. (pseudonym). Crown Mines, Johannesburg, 8 May 2007. Interview conducted in English and Zulu.



# International Journal of Educational Development in Africa

Please enter/renew my subscription to the journal

---

**Price in Africa:**

Institutional: ZAR 307.40  
Personal: ZAR 258.35

**Please note:**

1. Subscriptions are strictly for the 2014 year.
2. Two issues will be produced a year.
3. Only prepaid orders will be executed.
4. The above price includes airmail postage fees.

**To subscribe, please fax or mail the completed subscription form together with the proof of your electronic payment or a cheque/postal order (made out to the University of South Africa) to:**

Unisa Press  
PO Box 392  
UNISA  
0003  
South Africa

*Enquiries:* Tel: +27 12 429 2953  
Fax: +27 12 429 3449  
e-mail: [journalsubs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:journalsubs@unisa.ac.za)

---

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**DIRECT DEPOSIT**

**Bank:** Standard Bank  
**Account name:** Unisa  
**Account no:** 01 1554 622  
**Branch code:** 010645  
**Deposit ref:** 5400380454