

Editorial: ‘Brother Sun and Sister Moon: I can hear your tune, so much in love with all I survey’

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St. Francis of Assisi and Michel Foucault may have more in common than ordinarily meets the eye. In the challenge he faced with onset of blindness, the Italian spiritual revolutionary began to see with greater clarity the interconnections with ‘Brother Sun and Sister Moon’: the interconnection to rise above one’s own personal miseries; to extend beyond the dogmas of ritual and convention; to challenge the hierarchies of officialdom such as the organised Catholic Church; to question the crass materialism which fetishises human existence; to assert the ability of the individual to defy subjugation; to engage the power of collective action and to see the glory all around. Power does not survive except in contexts when individuals permit it to diminish their spirit. This leader of a new missionary spiritual order believed that collective power has a capability to disrupt ritual and normalising conventions, but the greater good is established when that awakening awareness is felt within the heart and soul, hearing the tune of ‘Brother Wind and Sister Air’ – to then realise our interconnections with the fragility of the planet and its creatures within our care, embrace our ethical role, sow love where there is hatred, grant pardon where there is injury, promote faith when there is doubt, engender hope in times of despair, generate light in darkness, bring joy amidst sadness. St Francis’s song concludes that ‘I am God’s creature, of Him I am a part. I feel His love awakening my heart. Brother Sun and Sister Moon, now do I see you. I can hear your tune, so much in love with all I survey’.

Presumably Foucault would not have promoted such a religious and spiritual abandonment to a divinity since he would himself regard this as a

capitulation to another form of power. Rather than polarising of opposites, Foucault (1990) saw the complementarity of co-existing dichotomies. Foucault, in his attempts to challenge the infantilising of our human existence at the feet of disciplined power, campaigns for ‘autonomy’: the giving of the law to oneself, recognising that such independence can never be complete or exhaustive since we are all, as Bert Olivier reminds us in his first paper, inserted into a network of society. Our human existence is programmed within a pattern of hierarchies and subjugations, margins and peripheries, but our agency and autonomy can be asserted discursively to disrupt these very patternings.

In a footnote to his first paper in this anthology, Olivier presents a gem that should not go unnoticed. The very possibility of education as an enterprise for realising the potential of individuals and autonomy comes into question. Olivier poses the question about whether it is possible at all to educate the young since we as educators perhaps do not sufficiently grasp the ‘structural complexity of human beings’. This questioning of the possibility of education is raised in the context of whether our goals for schooling have become instrumentalised and commodified within the neoliberal discourse to the point where it is unable to truly grant freedom of will and direction. This argument is again raised in more depth by Maistry in his paper in this anthology. In the footnote just mentioned, Olivier expands Lacan’s view (Lee 1990; Olivier 2005a) of what this complexity of human subjectivity entails in the following terms:

a person has a ‘sense of self’ (imaginary), a sense of where and how he or she fits into society (symbolic, through language), and a sense of things that surpass herself or himself in such a way that one has no control over them (the unsymbolisable ‘real’) – this much may be learnt through literature, myths and even folk wisdom. The point is that all of these aspects of being human have to be considered by educators for ‘true’ education to take place.

This anthology serves as a questioning of what we have come to expect as the goals of true education. What is possible? feasible? do-able? intractable? The title of the Colloquium, ‘Education at the Crossroads’, from which the presented papers draw their theme, was intended to raise questions about whether we are facing a crisis within the education system. The Colloquium

asked whether the hallmarks of quality education have become hijacked on the road of instrumentality – the road of the commodification agenda, of an efficiency rationale that equates performance on assessment scores as equivalent to ‘quality education’. The Colloquium invited presentations as follows:

The introduction of a political system based on democracy in 1994 presented a rare opportunity to re-look, re-think and re-organise education provisioning in South Africa. Guided by master narratives of transformation, equity, quality and good governance, education was repackaged, underpinned by good intentions and grand designs. The outcomes were spectacularly dismal, both in depth and breadth, with pockets of success in state schools. Responses have included modifications to the curriculum, a proliferation of policies and retraining of teachers. Student achievements, however, have not matched the massive inputs to improve education for the previously disadvantaged and dispossessed or for the rising middle classes. International studies confirm that South African student performance lags behind those from poorer and less resourced systems in Africa, that numeracy and literacy skills are below par and that few students are sufficiently skilled for higher education. Sixteen years after the demise of apartheid we are at the crossroads. Whereto from here? Can we continue with knee-jerk tinkering of the curriculum? What vision for the future? What can and must be done? How can researchers disrupt current thinking about education with new possibilities, new practices and renewed optimism? Is it not time for scholarship to reclaim a space as a key influence to educational reform? (3rd Annual Educational Research Colloquium, 6-7 October 2011, Call for papers).

This Colloquium thus sought to instigate academic discussion about who we are, what we teach, whom we teach, and what they learn. Several presenters in this anthology have grappled with this theme, asking whether these very questions are in themselves framed within an instrumentalist efficiency discourse. Iben Christiansen asks, for example, whether education alone will provide an alleviation of the complex challenges of our times. Among the key factors facing our present society she points to issues of health and nutrition,

urging that we need a more holistic response to the ensuring of ‘quality education’ which includes the need for education and schooling to address the context of our financial and environmental crises. The concerns of ‘people, planet and profit’ often compete for supremacy, and in the shadow of this agenda those on the margins of society are often unable to exercise sufficient agency to generate a dignified livelihood. She proposes that environmental education should be more than just *about* the environmental issues, arguing that should extend to campaigning *for* the environment. This level of agenda, she argues, is what is needed to revitalise the education system with ‘fundamental ways of thinking’ which include deductive thinking, a sense of cause and effect, temporality and situatedness of practices, of a kind that would begin to re-examine historical ways of thinking. She sees the need for an education that fosters critical thinking that goes beyond than mere appearances and works to create meaningful connections – not just reconfiguring outward practices, but re-ordering the pre-occupations of our minds. Liberation from oppression and poverty must lead onwards to realisation of our interconnectivity with overarching global and planetary agendas. Christiansen argues that the crossroads metaphor is perhaps too restricted. She calls, rather, for a U-turn – which then raises a further question: what will we be turning back towards in this U-turn? The closing section to her paper suggests that it should be a renewed commitment to a deep teacher professionalism that include more than performativities and accountabilities. She believes that a teacher professional is one who challenges the road signs along our journey, who embraces the notion of being an ‘organic intellectual’ beyond the Gramscian notion simply of a class-driven agenda. Instead an organic intellectual is one sensitive to the call of the community within which she works, responsive to the specificities of their needs and the responsibilities of sustainable interventions that comprehensively take heed of social justice (equity), environmental and economic necessities.

It can be seen from the first four papers of this collection that the philosophical and theoretical agendas driving educational change have renewed precedence. It is a welcome shift of emphasis in our education discourses to see a return of philosophical and theoretical exploration in a special issue of this academic journal. In the initial decade of our new democracy educational research tended to be dominated by ‘policy implementation analysis’, with the constraints of context and reversal of our

historical situatedness occupying the foreground in our research deliberations. Perhaps all that we learnt has been that policy alone is an insufficient prerequisite for deep quality change in education and schooling.

The first four papers (two by Bert Olivier, plus those by Maistry and Christiansen) open up a debate about how philosophical considerations could help us make sense of why we are at the place we are, standing somewhat perplexed that our laudable policy intentions have not been realised, and that teachers and the education system have not been able to rescue our democracy. This debate is not a matter of falling back simplistically on issues of blame, admonishing teachers who fail to embrace the stipulated directives or accusing them of lacking competence or capacity to put envisaged policy into practice. Rather, suggests Olivier, it is the democratic voice of the populace that is being seduced by a superficiality and ‘causality of ignorance’. Citing Hardt and Negri (2001; 2009), Olivier shows how we are ‘living in the age of the Empire’. This is not, as he explains, a geographic or nationalistic imposition on the subjugated of any single colonial force of power. This ‘Empire’ is an insidious infiltration of values, ethics and practices into the hearts and minds of the subjugated where they (the marginalised) end up being complicit in their own oppression. Through the pervasive influence of technology, the tentacles of Empire infiltrate our minds and choices in relation to the things we choose to value. Superficial cultural habits and routines invade our spaces, or more to the point, they anaesthetise our powers of resistances. One chief agent of the Empire is the entertainment industry (with all its power in the marketplace) which provides a set of superficial targets and role models of what constitutes quality of life or even quality of education. Through the networks of Empire we lose our capacity to engage projectively into the future. We remain locked in an earthy rootedness of materialistic pursuits, rejecting the possibility for otherness, unable to seek out deep meaningful choices for our existence and unable to see the finitude of our present practice. Olivier points us to Kristeva (2000) in suggesting pathways of revolt.

Maistry’s paper explores one of the myths that dominate the Empire-speak. He argues in his paper that the odds are stacked against developing world economies that are unable to sustain meaningful resistance to the dominance of forces like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or the captains of capital. It is these powerful forces, however, which promote a common sense worldview that a productive economy will result in economic

growth and that in its rising tide it will lift up the plight of the poor, the boats stranded in low tide. Education for economic growth is a myth, Maistry argues, as is patently evident in measures of our post-apartheid education system. Despite numerous interventions at state level, our educational achievement records show that the economically deprived or marginalised still sit at the bottom rung of achievements, that poverty is the greater marker of educational achievement. The neoliberal agenda of more testing and more demands of accountability from its workforces will not simply yield an alternative remedy. Maistry turns to Nussbaum (2011) and her human development approach as an alternative. Her analysis suggests that the vocationalism and narrowness of the educational enterprise are characteristics of the way neoliberalism has subverted the quest for attainment of full human potential. As expressed in a quote Maistry gives from Nussbaum, ‘cultivated capacities for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake’ (Nussbaum 2010:10). Maistry ends his paper with a listing of Nussbaum’s ingredients for an alternative human capabilities approach to producing critical citizenry. These are the signposts at the crossroads which move us beyond a marketisation discourse towards a human rights, social justice and equity agenda. Wayne Hugo (2013), in a critique of Melanie Walker and Monica McLean’s (2013) article ‘Operationalising higher education and human development: a capabilities-based ethic for professional education’, has argued that it is not clear whether the capabilities approach

can actually work at the level of specific professions... ‘Capabilities’ are too generic a set, even if you provide realisable functions...One always has to be careful when an ethical approach like Capabilities suddenly finds itself with a massive groundswell of support , especially from the establishment. It could be because it has articulated something new that answers an increasingly pressing question facing our modern generation; or it could be that it resonates with the dominant forces of network capitalism currently running rampant through our world; or it could be a little of both. (Hugo 2103: 2).

We are not convinced that the capabilities approach is indeed complicit with network capitalism (the Empire). Evidence of this complicity would indeed

be most insightful. Nor do we think that ‘the establishment’ has indeed embraced any capabilities tenets since, by their very conception, capabilities are infused with the seeds of challenge to hierarchies, dominions and unjust powers. Walker and McLean offer the following list of professional public-good capabilities: informed vision, affiliation (solidarity), resilience, social and collective struggle, emotional reflexivity, integrity, assurance and confidence, knowledge, imagination and practical skills. Surely these are anathema to the Empire?

How then the capabilities approach finds resonance with or challenges the forces of global and economic capital is a question that remains unanswered. Are the forces of Empire too subversive, too invasive, too insidious? Is the human capability approach merely a critique of the neoliberal discourse or does it offer a concrete alternative? This is what readers must establish.

The next group of papers reflect on pedagogic practice and alternative educational delivery discourses in higher education and address the need for change in traditional approaches. Saras Reddy examines how the training of medical doctors has shifted to a problem-based learning approach in response to the need for a more context-driven pedagogy. Increasingly, practitioners were concerned about the lack of ability of newly qualified medical graduates to deal with the multiple contextual realities facing the practising medical doctor in complex hospital settings, in underresourced clinics and in rural practices. Introduction of a problem-based learning (PBL) approach was intended to enhance ‘contextual relevance’. However, the practitioners who were required to mediate the PBL curriculum were proponents of the strongly ‘content-based’ former approach which foregrounded strong theoretical input by lecturers transmitting the codified knowledge of the medical discipline. PBL therefore challenged their interpretation of ‘quality education’ and training for medical doctors. Using a Bernstein (2000) theoretical lens, Reddy examines how the intentions of the PBL curriculum came to be re-interpreted and perhaps subverted in practice. The paper notes that although the new curriculum fulfils the objective of alternative educational practice it might nonetheless have unintended consequences. The students came to display a highly committed and contextually sensitive disposition for medical practice,

but their lecturers and ward mentors insisted that this was inadequate, since their disciplinary foundational knowledge was interpreted as lacking, raising a measure of doubt about the medical graduates' own interpretation of their readiness for practice.

In the exploration of a more sensitive pedagogy from the 'killer courses' of the Engineering discipline, Mogasurie Moodley highlights the potentialities and limitations of an alternative approach. It is well known that there are some courses/modules within each discipline which repeatedly have poor throughput. This researcher looks at a pedagogy initiative which promoted a greater degree of peer mentoring and a more dialogical interaction between staff and students in a large element of the programme delivery. The findings, as with Reddy's study, indicate a generally positive response from the students who reported that they felt appreciated and listened to – that they had a sense of involvement in producing and making sense of their modules' subject matter. However, from the lecturer's perspectives, this kind of learning did not go far enough even though it correlated with better pass rates in the modules. Lecturers were more sceptical about whether 'higher-order skills' of the disciplinary content were indeed being developed through this process. This paper points to the need for alternative pathways that take account of throughput/output issues, of lived interactive emotive support when students are engaging in the learning process, and of the habituated practices of lecturing staff who are resistant to new directions. It is not enough for alternative pedagogical approaches be confined to promoting an emotively positive curriculum experience; they must also ensure deep engagement with content knowledge of a discipline. Broadly, the question is whether deep content knowledge input can be pursued in ways other than the traditional teacher-led lecture pedagogy that seems to be advocated by some lecturer participants in this study. What exactly were the traditional lecturers upholding as standards of quality education?

The third group of papers focuses on curriculum issues within teacher education preparing trainee teachers to implement the school curriculum. The introduction of Life Orientation as compulsory subject in the school curriculum has had numerous implications both for schools' ability to

effectively deliver on this new subject concoction and on teacher education institutions' ability to provide a teacher education Life Orientation curriculum that would equip teacher trainees to effectively teach this multi-faceted school subject. Mthiyane presents an account of how trainee teachers engage with the various dimensions of Life Orientation through cooperative learning strategies. She argues that short, year-long capping programmes like the Postgraduate Certificate in Education are inadequate to effectively prepare pre-service teachers for the complex and sensitive components of the Life Orientation curriculum, and that the success of the subject and its teachers will depend on the ability of teacher education institutions and schools to effectively partner with one another to establish appropriate credibility for the new school subject. Also focusing on the issue of credibility is Dube's paper investigating the status of Tourism as another new subject in the South African secondary school curriculum. Describing the dilemma that this discipline and the learners who subscribe to it are likely to encounter, she points out that while Tourism as subject may have vocational potential in helping to drive entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation it is not valued as an entrance requirement by higher education institutions in South Africa because the subject has not gained sufficient currency as an academic discipline. This raises doubt as to whether adding it to the school curriculum was a realistic decision on the part of the education authorities. Similarly, curriculum innovation in other school subjects like Accounting necessitate adaptation of existing pedagogical and assessment practices. Ngwenya's article reflects on the challenges that teachers in deprived rural contexts encounter when teaching a highly specialised discipline like Accounting. She argues that however commendable the teacher's intentions may be, teaching a subject like Accounting from conceptually weak foundations has profound implications for the kind of learning that is likely to occur. She makes a strong case for context-specific continuing professional development.

The next two papers address the intersection between gender issues and the education system. In her paper on why female trainee teachers take up cigarette smoking when they are at university, Shakila Singh shows, by getting into student mind-sets, how external acts of practice often have deeper signifying messages. From her interviews with female smokers, she is able to

show how their smoking codes a set of beliefs that govern their understanding of their gendered selves. She shows how the students are sophisticated readers of the world of university life, able to generate particular insights into how they will be interpreted and re-interpreted as young women because of choosing to smoke. She reveals that these women students see university life as a space where new forms of femininity can be enacted, challenging the traditional roles of conventional femininity in their own personal homes, families and school settings. They see the university as a space where these new-found freedoms can be exercised, and that smoking is one of the ways they can enact this freedom and independence in an assertion of their sense of self. The students are aware that university is a transitional and temporary space and that they are perhaps unlikely to continue their smoking indefinitely. However, Singh points to the paradoxical freedom of space for their sense of self which they exercise in contradistinction to the potential hazardous health consequences or potentially addictive nature of the habit. However, their knowledge of the effects of nicotine does not prevent them from exercising their different forms of their identities. Much more than the act of smoking is at stake. The health and identity constructions pose for Singh a crossroads of decision making.

Vijay Hamlall is one of the few voices in this anthology coming from the schooling sector. This is perhaps a consequence of the Colloquium's mandate to draw on researchers from within the three participating institutions of the University of Free State, the North West University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in this annual event. The voice of the academic researchers practising in higher education consequently dominated the submissions for this special edition. It remains a question therefore as to how we incorporate the voices of our young/novice postgraduate students into the world of academic publishing, or the voice of practising teachers in secondary and primary schooling. Or is it that the agenda for publishing and academic writing for the novice school-based researcher, has different currency from that offered and expected of higher education practitioners? This raises the different question, of course, about why academics engage in the pursuit of academic research, presentations, dissemination and publishing in the first place: is it simply producing 'academic output' (fuelling a notion of a commodification of the educational enterprises as driven by these measurables), or is it writing and publishing articles to ride the opportunity of 'academic tourism' (travelling to destinations away from one's own

institution to present or imbibe other cultural contexts of academic thinking), or is it ‘academic writing to produce new knowledge’ (seeking to extend the body of knowledge)? Or do elements of all these forces push or pull them in this force field of possibilities?

Vijay Hamlall’s paper provides a useful parallel with Shakila Singh’s paper. While Singh explored how female students chose to mark their identities through selected practices, Hamlall reveals how the construction of masculinities within a school context is marked by a host of contextual regimes. He argues that school boys’ masculinities are constructed in the context of a strong presence of a school discipline culture which itself is violent and aggressive, and promotes particular conceptions of masculinity. While he argues that no single notion of masculinity emerges as a result of these school-disciplined environments, he shows nonetheless how the school climate can legitimise and normalise enactments of violence. This is despite the overt public rhetoric of school policy platforms condemning violent behaviour. Through in-depth interviews with boys and school teachers, Hamlall shows that blustering intolerance and assertive responses to boys’ violence in schools paradoxically habituates violence. He recommends breaking the cycle through alternative, more caring, discourses of engagement which challenge aggressive masculinities. Not to do so would be to insidiously promote the caricature of aggressive masculinity.

This anthology of education at the crossroads does not chart out any single new direction. Instead it suggests that we are forever at the crossroads making decisions about directions for educational change. This is not a sign of weakness, but rather of heightened awareness about options. But our crossroads are not a four-way intersection, or a ‘divergence of two roads in the woods’ (Robert Frost 1874-1963: *The Road not Taken*). Our choices are not simply dichotomous alternatives, or ‘roads less travelled’ (Frost), rather the pathways from the crossroads lead in multiple and winding configurations, sometimes back to the point of origin. We should, like Alfred Lord Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses’, embrace eternal quest:

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch where through

Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
(‘Ulysses’: Alfred Lord Tennyson 1809-1892.)

Research into educational practices must not translate into disguised forms of indoctrination. These research endeavours draw from contexts of our practice, from insights about the varied options we would like to pursue. It is noteworthy that many of the papers in this anthology argue for alternative educational enterprises that will provide deeper, richer, fuller understandings of the challenges which face teachers, students and learners both in their classrooms and in more general university and school spaces – choosing pathways for their long-term career prospects within the broader society. Education is about crafting productive citizenry, not mindless ideological adherence, and the alternate pathways often involve ethical and moral re-affirmation – commitment to a collective and common social good. We need clear philosophical education roadmaps to guide the kinds of questions we ask, otherwise we may become manipulated zombies: a living dead; mindless consumers of the words, thoughts and goals of others

The four recommendations made by Olivier in his second paper warrant further endorsement:

1. As educators we need to make our students aware of the precariousness of our planetary ecology.
2. We have to make our students aware of the rampant and dominant infiltration of neoliberal capitalism into our daily lives.
3. As enlightened, fuller human beings, we should exercise our autonomy to live in this world and co-construct its otherness. This can best happen when we understand deep commitment to and connection with the common good.
4. Our creative and imaginative potential to pursue alternative pathways will foster recognition of what is valuable from our past, and while standing rooted in the present, this will enable us to soar above mediocrity into a new tomorrow. We will produce our future.

We give here our own interpretations, merely, of the more erudite contentions

in the papers which constitute this volume. Above all, their authors remain committed to the power that lies within each of us to create the new world order. As social scientists, Bert Olivier reminds us, our responsibility is not simply to *describe* the world as it is, but to *re-interpret it as it ought to be*. This would involve, as Kristeva (2000) suggests, a perpetual re-turning, a revolt of conscience. This is an embracing of power, but as Foucault puts it (1990: 84), 'There is no power without potential refusal or revolt'. We can hear the tunes, but do we listen to the voices of re-turning and re-direction: our new pathways?

With regard to the cover of this issue of *Alternation*: depictions of Education in South Africa are often dark and gloomy. Failure, deficiency and negativity abound in many interpretations of the present state of schooling and Education. However, opportunities for disruption exist. The cover presents a view that working outside the confines of categorical trajectories as constructed by fixed pathways or tracks might constrain innovation and hope for alternatives. By blurring boundaries we allow for glimmers of hope, sparks of inspiration as depicted in the articles of this anthology. Various vantages are likely to co-exist or collide. The artist, Daisy Pillay, depicts momentary flashes which burst out alongside the crossroads of inter-disciplinarity, moving the gloom to glitter.

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