

# Editorial: Southern African Strides in Geography Education<sup>1</sup>

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For the purposes of this Editorial, I want to sub-title it, ‘A Focus on Geography Education Research: North and South’. My reasons for reflecting on this topic will become clear in the course of the Editorial.

Geography Education, at times termed Geographical Education, has been a growing tangent discipline of Geography internationally. There is a plethora of literature in the discipline of Geography Education (GE) from the global north but limited literature comparatively from Africa, especially in the southern African region. Literature does indeed abound from countries taking stock of GE in for example, the United States (Bednarz 2002; Bednarz 2008; Brysch 2014), United Kingdom (Lambert & Morgan 2010; Morgan 2011), France (Graves 2001), Australia (Robertson 2003), Turkey (Şahin & Karabağ 2005; Karabağ & Şahin 2007a; Öztürk 2005; Karabağ & Şahin 2007b; Taş 2007) and Korea (Seo & Kim 2012). There are also cross-country analyses of aspects of GE, such as between Turkey and the USA (Demirci 2004); Europe and the USA (Bednarz & Schee 2006) or on concerns on environmental education (Rickinson & Lundholm 2008; Marcinkowski 2009; Morgan 2015). Eight years ago, Yecit (2010) undertook an international study on research in Geography Education between the period 2000 - 2009 by accessing archives, magazines and papers submitted to national and international conferences in addition to post-graduate and PhD theses. He found that,

the most recent studies related with Geography Education in the world are intensified on digital game based education, adaptation of latest technology to Geography lessons, development of competences in

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<sup>1</sup> This special edition is dedicated to the late Dr. David Manyatsi, senior lecturer in Geography Education at the University of Swaziland (eSwatini).

Geography, CBS applications in secondary education and spread of CBS based social projects, environmental and citizenship education (Yecit 2010: 261).

He commented that the areas of interests were philosophical aspects of Geography Education – such as the inclusion of sustainable development, the use of technological advancements in Geography Education classrooms, textbook research, training and development of competences of teachers and the least literature was on interdisciplinary relations.

A more recent undertaking devoted to the nature of research in Geography Education in the Nordic countries can be found in the Norwegian journal of Geography's special issue (2013) on 'research on Geographical education'. The editors (Rod & Saetra 2013: 117) of this issue, argue that didactics (as a field of research) in Geography despite it being 'an evolving field of research for approximately 20 years...is not yet a particularly mature field of research'. They contend that despite a keen interest by scholars to contribute to the special issue, there was 'a relatively high number of unfinished or rejected papers' and they believe that this reflects the 'immature status of Nordic research on the didactics of Geography'.

In southern Africa, Van Eeden and Warnich (2018: xiv) note, that in the context of South Africa, 'a combined or comprehensive publication on teaching and learning History and Geography as disciplines in their own right and as combined ... is long overdue'. However, it must be acknowledged that within the broad umbrella of teaching and learning of the Social Sciences (History and Geography), they do argue that there are publications, which are over a century old. Indeed, there have been some particularly significant publications from sub Saharan Africa and critical engagement in particular in the southern African region but many are now considered outdated (see for e.g. Beets & Le Grange's article on Geography Education in South Africa in 2005 and their later article in 2008 on post-apartheid curriculum reform). Of course, there are significant book and journal contributions of a philosophical nature in the ambit of teaching and learning in Geography Education in SA and Africa of late (see for example, Wilmot & Irwin 2015; Lotz-Sisitka, Shumba, Lupele & Wilmot 2016; and Van Eeden & Warnich 2018). However, there is still room for a broader expanse of the literature in Geography Education from a range of scholars publishing in GE in SA contexts and from its neighbours thus a revisiting of recent Geography Education research in the southern African re-

gion is thus timeous.

This special edition attempts to address this call partially and to expand the borders beyond SA to publications in Geography Education in the southern African region. This edition is also inspired by the work of the SANORD TEACHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP (STEP) thematic group of SANORD, wherein I am the co-ordinator of the global south. This special edition herein is the result of invitations to Geography Education scholars in higher education institutions across South Africa and within the SANORD network of universities, with a call to scholars in the Southern African region, specifically through the STEP thematic group in 2016/2017. The edition of journal articles thus comprises of southern Africa's most recent contributions to knowledge production emanating from three countries: South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, by scholars researching in the field of Geography Education. It is also with deep regret, that this edition pays tribute and mourns the passing of Dr. David. Manyatsi in 2017 who was co-authoring a paper for this edition on the teaching of sustainable development in the Swaziland context. The review panel comprised of Geography Education, Social Sciences and education academics from the global south and north.

The edition seeks to provide a wide spread of articles from established and novice researchers publishing within the field of Geography Education in Southern African countries, that is, the recent research strides that have been made in GE in southern Africa are foregrounded. There are distinct efforts to develop scholarship and promote the mentorship of young academics in Geography Education and this is evident in several co-authored publications herein. Collectively, the edition serves to showcase the areas of research in: curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, in addition to the epistemologies and methodologies in the expanse of research being undertaken within GE in the region (of course in the Nordic countries and Germany, they would refer to this as the didactics of Geography). Interestingly, the interest areas in Geography Education in the south do mirror many of the focus areas in Yecit's (2010) publication and the Nordic special edition (Rod & Saetra 2013). What is different is the focus on curriculum innovation in countries in the south as they grapple with decolonising the curricula and responding to climate change. Within the South African context, articles are spread across an expanse of Geography education interests from school to higher education. The school based papers focus on aspects of curriculum policy, textbooks as instructional resources at school and learner performance in the school exit

examination. The papers that are higher education centred, revolve around Geography students' preparedness for the B.Ed programme in higher education, structuring courses in mapwork and fieldwork to resolve preservice teachers' limited knowledge and skills, the introduction of innovative learning tools in courses and filling the gaps in knowledge amongst inservice teachers through open education resources. Additionally, there are contributions from Zimbabwe that deal with Geography curriculum innovation in SA and Zimbabwe, namely in the introduction of GIS into the school syllabus and the impacts of food insecurity on learners in Zimbabwe. In the Namibian context, the integration of climate change into the Geography curriculum is the emphasis. Summaries of each of the articles are catalogued below.

The edition commences with an article by Le Grange and Ontong titled: 'Towards an integrated school Geography curriculum: The role of place-based education'. Therein, the authors trace the plethora of curriculum modifications in democratic South Africa, which were a rudimentary attempt to decolonize education. In particular, they hone in on the most recent amendment called the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and revisit the concepts of 'continuity' and 'progression' in the school Geography curriculum. They note several shortfalls in the CAPS curriculum regarding poor integration, a lack of appreciation of the value of indigenous knowledge and textbook reliance which could nurture unproductive pedagogical approaches by teachers. They conclude by suggesting what they term as 'place-based education' as both an approach and a framework to overcome the shortfalls in the Geography CAPS curriculum.

The next paper by Manik and Malahlela focuses on specifically the use of CAPS textbooks by Geography teachers in FET phase (Grades 11 and 12). They examine the use of the textbooks and associated challenges experienced by teachers in two poor provinces of South Africa: KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, both of which are located along the eastern coast of South Africa. Their data derives from a mixed methods north-south study on Geography textbooks and pedagogy. They reveal an enormous discontent amongst the teachers who complained of textbook access challenges, which was detrimental to them achieving quality teaching and learning with resultant negative effects on learner performance. Poor textbook quality was also observed in respect of geographic content, decontextualized information, irrelevant examples and wrong information. Most interestingly was the view that some CAPS textbooks did not sufficiently address learners' needs in terms

of catering for English as a second language in the two provinces. The authors conclude by recommending a reimagining of the CAPS textbooks by all stakeholders to address the challenges experienced in the CAPS textbook use.

The next article by Ahiaku and Mncube is the result of their interest to research Grade 12 (school exit year) Geography learners' poor performance in public schools in the Ithungulu district of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. They undertake this investigation through the lens of teachers and they use a mixed methods approach. Using the following research tools: questionnaires and semi structured interviews, they remarkably reveal that no relationship exists between the Geography teachers' professional qualifications and learners' performance. Nevertheless, variables such as the gender of the teacher, the teaching of the subject and the teachers' marking experience were positively correlated to the learners' performance in the grade 12 Geography exit examination.

The following article keeps the discussion in South African context but shifts it away from being solely school based. Malatjie and Singh address the all important current higher education debate that abounds on the preparation of students for higher education in South Africa, in their article titled: Implications of the articulation gap between Geography learners in secondary schools and university. They used a qualitative case study approach and drew their sample from a cohort of first year Geography students who failed both semesters and lecturers who teach first year Geography. They additionally examined the Geography FET curriculum and its alignment to the first year Geography curriculum at one university. Whilst there is literature (see for e.g. Dhunpath & Vithal 2012; Manik 2015) which argues that institutions are underprepared, both Malatjie and Singh argue that Geography students are indeed underprepared for university and unable to manage the requirements for first year university Geography. Malatjie and Singh reveal an interesting caveat around learners' preparation for higher education namely that there are Geography teachers at schools who have a tendency to promote surface learning, which is rejected in favour of deep learning in higher education.

Sarita Ramsaroop's paper, which follows on, sculpts part of learners' poor performance down to teachers' weaknesses in a particular sub discipline namely that of mapwork. In her paper titled Bringing Map Learning To 'Life' By Using The Environment As A Learning Resource, she explores first year student learning in mapwork via course work and fieldwork. She reveals that students have developed pedagogic content knowledge and demonstrated

agency in their learning of mapwork and she therefore presents data that illuminate the idea that gaps in knowledge stemming from a school education can be filled through creative methodologies in university Geography education courses.

As advancements in technology begin to transform teaching and learning in higher education, Golightly and Van der Westhuizen, in their paper turn the lens to examine online learning. In particular, they explore online problem based learning amongst third year Geography Education students. Their study found that the student teachers were receptive to online learning tools as well as online collaborative spaces within which they could interact with each other. They contend that these findings have positive implications for online teaching and learning delivery models at universities.

The next paper by Dreyer hones in on needs specific inservice teacher training in Geography education. He locates a specific aspect of post-apartheid curriculum change in the Intermediate and Senior Phases where selected aspects of Physical Geography were moved out of Geography and into the theme *Earth and Beyond* in the subject, Natural Science. He then undertook a case study of a rural disadvantaged school district located in KwaZulu-Natal and noted that the Natural Science teachers did not have any Geography training and they were using a transmission pedagogic method in tandem with the textbook to teach this theme. He reports that essential geographic resources such as a map and the globe were absent in the teaching. Dreyer resultantly devises an intervention using Open Education Resources (OER) to develop these teachers professionally.

Tarisayi, in the next paper, moves the discussion on GIS to Geography Education in Zimbabwe following curriculum changes in Geography. In his paper on ‘Lessons for GIS implementation in Zimbabwe from the South African experiences’, he draws on the challenges experienced in the introduction of GIS in SA schools, to provide suggestions to Zimbabwean education policy stakeholders on how best to manage GIS as a new inclusion in the syllabus. He suggests integrating GIS into Geography themes in the syllabus rather than having to teach it in an isolated manner, the provision of sufficient financial resources for GIS implementation and increasing the time allocation for GIS in the syllabus.

The next paper keeps to the context of Zimbabwe. Ndiweni and Manik examine the ‘Determinants of Food Insecurity Amongst Primary School Children in South Western Zimbabwe: A Case of Matobo District’ through the

prism of affected parents and teachers. They report on the determinants of food insecurity in a context where inadequate data presently exists. Using a case study research design and accessing school administrators, teachers and parents of food insecure children in schools, the paper is an attempt to mine deep. The results reveal that the determinants of food insecurity amongst primary school children in Matobo district are multidimensional with numerous facets and implications for children: social, economic and environmental and collectively these tend to exacerbate the vulnerability of children. In addition to the loss of assets, the study highlights elements of dire poverty and climate change as key contributors to food insecurity for all members in a household and not only children in this rural district of Zimbabwe.

The value of understanding and learning about climate change in relation to life in southern Africa cannot be underestimated. In the final paper contribution, Tshiningayamwe examines the integration of climate change into the Namibian school Geography curriculum.

Her analysis indicates that climate change content is not fully infused into Namibia's high school Geography curriculum. She reveals that although there are features of climate change in the Geography curriculum, the teachers do lack pedagogical content knowledge, they are recipients of inadequate professional development and there exists poor quality teaching resources for climate change compromising its teaching.

There is a common thread weaving through majority of the contributions, the prevalence of poverty: a poverty of resources, finances, biophysical poverty of learners, poverty of knowledge and competences, poverty of training, a poverty of commitment. All of these serve to highlight how Geography Education can be vulnerable to subverting the progress of a post-colonial education that countries in the southern African region have been trying to infuse to garner positive changes in education. But... there is hope presented in all the papers, the authors provide recommendations which can serve to build resilience and reignite the post-colonial task at hand. Nevertheless, I do persist in my argument that there is a need to continue to examine and take stock and trace the status of Geography Education in countries in the southern African region due to the nature of post-colonial curriculum transformations and innovations that have been unfolding. It is evident that education is being fashioned to be responsive to environmental and technology concerns in addition to efforts to decolonize Geography curricula.

**Acknowledgement:** I am grateful to Prof. Erlend Eidsvik, of Geography Education at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and SANORD representative, for his critical commentary on this Editorial.

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