

Editorial:

Toward More South African Research on Learning in Childhood

In the fourth issue of this young journal there is already much evidence, based on the manuscripts we have received, that there is a need to publish more research on the education of children. The journal is filling a gap, which we recognised four years ago, when we started planning for it. However, there continues to be a dearth of articles on the psychology of learning in childhood. Perhaps there simply is not enough research capacity yet. Perhaps it is the result of the backseat that primary school education, specifically in the foundation phase, occupied in the educational reform agenda until recently. Perhaps it is too expensive to conduct studies that inquire into the way children learn, with fieldworkers required to conduct large scale research with findings that can be generalised. Perhaps we all feel that we cannot diminish any child's time on task in school by interfering in school routine in a country where so much learning time has been lost in so many ways. Perhaps we have given up on single, qualitative case studies that do not go beyond description. Although such studies may, logistically, be easier to conduct, they do not seem to influence policy much. Whatever the reason may be, no one can argue that we know enough of the tapestry of South African children's learning. Certainly, in this journal, preference will be given to empirical work that reports on research of child learning and development in future, with studies of any design type included.

The articles

This does not mean we do not welcome manuscripts about teachers and teaching, especially ones that look at the core of teacher education. Such an article is the first one in this issue. Sarah Gravett theorises the age old theory-practice 'divide,' arguing that the culprits responsible for this notion may well be those of us who design teacher education programmes. Her stance is that knowledge of education and 'doing' of education can be 'interlaced' in schools that are closely affiliated to teacher preparation programmes. Such collaboration, she argues, should be on-going, so that school management teams and teachers of such schools can become part of the teacher education team of a university. Carisma Nel writes about teacher preparation as well, proposing that there should be a specific place for "the vocabulary of mathematics" in the building of teacher knowledge in the pre-service years.

Mathematics education is also the topic of the article by Graham Dampier and Daphney Mawila. They explain how the translation of a standardised German test was used with a sample of children who were assessed in isiZulu and Sesotho, concluding that this pilot inquiry showed that only some items were affected by the translation. The next article, by Nosisi Feza, about the need for pre-school interventions, concludes that, ideally, "quality mathematics interventions, longitudinal studies on impact of such interventions and tracking studies on schooling effects of early quality mathematics preparation" are sorely needed. Remaining within the field of learning in the early

years, Brian Ramadiro reports on a study of grade 2 – 6 learners’ reading errors in isiXhosa and in English. He concludes that the children who were tested read better in isiXhosa than in English, but that they are not reading as well as they could be reading in what is their mother tongue.

The role of speech-language therapists in an inner-city context is the topic of the article by Sandra du Plessis. Reporting on a descriptive survey study she suggests that speech-language therapists need to consider and employ innovative service delivery models that utilise the strengths of inner-city dwellers and teachers in this specific multilingual context. Günther Fink and co-authors report on evidence they gathered on the developmental impact of a community-based project to improve school readiness. They found higher primary school enrolment rates and improved physical development among children formerly attending the center compared to the matched control group after one year.

In the next article in this issue Zelda van der Merwe and Carisma Nel report disconcerting findings of a study they conducted in a teacher education programme. They examined a programme at a South African university and found that the reading literacy components are included haphazardly in the programme design and that there is no evidence-based research included in the curriculum of the pre-service teachers. In another article on the topic of pre-service teacher education describes the variety of approaches to programme design for the preparation of foundation phase teachers. Steyn and co-authors found that the subject area of “life skills” is addressed differently in nine higher education institutions, with some paying more attention than others to the national school curriculum content.

Anita Keller and Max Bergman describe a study of grade R children’s self-esteem, as judged by their teachers. They include issues related to measurement and ecological validity, culture-sensitivity, and suggest subsequent work on self-esteem of children in South Africa.

By the time of going to print we have not yet received the outcome of the submission of the journal for accreditation in the higher education system in South Africa, where new journals are reviewed after one year. Once more we salute authors who have donated their work to the two issues of the second volume.

Lastly, we include a call for manuscripts for a special issue on numeracy education, guest edited by Hamsa Venkat and Mellony Graven.

Elizabeth Henning (editor) and Graham Dampier (associate editor, 2012)

On behalf of the editorial team

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