



Turning the spotlight on the politics, power and problems in primary education



Authors:

Marcina Singh¹ 

Jonathan D. Jansen² 

Affiliations:

¹SARCHI Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

²Department of Education Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Marcina Singh,
marcinas@uj.ac.za
marcina.research@gmail.com

How to cite this article:

Singh, M. & Jansen, J.D., 2024, 'Turning the spotlight on the politics, power and problems in primary education', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), a1610. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1610>

Copyright:

© 2024. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

When the call for articles went out, there was an expectation that submissions would focus on mechanisms of coloniality, reinforcing the truism that the remnants of colonialism are alive and well in our education system. However, much to our surprise, what emerged was a collection of articles that focused on the effects of a colonial and apartheid past intertwined with post-apartheid legacies. To us, this highlighted three things: firstly, the discourse of early years education has not sufficiently theorised and problematised the notion of decolonisation; secondly, there is a tendency to conflate pre- and post-apartheid challenges highlighting an inability to distinguish between problems we inherited and problems we created, and thirdly, the early years of education are so riddled with challenges that it becomes impossible to redirect attention elsewhere.

Nevertheless, this collection does provide critical insight into the key challenges in primary education. Closely linked to decolonial debates on language and literacy, the contributions of Akinmolayan et al. (2024) and Barends and Reddy (2024) advocate for Afrocentric pedagogies and challenge normative practices about how we teach learners to read and make sense of what they read. Christian and Stambach (2024) highlight how instructional leadership is key to improved school management, particularly in communities that are prone to crises and violence. The contribution by Jacobs (2024) gives impetus to the voice of parents as a previously silenced constituency. It suggests that when parents are involved in their children's learning, learning is optimised, and the transformative potential of community engagement is unleashed. Dyosini (2024) notes that learning, unlearning and relearning through continuous professional development is key to realising a transformed primary education sector. The learning context is highlighted by Singh (2024a), who astutely notes that violence (physical, emotional and epistemic) and the resultant trauma militate against effective teaching and learning and that learning interventions will remain unimpactful unless the issue of violence in schools (and communities) is addressed. Maistry and Du Preez's (2024) contribution provides some philosophical insights and critiques the curriculum from a posthumanist perspective as a departure from Western-Eurocentric humanist tradition. They posit that a posthumanist approach can unleash the emancipatory potential of education, particularly as we seek to decolonise the existing childhood education institutions. Lastly, Ebrahim (2024) focuses her attention on the epistemic dimension of Early Childhood Care. Using case studies from the US, Africa and South Africa, she highlights how engaging with experiences from varied geopolitical spaces allows us to resist and contest dominant perspectives in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

A golden thread emerges from this collection that highlights mechanisms of coloniality as being evident in challenges relating to language, voice, recognition, learning contexts and power. These aspects have also been highlighted as problematic within South African higher education spaces (Jansen 2019). As such, the contributions bring life to the words of Maldonado-Torres (2007), who notes that 'we breathe coloniality, all the time and every day' (p. 243). While all the educational malaise in primary education cannot be solely attributed to colonialism and apartheid, this collection does highlight how *all the time and every day*, learners in primary schools in South Africa are not receiving the quality of education they are entitled to. They are stuck in a system that often sets them up for failure, and their living and learning contexts feed this mechanism that supports them to underperform, resulting in a cycle of learned helplessness.

As a way forward, there is an urgent need to include early childhood education and primary education in discussions about decolonisation, as it is not immune to the challenges currently experienced in the higher education sector. The challenges in these sectors may manifest differently, but the colonial mechanisms remain the same. In conclusion, it is evident that 'the

Note: Special Collection: Interrogating Coloniality in South African Primary Schools.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

provision of basic education in postcolonial states is entangled in a web of past and present hegemonic forces' (Singh 2024b:4). However, understanding these forces is essential for emancipation and transformation.

References

- Akinmolayan, E., Hingston, C., Akpan, U. & Arise, O., 2024, 'Towards decolonisation of primary school education in South Africa', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1440>
- Barends, Z. & Reddy, C., 2024, 'Moving beyond a balanced approach to reading instruction In search of a contextualised alternative', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), a1528. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1528>
- Christian, D. & Stambach, A.E., 2024, 'Inequalities in the Cape Flats: Principals' perspectives on children's schooling', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), a1527. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1527>
- Dyosini, T., 2024, 'Continuous professional development of teachers: Perceptions and challenges of in-service foundation phase teachers', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* (forthcoming)
- Ebrahim, H., 2024, 'Interrogating the epistemic dimension for new beginnings in early childhood care and education', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1532>
- Jacobs, C., 2024, 'Reimagining a framework for parent involvement in South Africa: Preparing preservice teachers', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), a1431. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1431>
- Jansen, J.D., 2019, *Decolonisation in universities: The politics of knowledge*, Wits University Press, Johannesburg.
- Maistry, S.M. & Du Preez, P., 2024, 'The posthuman condition: Insights for decolonising curriculum in childhood education', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), a1436. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1436>
- Maldonado-Torres, N., 2007, 'On the colonality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept', *Cultural Studies* 21(2–3), 240–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>
- Singh, M., 2024a, 'Huge investments, poor outcomes: The impact of violence and trauma on learning', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1522>
- Singh, M., 2024b, 'Hidden traumas of colonality of a South African child who received an academic scholarship', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 14(1), a1585. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1585>