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Challenges and Responses in the 21st Century.  
Scientific & Academic Publishing, USA.***Freda Wolfenden*

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This book promised much; a series of vignettes and critical studies of innovations, initiatives and debates across different education sectors in Southern Africa from local academics with a variety of discipline backgrounds and deeply familiar with the contexts in which they are teaching and researching. The scope of the book is huge, ranging from reports of small-scale enquiries to broader overviews of shifts and developments at the national level. I hoped this would be something to celebrate, an invitation to engage with insights from the South. But the reality was a little disappointing. Most problematic for me is the lack of a sense of a coherent whole in the book, an absence of intellectual threads through the narratives and signposts to help the reader link the empirical studies and the more theoretical or rhetorical pieces. The variety of styles, subjects and multiple perspectives sharing a common geographical location are the book's strengths but I had no sense of why these particular subjects and articles had been included. In some chapters the abstract made reference to the broader picture but this was often not followed through in the body of the piece. Taken as a whole the book portrays a context with interesting developments but there is no sense of how these complex issues interrelate across the landscape, and the dominant theoretical ideas or debates are only implicit, never openly discussed. Perhaps this is not the intention?

The editors' introduction gives little indication of the motivations behind the book, origins of the contributions or criteria for inclusion. These would have been helpful in framing the contributions and making the book work as a coherent whole. The contributions are highly variable in quality, a few read as if they started life as assignments or internal policy / review papers, some appeared to be extremely recent, and others more dated. There is nothing wrong with this. But for inclusion in an international book a much clearer focus on the intended positioning and audience, together with more consistent editing might be expected. There is a need to eliminate repetition across chapters, omissions and typing errors – was the population of Swaziland previously estimated at 1126 million people (p. 43)! All the references are gathered together at the end of the book implying the editors see this as a coherent narrative rather than a collection of discrete pieces – for me this was frustrating and I would have preferred references to be located with each individual chapter.

The book is divided into five parts, each with a number of chapters. The first section explores 'Programme Reforms and Implementations' and begins with a damning critique of national policies which inhibit participation of international students in work integrated learning placements associated with higher education programmes. Whilst Taylor anticipates some of the recurring themes of the book it seems a curious choice for a first chapter – a considerable proportion of the narrative is concerned with local policy detail. Chapter 2 explores teachers' professional identity and is, by contrast, curiously uncontextualised. Lombard asks key questions about how teachers respond to changes, not merely in policy but also shifts in views of knowledge and learning. However, through neglecting an exploration of how professional identity is negotiated and emerges in the context of Southern Africa she offers little new to the field, merely synthesising the existing knowledge base. The chapter closes with suggestions for further research and I wanted to encourage her to develop one or two of these in their own context.

Much of Chapter 3 is then similarly disappointing with little sense of the local in its description of the introduction of a new high school leaving certificate (the HIGCSE) in Swaziland. The reader is left wanting to know how the curriculum has been localised, what training the teachers undertook and how they adapted and reacted to the change? Instead there was a lengthy piece on supervision of schools, forms of assessment and even a digression to reforms in West Africa, all of which appeared rather disconnected from the general argument of the chapter. In many ways the following chapter provides the core of this book. Mago Maila situates his discourse in higher education and begins with a critical perspective on prevailing hierarchies of knowledge which accord priority to 'scientific' knowledge and inhibit exploring how the local might be linked with the global. This is developed into a passionate advocacy for transformative learning strategies to be harnessed to education for sustainable development and movement towards a theory/ practice duality where one continually informs the other as students move deeper into their practice. These key ideas frame many of the pieces in the book and might have benefited from being developed more fully throughout the book. Chapter 5 is concerned with tertiary learning opportunities in horticulture and could have provided an interesting case to illustrate these

arguments but the account lacks analysis and is somewhat inward looking towards the particular institution.

Section two consists of two chapters looking at the impact of HIV/ AIDS on education. Chapter 6 takes society's response to the public health challenges associated with HIV / AIDS as its focus and Munachitombwe Muyabala argues passionately for embracing the 'Healthlife' concept, a holistic framework of physical, financial and spiritual health. Whilst his focus on 'transformation' and change is refreshing, the lack of theoretical depth to his argument and the absence of any detailed analysis of current approaches make it difficult to see how this idea might be of benefit to learners and be applied within education systems. The following chapter zooms in on a small-scale interpretivist study exploring teenage pupils' views on a Christian God in the context of HIV/AIDS. I found this insightful and fascinating, the voices of the pupils were genuine and engaging and I was left wanting to know more – Where was the study carried out? What was the environment of the school? What are the views of their teachers?

The third section explores parental involvement in education and its three chapters are possibly the most coherent section of the book, although I wondered at the rationale for the inclusion of the first commentary, a case study of parental engagement and activity at a primary school in a very different environment, the UK's capital city, London. The abstract recognises the dissimilar context and suggests there may be lessons from this case for colleagues within the SADC region. However, there is no discussion of this within the main body of the article and the immense differences in policy, institutional structures, lifestyles and histories of participation in formal education make the process of transposing ideas and strategies difficult for readers unfamiliar with London primary schools. By contrast the following chapter is firmly situated in the SADC region, although I had to work hard to establish the exact location of the study. This empirical study is tiny in scale but Masango highlights policy tensions in support for school community interactions and shares examples of how these relationships are understood by parents and school staff. The final chapter in this section delves deeper, with a detailed and thoughtful ethnographic study of the literacy trajectory of four young children across both home and school environments. Rich with children's voices and behaviour together with vivid descriptions of their surroundings, the article clearly illustrates how these young children's agency is limited and how, across both domains, adults don't view them as knowledgeable. But freed from an adult presence the children experiment and negotiate with multiple early literacy practices. These observations are highly pertinent; frequently children's lack of progress with literacy is partly attributed to a lack of suitable resources but when unsupervised these children were seen to be creatively using any available material as a literacy tool.

Section four looks at Open and Distance Learning in two countries of the region. Reaching learners in marginalised and nomadic communities is critical to achieving *Education for All* goals and the challenges of engaging these learners in secondary education through ODL in Botswana are explored in the first chapter. Gatsha draws on data from a remote learning centre to highlight tensions in the design and delivery of the programme, in particular the limitations of the curriculum as experienced by learners. These issues — different forms of knowledge, language of instruction and so on — are relevant to colleagues in other contexts and it will be interesting to know if his recommendations are acted upon and the resulting impact. The companion chapter adopts an institutional perspective to analyse the challenges associated with offering ODL within a conventional university (University of Swaziland) where staff work across both modes. Following the adoption of a VLE (Moodle) the author describes pilot and implementation activity. Much of this journey will be familiar to the reader from other contexts but less frequently discussed is the author's observation that the explicit structure in the VLE led to an increased focus on teaching approaches by academic staff — a 'rediscovering pedagogy'. As the author comments this offers the possibility of these ODL staff acting as 'agents of change' across the institution.

The book finishes with a section labelled 'Education policy issues' but the chapters continue their focus on specific issues in particular environments; private schools in Swaziland, the expansion of primary schooling in Zimbabwe and the development of teacher education in Botswana. The immense growth of low-cost private schooling in countries such as Nigeria and India is currently a much discussed topic with controversy over the quality and equity of the education provided within these schools. The chapter here, the weakest in this section, could have added a valuable small-country perspective to this debate but I found it difficult to get a sense of scale and participation in the private schooling sector in Swaziland. Data was generated only from newspaper reports so, inevitably, the investigation focusses on 'bad practises' seen in illegal private schools, whereas, it would have been useful to understand the wider picture and to include views of parents as users of these schools. Chapter 14 offers a comprehensive description of Zimbabwe's trajectory towards UPE since independence and includes a welcome discussion of female education, the only reference I noted to gender issues within the collection. Shortage of qualified teachers is identified as a factor limiting educational achievements in Zimbabwe, as in many neighbouring countries, and the final chapter focusses on strategic development of teacher training in Botswana. Monyatsi points out that this has been predominately undertaken within a traditional academic framework with its emphasis on abstract subject knowledge. This analysis offers a useful addition to our understandings of the genesis of the 'theory- practice' divide in teacher education; many commentators currently argue this division is restricting improvements in teacher quality across the region.

I ended this book wanting to know more about some of the initiatives and to draw together the key ideas. For

the reader who makes a judicious selection there are some interesting pieces to stimulate further investigation; the chapter summaries in the preface are useful in pointing the reader to particular areas of interest, although disappointingly lacking in detail on the location and context of the studies, a considerable flaw in a book whose value rests so heavily on offering a platform for local interpretations and expertise. This may be unintended but the book does illuminate an encouraging emerging participation in research communities. As Mantyi-Neube observes in Chapter 3, there is a need to encourage colleagues in Sub Saharan Africa to look both inward and outward in their contributions, exploring how their local knowledge can be linked to global knowledge, to shift and broaden the discourse.

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