

Editorial: Dealing with the challenge of rising unemployment: can this be done and how?

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It feels somewhat strange to think that the end of my five-year term as editor of the *SAJP* is in sight. These years have been a challenging but interesting and rewarding period in my career. I shall always be indebted to the core editorial staff for their help and support: the consulting editor, Anthony Pillay, the consulting editor: statistics, Tyrone Pretorius, the books editor, Kopano Ratele, the copy editors, Willy Nel and Linda Theron, the publishing editor, Erna Kinsey, and the editorial secretary, Moipone Williams. Anthony's appointment, as incoming editor, is to be welcomed. I believe he is ideally equipped to take the journal to new heights, especially as the *SAJP* will be going online from 1 January 2013.

While reading the articles due to appear in this issue of the *SAJP*, I noticed commonalities that enabled me to group the articles into specific themes. The different authors wrote about **assessment-related issues, the role of culture in the theory and practice of psychology, adolescent developmental issues, the training of psychologists and resilience in psychology**. These topics have a bearing on our core business as psychologists. However, in this issue, I want to focus on a matter that has implications for the future of the country as a whole: the debate on the Grade 12 results and, more particularly, the impact of basic education and training on higher education and training and, eventually, the world of work.

In my first editorial of 2011 (Maree, 2011), I reflected on the 2010 Grade 12 results and the unexpectedly large increase in the overall pass rate. More particularly, I discussed a number of issues including the following:

- a. The problem of the unequal distribution of teachers, especially in the gateway subjects (mathematics, physical sciences and accounting), between the more affluent urban areas on the one hand and the rural and township schools on the other. Some observers have called for a systematic teacher audit to ensure adequate planning at national level while others have called for the systematic 'redeployment' of teachers to achieve a better balance.
- b. How to interpret and deal with the trend among those parents who can afford it to send their children to private schools in the well-founded belief that there they will stand a better chance of achieving results that will help them qualify for sought-after fields of study at tertiary training institutions.
- c. How to respond to learners whose parents can least afford private education and who are once again disadvantaged in that they do not have the luxury of choosing between public and private education.
- d. How to break the vicious cycle where being poor and disadvantaged more often than not means inadequate support at school and in the community. This leads to inadequate achievement at school frequently resulting in inappropriate and/or inadequate study opportunities and inadequate realisation of personal potential including failure to find suitable employment and to make a meaningful contribution to society at large).

There is little evidence that these issues have been dealt with at all. In fact, the release of the 2011 Grade 12 results was followed by numerous discussions in the printed and oral media that simply rehashed views that had been aired so often before. Sadly, in the words of Jonathan Jansen (2012, p. 7), rector of the University of the Free State: *[T]he off-stage losers [in the ongoing education challenge] remain the poorest among our children*. Some observers argue that research on the above issues has been no more than an academic exercise that has had little practical impact on what is

actually happening in our schools and at our tertiary training institutions. Others argue that whatever research was conducted was inadequate. Suffice it to say that the situation is a matter of concern to all of us — not only to policy makers who also have to deal with the problem of escalating unemployment.

It is against this background that I would like to commend the education authorities, and Dr Blade Nzimande, in particular, on the release of the *Green Paper for post-school education and training* (DoHE, 2012). The paper stresses the importance of collaboration at all levels (basic education and training, higher education and training, and the world of work) in combating the scourge of unemployment. It proposes strategies that can bring about meaningful change in the lives of many thousands of people, particularly prospective students and the unemployed.

Before I continue, I would like you to read an extract from one of the oldest newspapers in South Africa:

Anxious bereaved families have been forced to wait for several days before they can bury their loved ones as there have been no doctors at the Professor ZK Matthews Hospital in Barkly West to proclaim them dead. ... Families from afar as Hartswater, Windsorton, Kimberley and Barkly West stood outside the hospital's doors yesterday waiting for answers from management about the delay (Halata, 2011, 2).

Numerous articles with similar content have appeared in our newspapers over the past number of months. Sadly, once again, those suffering the most are desperately poor people living in the rural areas and townships. Many reasons can be advanced for this tragic state of affairs, but I will focus on the following two reasons in particular.

- a. The severe and increasing shortage of medical doctors.¹
- b. The unwillingness of medical doctors to work in rural areas.

Despite compulsory community service for medical doctors and professionals in related fields, we are nowhere nearer to finding a solution to the problem of uneven service provision than we were before. Recently (2012-01-09), we learnt that a number of medical doctors who had recently qualified and were supposed to complete their community service in the Eastern Cape refused to honour their commitment. Time and space prevent an in-depth discussion of the reasons for this. I will therefore deal with only two issues here: the number of medical doctors that are trained annually and what happens to these doctors after their training.

Year after year, thousands of young people apply to study medicine, yet only a handful are accepted into schools of medicine. The number of disappointed and frustrated prospective medical students grows with each passing year. Can nothing be done to increase the number of students that are accepted into this field of study — a study field that will guarantee employment, a good salary and provide graduates with an excellent opportunity to design successful lives and make a social contribution? I believe the answer is “yes”. Much can be done in this regard. We could easily treble the number of students studying medicine annually. Experts I have talked to over the years cite a lack of training facilities as the biggest challenge. If that is the case, policy makers should rethink the matter and create more training opportunities. If this necessitates closing departments and terminating training in fields of study that do not ensure employment, so be it. Creativity, openness to change and a willingness to adapt are indispensable commodities in the 21st century. What worked in the past, may no longer work today. All people must accept this as a fact and focus on finding ways to ensure that we, as a society, become more pro-active and adaptive rather than reactive. Let us conduct research on those fields of study that will offer students bright futures, and let us rank such fields on a scale of (say) 1 to 10 in terms of the degree to which successful completion will ensure employment.

As an example of creative thinking, I would like to congratulate colleagues at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for identifying the desperate need for career counselling among numerous disadvantaged people in particular and for subsequently establishing the National Careers Advice Service, which has the potential to impact positively on the career aspirations of many

thousands of South Africans. On phoning 086 0111 673 (share-call), callers will receive a return call (at no additional cost) from trained staff members who will provide advice on questions such as the following:

- a. Where are my local training institutions based? What are their telephone numbers?
- b. What study opportunities are available to me with my Grade 12 results?
- c. How do I go about obtaining a learnership? What learnerships are available to me?
- d. Is the provider of private training where I wish to study registered on the National Qualifications Framework?
- e. How employable will I be after my training?

I believe we can all benefit and learn from this SAQA initiative.

I will now briefly discuss each of the contributions in the current issue consecutively under the headings listed earlier.

Assessment-related issues

In the leading article in this section, *Self-reported generalised anxiety and psychomotor test performance in healthy South Africans*, Charles van Wijk (2012) contends that tests like the Grooved Pegboard may have special meaning in South Africa, particularly in the context of screening for HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders. However, inconsistent findings on the relationship between self-reported anxiety and neuropsychological performance in healthy adults have been reported. These findings pertain specifically to tests of psychomotor functions such as the Form Board and Grooved Pegboard. This article attempts to clarify the relationship between self-reported anxiety and performance on psychomotor tests among South African samples. Van Wijk (2012) concludes that anxiety may confound psychomotor test performance and argues that practitioners should be aware of its (anxiety's) potential influence.

In the second contribution in the first collection of articles, *Covariation of character strengths and dimensions of psychological type in university peer educators*, Nicholas Munro, Yvonne Chilimanzi and Viv O'Neill (2012) explore the association between character strengths and psychological type in a sample of university peer educators. The authors found that, when compared with introverts, extraverts reported significantly higher scores for curiosity and humour. Appreciation of beauty and excellence, on the other hand, was significantly stronger in *intuition* than in *sensing* in the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)* (Briggs & Briggs Myers, 1990) preference of intuition (compared with sensing). In addition, the capacity to love and be loved and gratitude were higher for participants with the *MBTI* category of feeling when compared with thinking.

Journal editors regularly state that articles that describe the standardisation of psychometric instruments are particularly welcome. A case in point is the third article in this section, *The reliabilities of an English, Afrikaans and Xhosa version of the SDO₆ scale in South Africa*, in which Ines Meyer (2012) establishes the psychometric properties of the SDO₆ scale as a measure of social dominance orientation in South Africa. Reliability was determined for both the original English and newly developed Afrikaans and isiXhosa forms.

The second group of articles deals with the role of culture in the theory and practice of psychology.

Investigating the role of culture in the theory and practice of psychology

In the first contribution in this section, *South African Indian women screened for postpartum depression: multiple case-study of perinatal and postpartum experiences*, Tasneem Kathree and Inge Petersen (2012) state that postpartum depression is an incapacitating condition with negative psychosocial implications and attempt to understand the experiences of South African Indian women screened for postpartum depressive symptoms. The study confirms the findings of previous studies on this topic, namely, that interpersonal issues, abusive relationships, economic hardships and a lack of adequate social support either trigger or intensify depressive feelings in the postpartum period.

There is a general belief that psychological disorders can be understood sufficiently only when the cultural contexts in which they occur are considered. In the second contribution, *Culture and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): a proposed conceptual framework*, Kempie van Rooyen and Zinziswa Nqweni (2012) present a framework for analysis that can be used as a starting point for the inclusion of universal and culture-specific elements of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This framework promises to facilitate the study of the dynamic interaction between universal and culture-specific elements and analysis of the way in which this interaction may yield the symptom profile often observed with PTSD.

Professionals are unanimous in their agreement on the importance of community-based palliative care in South Africa. Yet, little research has been done on the challenges that formal caregivers in low-income settings face in their efforts to provide caregiving services. In the concluding contribution in this section, *Contextual elements of palliative caregiving in a low-income community*, Sarah Uren and Tanya Graham (2012) attempt to fill this gap in the literature. Working from an interpretive phenomenological perspective, the authors conclude that contextual factors are an integral (if neglected) aspect of understanding caregiving in various settings.

The third batch of articles deals with adolescent developmental issues.

Dealing with adolescent developmental issues

In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, an increasing number of at-risk children are dropping out of school and adopting a desperate existence on the streets without any resilience-promoting resources at their disposal. In the first article in this section, *The role of school engagement in strengthening resilience among male street children*, Macalane Malindi and Nyika Machenjdzze (2012) consider whether school engagement reinforces resilience in male school-going street children in residential care. The findings indicate that school engagement can expose street children to beneficial social and academic environments and thus enable them to regain their childhoods, remain in school and function more adequately.

Azwihangwisi Muthivhi (2012), in the second contribution in this section, *Schooling and the development of verbal thinking: a case of TshiVenda-speaking children's reasoning and classification skills*, examines rural South African primary school learners' achievement in classification and generalisation tasks. The purpose of the study on which the article is based was to investigate the connection between verbal forms of thinking and the sociocultural activities in and through which verbal thinking develops. The author's unsurprising finding is that different ways of thinking and concept development are rooted in and shaped by the sociocultural activities and discourse modes in which learners participate. It confirms the importance of taking cultural contexts into account when classroom learning activities are organised for these learners.

In a world that is becoming increasingly complex and that is characterised and influenced by multiple changes in the global economy, adolescents experience numerous challenges that require effective coping skills. In South Africa, the situation is exacerbated by adolescents' exposure to factors such as violence, socio-economic deprivation and ongoing transformation, which can lead to high levels of stress. Accordingly, adolescents need to be resilient in order to cope with the heightened levels of stress and trauma. Marisa de Villiers and Henriëtte van den Berg (2012) in their article, *The implementation and evaluation of a resiliency programme for children*, describe the development, implementation and assessment of a resiliency programme for 12-year-old children. Whereas the intervention seemed to impact positively on intrapersonal characteristics (e.g. emotional regulation and self-appraisal), interpersonal skills and external resources (e.g. family and general social support) did not improve meaningfully.

The next two sections comprise only one article each.

Training of psychologists

The evidence-based movement has seemingly not impacted significantly on South African clinical

and counselling psychologists despite the international importance of the movement. In their stand-alone article in this section, *Psychology training directors' reflections on evidence-based practice in South Africa*, Ashraf Kagee and Crick Lund (2012) report on their interviews with a number of psychology training directors to ascertain the reasons for the limited impact of the evidence-based movement in South Africa. An analysis of the directors' reflections reveals wide-ranging opinions on the merits and disadvantages of the movement. The authors recommend that the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) should engage with evidence-based practice (EBP) and that a locally standardised accreditation of psychology training programmes should be developed to assess EBP.

Resilience in psychology

In the first contribution in this section, *Resilience in remarried families*, Otilia Brown and Juliet Robinson (2012) report on a mixed-methods approach to investigating the characteristics of resiliency factors that enable the adjustment and adaptation of remarried families. The authors emphasise the importance of directing interventions at specific life stages as challenges, as well as protective factors, differ widely in the different stages. The article makes for informative reading given the limited knowledge of resilience in family contexts.

In the last article in this issue, *Where is the dialogue? a social constructionist view of empirically supported treatments*, David Fourie (2012) reflects on the polemic which manifested when the list of empirically supported treatments by the American Psychological Association in 1995 was made public. Fourie (2012) contends that the two opposing sides pursue a similar objectivist/empiricist and reductionist epistemology and, instead, adopts a social constructionist perspective. Using practical examples, he demonstrates that the notion of therapeutic outcome as linearly shaped by either technical or common (or a blend of these) factors amounts to deceptive oversimplification and does not succeed in explaining dialogue, which constitutes the heart of psychotherapy.

As usual, readers are invited to comment on the different authors' treatment of the topics dealt with in this issue. Let us know whether you think the topics are relevant to 21st century psychology. Most importantly, feel free to submit manuscripts that address gaps you have noticed in (South) African and other psychological research.

I wish to thank the SAJP's core editorial staff for their exceptional support and Tim Steward for his thoughtful editing of this contribution.

Enjoy reading this issue of the SAJP.

Kobus Maree

NOTE

1. This also applies to many other fields of study such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, communications pathology and architecture.

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