

Impact of Grade R in South Africa limited

Although it is widely accepted that early learning programmes are the most appropriate ways to overcome the difficulties faced by children from poor backgrounds, a study by a SU research group found that Grade R has virtually no measurable impact in the poorest schools that were sampled. The study was done by ReSEP (Research on Socio-Economic Policy), a research group in the Department of Economics, assisted by other researchers.

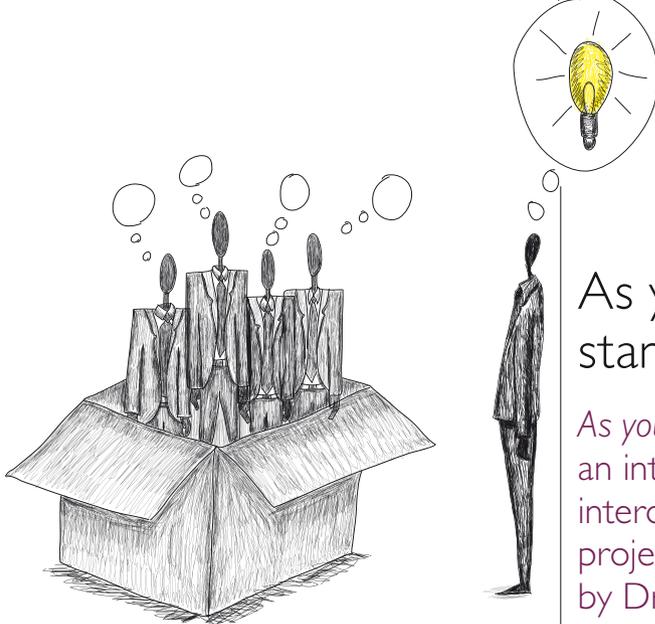
Their findings, released by the government's Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, showed that instead of reducing inequalities, Grade R further extends the advantage of more affluent schools, as early learning programmes do have a positive impact in such schools. The report states that on average children who attend Grade R gain only about the equivalent of 12 days of learning in maths compared to children who do not attend Grade R, and 50 days with regard to home language. But these gains are unequal: While children in the richest two deciles of schools gain more, those in the poorest three quintiles, on average, do not gain at all.

In the light of expectations that Grade R can help to overcome the learning deficits of poor children, the results are discouraging. The authors believe that the differences in impact in rich and poor schools have less to do with Grade R specifically and more with factors such as the capacity of the schools to implement and support programmes of this nature.

In response to the report, the Department of Basic Education has held a two-day workshop to develop an improvement plan that mainly focuses on improving the quality of Grade R.

Prof Servaas van der Berg, lead researcher at ReSEP, said he was impressed with the fact that DPME is serious about measuring the impact of government policies and releasing reports such as these. See www.resep.sun.ac.za for the full report.

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As you are standing here

As you are standing here is an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary research project that was launched by Dr Ernst van der Wal and Dr Lizabé Lambrechts. It arose out of an interest in the suppressed and/or erased histories of Stellenbosch and its surrounds.

The various socio-political and cultural discourses (be it from the colonial, postcolonial, apartheid and post-apartheid eras) that affected the complex history of this town serve as the point of departure for this research and teaching project. By bringing together postgraduate students and lecturers, as well as members from the local communities, *As you are standing here* aims to promote forms of social inclusion and critical citizenship by creating an interactive space where ideas surrounding history and its representation can be shared and critically investigated.

Various methodologies and practices were developed as a means to address the particular concerns of this project, such as curatorial mapping that was used to engage with the stories, life experiences and material culture of members of the local community. In order to test these methodologies, various exhibitions, interventions and public workshops will take place in the course of 2015 within Stellenbosch and Kayamandi. A digital platform is also being developed that employs an open source mapping programme to share information, texts, images and video and audio files.

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Boosting creativity to develop critical thinking

Creativity is key to employability and has been rated by the Pedagogy for Employability Group as the most important quality they sought in graduates. This is particularly true in southern Africa where the work force is faced with unique challenges that will demand creative solutions.

Collaborative work of Dr Liezel Frick and Dr Ruth Albertyn (both from SU) and Prof Eva Brodin (Lund University, Sweden) has focused on developing the concept of creativity at the doctoral level. They now aim to extend the project to focus on conceptualising and developing creativity within the wider higher education sector and contributing to developing locally relevant and globally acceptable pedagogies that foster creativity through the contributions of a cohort of focused doctoral studies.

Creativity is closely linked to the development of critical thinking, reflection and problem solving, which are essential attributes for graduates who need to be both globally competitive and locally relevant. They believe that it can be taught and learned in any discipline and is therefore within reach of all students given a supportive pedagogical environment.

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