

Editorial

It gives us great pleasure to get the opportunity to write this editorial at a time when the world continues to be pushed and tossed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Who would have thought that almost two years later countries would be experiencing a fourth wave of the pandemic despite the existence of vaccines! This is confirmation that there is need to consistently do things differently. No more one size fits all. Ugly as this pandemic maybe, it pushes every structure and culture of the world, including the higher education sector, to think out of their comfort box for survival. Intellectuals continue to challenge the current colonised form of operation in the higher education sector as an attempt to deal with inequalities of the past. All five papers in this Issue provide a strong account of social justice; yet their focus is on different concerns about higher education today. In this issue, we see how national politics play out in higher education contexts from different countries. Of the five papers, only one paper is set in Zimbabwe while the other four are located in South Africa. Interestingly, they all portray similar social injustices. While each paper has the discourse of social justice in it, the following key words and themes are noted in some of the papers:

- Equal participation and structural inequalities/ Parity of participation
- Decolonising and indigenous knowledge systems
- Participatory research methods
- Epistemological access
- Engaged scholarship
- International research funding
- E-Learning

A common thread found across the articles is a critical interrogation of definitions, structures, and relationships in higher education. The articles in this December edition draw attention to the intricate and often invisible ways that power works within an institution and the people that occupy its spaces. All the articles touch on ways that uneven power dynamics can be troubled and challenged, in relationships in higher education. These dynamics include the relationship that students and staff have with knowledge. As a collective contribution, the articles unpack taken-for-granted understandings that shape access to and participation in higher education.

Mlamuli Hlatshwayo' s article "The raptures in our rainbow nation: Reflections on teaching and learning practices in the time of #RhodesMustFall" offers a critique of unequal power relations to teaching and learning arrangements in higher education. The article begins with an updated engagement with Morrow' s well-known concept of epistemological access in higher education. Hlatshwayo argues that a curriculum that marginalises indigenous and local



knowledges creates alienation, and thus a form of epistemic violence for students who occupy a space where ways of knowing and being are unfamiliar. An important argument is that epistemological access cannot be offered to students by the university. Instead, the process should be collaborative, negotiated co-construction of knowledge by students and staff. This challenging task is one that must be negotiated by students and staff, as they reconceptualize existing knowledge structures.

This view is also put into practice by the next two articles in this issue, which are set in different historical universities; one is a historically advantaged university while the other is in a historically disadvantaged black university. These articles provide different yet interrelated approaches to the practical work of decolonising and transforming higher education spaces, curricula, and cultures. Nkosinathi Emmanuel Madondo's article "Teaching science by drawing on students lived rural home experiences" troubles accepted notions of how scientific knowledge should be taught at a university. The article reports on a study that was conducted in a historically white, urban university. Madondo argues that, historically, such a university would transfer knowledge in ways that emulate middle-class students' existing social and academic literacies. The author draws on Nancy Fraser's theory of justice to create a sociological framework that acknowledges and adapts students' prior experience into teaching and learning practices. The important notion of student alienation is also foregrounded here and teases out implications for students from rural communities.

The article "Creating intergenerational learning spaces: A collaboration between UNIVEN community engagement programme and Dzomo la Mupo" by Vhonani Olive Netshandama, Nyadzani Dolphus Nevhudoli, brings a fresh approach to teaching and learning in higher education by bringing in knowers of indigenous knowledge systems and university students under one roof. The authors do this by drawing on a critical participatory research project to offer practical insights into how power relations can be reimaged using the exchange of intergenerational knowledge. The project challenges micro-structures of power inequality with the university, in ways that include the community outside the university in participatory processes.

The next article shifts away from the teaching and learning focus that we see in the first three articles. In their article "Interrogating the power dynamics in international projects", Chrissie Boughey and Sioux McKenna interrogate the complex dynamics involved in Global North-Global South research partnerships. The project is contextualized as part of a higher education agenda that prioritizes international partnerships and research outputs. The empirical findings are framed by Archer's social realism – and in particular the important role of institutional and individual agency – to explore the nuanced dynamics between role-players. This framework reflects the intersecting historical, cultural, and social factors that shape research partnerships. The authors show that power relations are complicated by constraints such as limited infrastructure and resource scarcity in rural areas. Role-player dynamics are not defined by a rich-poor dichotomy, however, and the participant contributions map out structural inequalities that shape higher education in South Africa and globally. The authors caution against

simplistic dichotomies that set out North-South partnerships and encourage researchers to engage in ongoing learning and reflection as part of international partnerships.

The final article, "E-Learning policy and technology-enhanced flexible curriculum delivery in developing contexts: A critical discourse analysis" by Caroline Magunje and Agnes Chigona offers a critical discourse analysis of e-learning offerings at a private university in Zimbabwe. Using Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA), the article provides a theoretical critique of e-learning policy and related documents of the university. The authors argue that national ICT policies of several African countries are great in their nature, but they are silent on how technology should be used to enhance curriculum delivery. This is a critical observation in that failure to encourage implementation from a national level, institutions might not see the need to do so in their own policies especially in a developing context like Zimbabwe.

In analyzing all the five papers, it became evident that higher education institutions in South Africa and beyond, especially on the African continent, continue to suffer colonial impetuses. While this hits hard on everyone in the system, it hits even harder on students as they try to navigate their way to success. This is seen in the first three articles wherein issues of parity of participation are illuminated. Similarly, challenges are not only reflected in pedagogical spaces, but they also play out in research and structural or policy levels as reflected in the last two articles.

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