

Editorial

This volume presents a wide array of articles that highlight the nuanced dynamics of South African Higher Education. As the sector grapples with several issues, the insights herein are both timely and transformative.

We begin with a paper by Kristien Andrianatos and Janelize Morelli, from Northwest University, titled 'Sharing vulnerability: A duoethnographic enquiry into the development of digital competencies. The authors reflect on their professional learning experiences as educators who are in the journey of developing digital competencies. Their research uses Mentimeter, an interactive presentation software. This software enables students to participate in online discussions with devices such as smartphones and laptops, and their input is displayed on the presenter's screen, almost instantly. Through dialogical storytelling, the authors share explicitly the journey associated with adopting new technologies in the South African diverse student context. In their discussion they critique the Higher Education Digital Competency (HeDiCom) framework for digital competencies, arguing that it fails "to account for the emotional and psychological toll that developing digital competencies can impose on HE educators". Their findings emphasise the importance of professional learning communities and vulnerability in using technological adoption. This study invites the readers to critically reflect on their own journey of digital practices, hoping that they would recognise the pedagogical vulnerability of this experience.

The next article is by Msakha Mona from University of Cape Town and Ellen Hurst-Harosh, from University of Johannesburg titled 'African language-speaking plurilingual students' writing in English: Shifting the focus from "error" to "variation"'. This article challenges traditional practices of assessing students' knowledge in written assessments. They argue that assessment practices should consider the social and linguistic contexts of students' writing, particularly for plurilingual speakers of English. Through a translanguaging lens, the authors demonstrate how African plurilingual students' writing reflects their unique *locus of enunciation*. By analysing students' English essays, the authors reveal how variations often dismissed as grammatical mistakes are influenced by students' repertoires. In their analysis, the authors draw on discourses on plurilingualism, translanguaging and hidden curriculum. This article contributes to the notion of rethinking assessment practices in higher education institutions by advocating for a decolonial reframing that views plurilingual students' writing as meaningful variations that are rooted in their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

From recognizing the diverse student body in South African Higher Education, Chrissie Boughey from Rhodes university, presents an article titled 'Conditions constraining the potential of Educational Development to impact on the transformation of teaching and learning'. The author extends prior frameworks such as Bernstein's discourse analysis and Gamble's typologies of



knowledge to argue that knowledge produced in higher education is not “powerful knowledge” required to meaningfully reconceptualise systemic issues. The author uses critical realist and social realist framework to critique barriers to achieving equity and transformation in teaching and learning, particularly in the South African context. One such barrier this study reveals is the tension between equity driven and efficiency driven discourses which in the author’s view shapes practitioners’ agency and knowledge production in ways that perpetuate existing inequalities. The author mentions that one of the conditions constraining the potential of educational development practitioners is their employment conditions, whereby many are on contract positions. Therefore, there is an imperative for enhanced capacity to produce the powerful knowledge that will reconceptualise problems and improve employment conditions which will lead to the recruitment and retention of practitioners who will build a career in the field. Another condition the author emphasises as a barrier to “powerful knowledge” is the separation of the research function, which is in a research unit and practice which is in a teaching and learning centre in some universities. Boughey’s article advocates that for meaningful transformation in higher education to be realised, there should be strategic alignment of research, practice and institutional structures. This article aims to contribute to the transformation of teaching and learning not only in South Africa but also across the world.

Paul Maluleka from UNISA presents an article titled ‘Ageism and gatekeeping: My experiences as an early career academic at a historically black university in South Africa’. The author uses an autoethnographic reflexivity approach to narrate his encounters with ageism and gatekeeping at a Historically Black University as a New Generation of Academics programme academic. Drawing from intersectionality and Nat Nakasa’s “native of nowhere” theoretical lenses, the author argues that the intersectionality between ageism and gatekeeping made him feel like a “native of nowhere” as he did not feel a sense of belonging among early career academics within the university. The author argues that age and gatekeeping tactics are used in post-apartheid South African higher education to determine who is the legitimate knower or not, who is valued, or not and who is recognised or not. The article calls for “decolonial love” as a transformative practice in higher education. It urges senior black academics to not perpetuate the violent experiences they have experienced in institutions of higher learning. In that way Early Career Academics can become “natives of somewhere” within the university, therefore creating a more humane and inclusive academic future.

Then Linda Sparks from the University of Free State presents an article titled ‘Empowering marginalised students in access programmes: A gendered and Afrocentric approach to a decolonised academic literacy curriculum’. The article highlights that it is a social injustice if prescribed reading texts for students are western and patriarchal, hence attempts should be made for students to be exposed to gender/Afrocentric reading material. The article explores the transformative impact of a decolonised, gender inclusive curriculum on South African students. Using a mixed method approach grounded in critical theory, the findings emphasise the importance of diverse, socially just content and collaborative Ubuntu inspired pedagogy in addressing systemic inequalities and enhancing

students' success. This research calls for a reintroduction of a curriculum which takes into consideration elements of a decolonised and gender-centric reading curriculum to an academic literacy module to empower marginalised learners.

Halima Namakula, from the University of Johannesburg, titles the next article 'Supporting First-year student academic literacy and emotional well-being through a pedagogy of care in South African writing centres'. Drawing on qualitative interviews with students and peer tutors, the author views writing centres as transformative spaces, fostering a sense of belonging to first year students. The author advocates for a 'pedagogy of care' whereby emotional support and academic skill building are integrated as part of the programme offered to first year students. The article positions peer tutors as key in making writing centres inclusive and welcoming spaces. The study recommends research that could explore long-term impact of the 'pedagogy of care' on students' academic and personal development and how this can inform ongoing improvements in writing centre practices.

The next paper, by Mazvita Mollin Thondhlana and Sioux McKenna from Rhodes University, is titled 'Community engagement as a liminal space of translanguaging'. This paper emphasises the transformative role of community engagement (CE) in higher education. The paper reveals that Community Engagement can be a space for universities to heed calls for multilingualism because linguistic hierarchies and academic boundaries dissolved as translanguaging practices in isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans were validated during their study. The transformative liminality, they assert, holds valuable lessons for rethinking language use and pedagogical approaches in higher education. In other words, the liminal space of CE, where students felt free of many of the language and power constraints of the formal classroom, was key to its valuing and nurturing multilingualism. These spaces offered lessons for translanguaging that can enrich teaching and learning.

These articles are a powerful contribution to the ongoing discourse on how institutions of higher learning can navigate the complexities of teaching and learning whilst transforming and rethinking their practices.

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