Editorial

This December 2025 Issue brings with it a suite of ten papers and three book reviews, entangled in four different themes that are so relevant to the current atmosphere in academia, namely sustainable development, language and linguistics, Artificial Intelligence, and social justice. As such, the issue ignites a positive ambience as it shares innovative pedagogical practices in specific disciplines, which range from the Arts, Management Sciences, Physics, English assessment at undergraduate levels to structured coursework doctoral programmes. The issue further problematises the dominance of certain discourses in higher education, and also provides an interesting argument on the need for the sector to consider providing more specialised mentoring opportunities to middle career academics. So, the image on the cover page of the issue encapsulates this positive effect that the authors brought in.

Sustainable development

In the first paper titled: 'Sustainable community engagement within the Arts: A conceptual framework'*,* Yvonne-Marié Brand and Janelize Morelli explore the complexities of fostering sustainable community engagement within the Arts by developing a theoretically grounded framework informed by literature and practice. The presented framework contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the role of the Arts in higher education contexts in advancing sustainability. The authors have positioned the current debates on community engagement and sustainability. The framework is structured on the basis of six interrelated themes.

The second paper by Neil Eccles, titled: 'Sustainable development: Attempting to teach some 'Good Sense' to Economic and Management Science students with a Freirean inspired module', reflects on the impact of the module designed to conscientise and implicate economic and management science students in socio-economic and environmental challenges. A conceptual framework proposed by Hopwood, et al. (2005) was used to compare student positions in relation to these challenges based on their pre- and post-module opinions.

The third paper by Heidi Matisson and Amanda Hlengwa, titled 'Building blocks for success: Mentorship's impact on mid-career academics'*,* present an autoethonographic study of their personal experiences in their journey of professional growth in academia. The authors use collaborative autoethnography to present their contrasting experiences to explore the connection between mentoring and the progression of an academic through the various stages of their career. They employ an analogy of building a house and making a home. With this analogy they argue that while early career academics can benefit from mentorship that addresses the basic elements of an academic career, mid-career academics require more specialised interventions. This paper ties in well with the next autoethnographic study under a different theme.

Language/linguistics

Paper four by Tarryn Frankish, Sphelele Ngubane, and Andrea Alcock is titled 'Critical considerations for COIL practitioners in higher education: A review of literature from South Africa, the global south and developing spaces'. These Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) practitioners from a university of technology in SA embarked on an autoethonographic study to present a useful toolkit for students to use when exposing them to international virtual projects. The trio presents a critical evaluation of common tendencies that playout in power dynamics, preparedness and engagement of students and logistics, portraying students from the global south as inferior because of the common understanding that they come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Still on language matters, paper five by Mbali Sunrise Dhlamini and Russell H Kaschula, titled 'Language inclusion and neo-colonialism: The impacts of ethnolinguistic admission criteria at South African universities', presents another perspective about inclusion and inferiority but in this instance contextualised within the South African public university sector. This paper presents a critical view of the current SA ethnolinguistic distribution of African languages in SA universities. The argument is that the ethnolinguistic identity strategy transcended the scope of basic education in the homelands to the construction of the Historically White Universities (HWUs) and the Historically Black Universities (HBUs). Through this study, Dhlamini and Kaschula explore the language admission criteria and their impacts on promoting language inclusion and social cohesion in Departments of African Languages of selected universities.

Artificial Intelligence

Language matters continue in paper six with a focus on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for assessment of the English language. Dennis Alonzo, Jan Michael Vincent Abril, and Cherry Zin Oo, in their paper titled 'The use of Artificial Intelligence in English Language Assessment: Empirical evidence and future directions', provide a detailed scoping review to determine the effect of using AI in conducting English Language assessment. The study established that the use of AI in English assessment has more benefits. It takes away unnecessary workload on the teachers' shoulders and its real time outcome encourages active engagement by students.

Paper seven takes the AI debate further by arguing the impact of metaphors that students at an Egyptian university use to describe AI. Yasser Atef and Maha Bali titled their paper: 'Whose metaphor is it anyway? Analysing AI metaphors from positionality and values of speaker and recipient'. The duo reflects on how an individual's positionality affects how they receive and interpret AI metaphors. This duo-autoethnographic study by an undergrad disability activist, who is living with some form of disability, and his abled lecturer, who is an academic developer, argue that the meaning of a particular metaphor attached to AI may carry a different meaning to abled bodied individuals and disabled ones resulting in an unconscious bias. This analysis is a necessary one because it unveils the different meanings we attach to AI based on our positionality. Atef and Bali, therefore, advocate for supportive learning environments when reading, deciding,

speaking, creating policies, or teaching about AI. This leads to the next paper about concepts and their effects.

Social justice

Rubby Dhunpath also plays with words in paper eight, titled 'Beyond empty signifiers: Reclaiming social justice as an academic pursuit in higher education', which provides an interesting yet concerning argument about popular or buzz concepts in the higher education discourse. He adopts Ernesto Laclau's theory of empty signifiers to describe popular concepts such as decolonisation," "social justice," "inequality," the "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)". Dhunpath further adds two more traditions of theoretical lenses from critical scholarship namely, Fraser's (1997, 2005) tripartite model of social justice and by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum's (2011) capability approach.

Paper nine by Bako Audu, Honjiswa Conana, and Delia Marshall is titled 'Physics graduate preparedness: A human capabilities perspective'. In this study, Audu and colleagues explored students' perceptions about the teaching of Physics at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The authors needed to establish what enabled or constrained the development of graduate attributes through the teaching of Physics at this institution. In this identification process and the authors concluded that it will be critical for the institution to include assessing and addressing students' individual needs, integrating graduate attributes more explicitly and systematically into the curriculum, establishing platforms for student voice, and enhancing career guidance. The authors further concluded that it will be important to prepare graduates not only for the workplace but to take up societal roles as well-rounded, critical citizens.

The issue closes with paper ten written by a team of scholars and postgraduate supervisors from six different countries. The authors are Sioux McKenna, Paul Ashwin, Diane Negra, Patrick Onyango, Marie Paretti and Christine Teelken and the paper is titled 'Reimagining doctoral education in South Africa: The case for structured coursework'. These scholars provide a critical view of structured coursework doctoral programmes using SA as a case. South Africa's Higher Education Quality Sub-Framework (HEQSF) document encourages the adoption of alternative doctoral education structures other than reliance on full thesis only. The study points out the benefits and challenges of offering a structured coursework doctoral programme. Benefits include developing a shared knowledge base, building a community of practice, broadening career paths because candidates develop multiple skills such as project management, critical thinking, communication. Challenges, on the other hand, include balancing structure and flexibility, addressing resource implications, ensuring relevance and contextual considerations. In all this, the paper argues that these evolving doctoral models should 'remain enchored in the fundamental purpose of doctoral education: cultivating researchers capable of meaningful and original contributions to their fields'.

The Issue ends with three book reviews. The first to be reviewed is *Hydrofeminist Thinking with Oceans: Political and Scholarly Possibilities* (2024), edited by Tammy Shefer, Viviene Bozalek,

and Nike Romano. The second is titled *Thirty Years of Literacies Testing at the University of Cape Town: A Critical Reflection on the Work and its Impact* (2024) by Alan Cliff. The third book reviewed is titled *Reparative Futures and Transformative Learning Spaces* (2024) edited by Melanie Walker, Alejandra Boni, Diana Velasco.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

Langutani Mary Masehela
University of Cape Town