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### **Editorial October 2023**

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Throughout the history of the human race, we have had to learn to adapt to change in the face of a range of catastrophes and maladies that have threatened our very existence on earth. The Covid-19 period represented one such debilitating era that destabilised communities, societies, and countries and led to trauma, pain, and feelings of inadequacy. However, despite the havoc that it wreaked, we persevered in the face of adversity and learnt to rise above our circumstances. This is indicative of the indomitable spirit of humankind.

In the same vein, higher education institutions were confronted with myriads of challenges during this period as they struggled to adapt to changing circumstances in a locked-down world. However, the onset of the 2023 academic year signalled the return to some form of normality as higher education institutions scurried to explore the implementation of new modes of delivery such as a hybrid model in its various manifestations.

Initially, when lecturers and students had to adapt to online modes of delivery during the extended lock-down periods, which lasted for almost three years, there was an outcry as they waited in anticipation for face-to-face classes to resume. However, as they gradually learnt to navigate the transformed spaces and became comfortable with the new modes of delivery, they settled down to the demands of teaching and learning in changing times. During this period, colleagues in higher education institutions realised that working remotely, despite contributing to disconnectedness from their students, created opportunities for them to reflect on their own praxis, to embrace new ways of learning and knowing, and to become more resilient in the face of adversity. Students also eventually learnt how to adapt and became comfortable with the online form of delivery.

During the return to some form of normality, however, when academics and students from some higher education institutions were informed that contact classes would resume, there was an outcry. While in some instances, academics had to be coerced into returning to work, in others, students staged protests, demanding that online classes be resumed. Eventually, however, there was some semblance of normality as all students and staff returned to their respective institutions for contact classes. These varying reactions during periods of transition are reminiscent of how human beings react when confronted with change, and how they eventually transcend their discomfort to adapt and adjust to changing times.

Despite the onerous journey that academics had to traverse, however, they demonstrated their ability to embrace change, and continued to pursue research focusing on their praxis, insights, and experiences so that they could contribute to research for social change—as is highlighted in the articles in this edition of our journal. An important lesson that we have learnt as academics throughout this

period of self-discovery is that, ultimately, reflective practice is key to understanding how to transform our pedagogy and ways of knowing.

This focus on reflecting on their experiences is clearly articulated by Wood, Kahts-Kramer, Waddington, and Neethling in the first article in this edition, titled, “Lessons Learnt From Facilitating Action Learning With Youth Facing Multiple Adversities.” In their article, they present a case of a participatory action learning and action research project that they deemed a failure after employing social cohesion and collaboration as guiding principles to support vulnerable youth over a period of eight months. Through critically reflecting on why the project had failed and the lessons learnt, they provide invaluable insights to others working with similar groups so that they can avoid the mistakes they made—especially in terms of their assumptions about certain vulnerable groups, and the application of PALAR without a thorough understanding of the participants’ backgrounds, contexts, and challenges.

In reflecting on how they learnt to adapt to change, Msiza, Ndlovu, and Mbatha in their article titled “Transitioning Between Spaces: An Intersectional Account of how We are Becoming Academics,” provide a self-reflective account of their road to becoming academics. In their article, they share insights into how their identities and transitioning between spaces contributed to their becoming as early career academics. Through engaging with storyboarding, an arts-based approach, they provide insights into how “transition between the liminal and dominant spaces have influenced our identity construction and shaped our becoming.” An important lesson that they share is that all our identities are in a state of constant construction and that the academic spaces that we transition are significant to our becoming as academics.

Continuing the conversation of reflecting on one’s practice for the creation of novel learning opportunities, Petersen sheds light on her pedagogical becoming in her article, “My Pedagogical Becoming as a Stellenbosch University Residential Educator During the Covid-19 Pandemic.” In her article, she provides an overview of how she co-created a residential education and support programme with nine women students who remained with her in a university residence during a Covid-19 lock-down. Through the application of an autoethnographic approach focusing on the use of narrated prose, and the application of emotional recall, she provides insights into how an institutional care-based response to the pandemic enacted at one residence, contributed to inclusive transformation at an institution with a previous history of separate education. Furthermore, in this autoethnographic account she demonstrates how through the adoption of a pedagogy of care, relationships can be built, and a sense of community fostered.

This focus on the value of self-reflection on their pedagogy during the Covid-19 period is further explored by Kortjass and Mkhize-Mthembu in their article, titled, “Reflecting on Teaching in the Higher Education Context During the Covid-19 Era: A Collaborative Self-Study Project.” In their article, they reflect on how they explored the use of digital platforms as part of their pedagogical approach during the Covid-19 period. Through the creation of collages, concept maps, and a pantoum poem, they reflect on their teacher educator practices during the initial and ensuing levels of the Covid-19 lockdown period. Their article provides insights into how, through collaboration, they were able to support their students and to enable them to embrace learning during periods of uncertainty. In reflecting on their own praxis during this period of adapting to change, they gained invaluable insights into who they are and who they have become. Their study furthermore confirms that collaborative partnerships between teacher educators can lead to the development of strong learning communities in which strong relationships are built and all members valued.

The significance and value of self-reflection for enhanced practice are further explored by Geduld, Nthimbane, and Kagola in their article, titled, “Humanising Online Teaching and Learning in the BEd. Foundation Phase Programme: Moving Beyond Covid-19.” The primary focus of this study was to explore the experiences of lecturers who teach a humanising pedagogy embedded program in the Foundation Phase at a higher education institution through online learning in a highly under-resourced context. By drawing on their lived experiences and engaging in dialogue through narrative free writing and poetic inquiry, they try to make sense of the process of online learning. The themes that emerged from their self-study are mutual vulnerability and lecturer resilience and collaboration. Through this self-study, they shed light on the importance for lecturers to critically reflect on the challenges and opportunities that Covid-19 presented in order to incorporate some of the best practices acquired during the pandemic period in their teaching to enable better delivery of teaching in a humanising way post Covid-19.

The focus of reflecting on collaboration is explored by Sathorar, Geduld, Moeng, Mapasa, and Oosthuizen in their article “Leading for Sustainability and Empowerment: Reflecting on the Power of Collaboration and Humanising Pedagogy”. In their article, five women academics who hold leadership positions in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela University reflect on their experience of leading their respective teams through the Covid-19 pandemic. As women in leadership, they reflect on how collaboration assisted them to empower each other as well as their respective teams. Through engaging in collaborative self-study and the use of narrative freewriting to generate data, they question whether current leadership practices contribute to equality in the workplace, support collaboration, and encourage self-care and empowerment. This study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the importance of the shift from women leaders holding power to empowering each other as well as the rest of faculty through a humanising ethics of care. Based on their collaborative reflective practice engagement experiences, they co-constructed a humanising leadership model that highlights the link between democratic leadership and enhanced leadership practices.

Continuing the discussion on change in society through social justice, Mbhiza and Nkambule in their article titled, “Grade 4 Rural Learners’ Views and Learning Experiences That Address Social Justice in Postapartheid South Africa,” explore eight learners’ experiences of learning within rural school contexts through photo-elicitation group interviews, which they analyse thematically. The findings revealed that these learners are aware of the conditions that shape their learning in rural contexts, based on issues such as the conditions of the school buildings and the challenges of learning in overcrowded multi-grade classes. Their study revealed that much still needs to be done by the postapartheid government to address issues of equity and social justice in education in South Africa.

In reflecting on where we are and where we need to be on the road of inclusive education, Seeko and Mathebula in their conceptual article, “Democracy and Inclusive Education Policy in Post-1994 South African Schools: Goal, Tension, and Struggle,” critically engage with policy to understand how issues of inclusivity are addressed post 1994. In their article, they argue that despite the formalisation of inclusive education policies by the state, “active participation, deliberative engagement, and participatory representation remain a distant dream for many school-going children in South Africa.” They further contend that the realisation of substantive inclusive education depends on the “protests of the excluded” to contest the ideal state policy and real school experiences of learners in post-1994 South African schools.

This reflection on policy is further explored by Singh, Leen, David, and David in their article titled, “Mending the Research–Policy–Practice Gap: Conceptualising Research as Social Change in Education.” They contend that there is a widely acknowledged gap between research, policy, and practice owing

to a lack of capacity to translate and mobilise research results to end-users, including policymakers, practitioners, and community members. Acknowledging the divide, their conceptual paper focuses on how the research–policy–practice nexus in the education landscape could be strengthened so that research institutions are better equipped to meet the needs of the policymakers and practitioners. To this end, they advocate for a new approach, termed as “research as social change,” which centres research as a mechanism for social change and facilitates the conditions for the mutual understanding of norms, operational roles, academic rigour, and policy and practice outcomes among all stakeholders. The achievement of this ideal, they contend, is to apply the principles of the design-based implementation research framework to the research process so that stakeholders can be empowered to overcome the disparate social and cultural milieus in which they operate.

In reflecting on where we are and where we need to be, Khau’s conference report on the symposium held 26–30 of June 2023, titled, “The Sustainable Development Goals as Guidelines for Socially Responsible Universities: Symposium on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Partnership between Nelson Mandela University and the University of Oldenburg,” sheds light on the 2023–2028 roadmap between the two institutions, which outlines the deepening of collaboration and interdisciplinary projects planned for the two institutions. The symposium focused on strengthening and expanding collaboration and partnership in research, teaching, community engagement, and transfer. Interesting features of the way forward for the two institutions, as highlighted in the report, include the promotion of early career researchers and joint courses for students and young researchers. Another important goal arising from the symposium, relates to joint initiatives in research and education with a focus on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Change in our lives is inevitable, and our ability to adapt to change depends on how we perceive the experiences and how we embrace change. The articles in this edition demonstrate how, through reflective practice and engaging with new ways of knowing and seeing, there is a greater sense of how we can adapt our pedagogy, ways of knowing, and insights to create novel learning experiences that will contribute to education for social change.