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Editorial

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As 2020 draws to a close, we cannot deny that this year has demanded much of us all on personal and professional levels. COVID-19 has turned our world upside down, revealing at the same time both the fragility and resilience of human beings. The pandemic has clearly highlighted the inequalities in our society and, once again, those most affected by the restrictions placed on our private and work lives have been those who could least afford to stay at home and wait for things to change. The pandemic has affected us all, but while the more privileged members of society coped more easily by sitting out the lockdown in relative comfort, continuing to work from home, vulnerable populations suffered from the increase in gender-based violence, children missed out on months of schooling, the elderly were forced to stay alone without the support of family, and casual workers were left without an income and unable to seek means to provide for themselves and their dependents. The impact of the pandemic has worsened the “wicked” problems facing us in this country.

On the flip side, it has also required people to become more open to change, to innovate, to collaborate, and to learn not only to cope with the problems it has brought, but also to learn how to flourish in spite of them. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on our lives, yet it has also opened up possibilities for change, forcing us to *reflect* on what is really important to us in life, and to treasure what we have—instead of always wishing for more. It has unleashed a *critical* mindset and prompted people to *act collectively for change* (e.g., against police violence in the USA and elsewhere, and against corruption in South Africa). In other words, the principles of participatory research for social change are now more manifest in how we live our lives. We have adapted to the “new normal” by wearing masks and social distancing. As researchers, we have learned to conduct interviews, focus groups, and participatory data generation sessions via electronic means, pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones to learn new ways to communicate. Webinars and online conferences have enabled practitioners and community members to access and contribute to discussions that, previously, they could not afford to attend. We now speak regularly with colleagues from all over the world, widening our horizons and expanding possibilities to collaborate for change. Such a terrain is fertile for the co-creation of knowledge through experiential learning—collaborating to find answers to the challenges we face as humans in an unpredictable and ever-changing world. In times of crisis, new ways of thinking, doing, and relating emerge and the opportunity is there for us now, as participatory researchers, to begin to forge a new architecture of human participation in research.

This issue, our second of 2020, contains seven interesting articles by participatory and engaged researchers who address various issues connected to the transformation of education. The first article, by Romm, is a conceptual piece that builds on the work of Mertens by linking the notion of the

transformative paradigm to indigenous paradigms and knowledge cultures. She highlights the centrality of relationship in this kind of work and how such research is in itself “world shaping.” She argues that such transformative work is not just the prerogative of one specific paradigm, but that other research approaches can also contribute to positive social change by adopting a participatory approach to their inquiry.

Brown then moves us to teacher education, and how intergroup dialogue helped preservice teachers to understand the issues of privilege and oppression in relation to diverse sexual orientations. The opportunity to engage with and relate to peers allowed a sense of solidarity and ideas for change to emerge. Intergroup dialogue proved useful to enhance self-awareness of the preservice teachers regarding their positionality as teachers of comprehensive sexuality education, and prompted a desire to learn how to use intergroup dialogue to promote inclusion in the life orientation classroom.

Staying in teacher education, Petersen, Rademeyer, and Ramsaroop explain how they used an action research approach to design and implement an academic support programme using peer tutors. This much needed programme enabled students to support their peers in developing their English proficiency to enable them to cope with the demands of tertiary education. The authors recount how an action research approach enabled them to learn during the design process, improving their practice and the eventual academic product.

Du Plessis and Ahmed’s article moves us out of higher education to a rural school context where they used a participatory visual approach to explore the career aspirations of youth. Their findings add to the literature by providing much needed insight into the aspirations of this marginalised group whose opportunities for further study or employment are often hampered by their economic deprivation and lack of social capital. The visual methods enabled the participants to express their hopes for a brighter future, in spite of their circumstances, and to position themselves as agents of change in their community. The aim of the authors was to sensitise other stakeholders to the need to provide career education and planning opportunities to youth who, normally, are deprived of such support in rural schools.

Shifting to the leadership of township schools, Kagola and Khau also use a visual method, namely collage, to influence how members of school governing bodies perceive the employment of male teachers in the foundation phase. Collaborative reflection on their collages prompted a reduction in bias against appointing male teachers by providing participants with an opportunity to question hitherto unquestioned assumptions and biases about the ability and suitability of men in early years classrooms, and in the caring professions in general.

Arts-based practitioner enquiry methods enabled Childs, Mapasa, and Ward to improve their understanding about how to offer improved academic support to first-year university students. They explain how they developed an innovative, “Crafting Connections,” strategy to facilitate their practitioner self-enquiry. In addition to learning how to create a transformative learning experience for students, they also learnt how to walk the fine line between nurturing students and leaving space for them to direct their own learning.

The last article, by Bhurekeni, is again a conceptual piece that argues for transformation of the curriculum in Zimbabwe, specifically at primary school level, to challenge inherited colonial paradigms and replace them with more indigenous theories and practices. He calls for validation of indigenous ways of knowing, rather than mere acceptance of Western knowledge as the only valid basis for curriculum design. This, he suggests, would require a deeper level of epistemic exploration and understanding.

To round off this open issue, we have a book review by Tshidi Malebese of Zuber-Skerritt and Wood's 2019 edited book, *Action Learning and Action Research: Genres and Approaches*, which gives a concise overview of the different approaches to action learning and action research. The chapter authors are all leading researchers in their genre of action learning or action research and their explanations of when and how to use a particular approach will help other researchers to make appropriate decisions in their own contexts. Instead of a conference report (given that we have not had many face-to-face conferences this year), we include a report on an action research project to improve school discipline in a Zimbabwean context. Chiramba and Harris explain how dialogue in small groups of teachers and pupils can help preempt discipline problems by creating space for participants to share their feelings and seek constructive solutions to address any problematic issues.