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Working Collaboratively to Create a Better World

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The COVID-19-era seems like a distant dream as we continue living our lives as if nothing happened and no lessons were learnt. If we have not learnt anything from its devastating impact on our lives—and the many friends and family members we have lost—then we are surely blind, blasé, or living in a fool's paradise. Yet the aftermath of its impact has seen the emergence of many narcissistic, egocentric leaders hell-bent on plunging us into an even darker abyss, and we appear to be relentlessly carried along on this journey to nowhere as they pursue their narrow-minded self-interests.

It is during times like these—when world leaders are driving our world into crisis—that we must reflect deeply on where we find ourselves, where we hope to be, and how we can raise our voices to make a meaningful difference in the world in which we live. We cannot change the world on our own, but through collective responsibility, collaborative action, and agency we can strive to make the world a better place. Indeed, the COVID-19 era has taught us, if nothing else, that through our collective effort, collaborative engagement, and unwavering support to our fellow human beings, we can overcome insurmountable challenges.

Likewise, as dark clouds eclipse the sun, we must become torchbearers leading the way through troubled times to collectively pursue new ways to reimagining the world creating a better future for our children. Creating such a spirit of collaboration to transform our troubled world requires us to engage with like-minded people who share our vision of a unified world—one that will inspire hope for the future. We can emerge victorious if we pool our resources, talents, knowledge, skills, and funds of knowledge in creative ways for the development of a better world. However, if we espouse an individualistic outlook and continue to remain disconnected from each other, we can rest assured that nothing will change, and we will be at the behest of the dictates of the current generation of autocratic, despotic leaders reminiscent of Hitler, Bismarck, and Mussolini. With that said, the articles selected for this issue illustrate how we can subvert narrow-minded, parochial mindsets and ways of thinking and embrace new ways of knowing and learning

through collaborative engagement, self-reflective practice, and meaningmaking to promote educational research for social change.

The first article, by Nqobile Msomi, Ashley Westaway, and Jacqueline Akhurst, “An African-Centred Community Psychology in Operation in Education Development: The Case of GADRA Education,” is a longitudinal mixed-methods study that examines the significant role that GADRA Education, Makhanda’s oldest NGO, has played in supporting educational projects and vigorously promoting educational change in the city. Through an African-centred community psychology perspective, the study reminds us of the significant contribution that values-based and participatory work can make to transformative change in public schooling in South Africa.

Then, Ezekiel Majola, Noluvo Rangana, and Deidre Geduld, in their article, “Rethinking Paulo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy: Challenges and Relevance in South Africa’s TVET Sector” explore the challenges of applying Freire’s critical pedagogy to the TVET sector through the application of a qualitative participatory action research approach, using visual methodology (photographs) as a data collection tool and involving 15 National Certificate Vocational graduates from Gqeberha. The findings highlight the tensions between TVET’s aim to equip students for employability while aiming to address socio-political inequalities, and the relevance of Freirean praxis in a system driven by economic demands. In examining these tensions, the article proposes a re-thinking of Freirean pedagogy in TVET that entails balancing curriculum, policy, and pedagogical reforms to promote emancipatory education.

The conversation continues in “Inclusive Education and Social Transformation: Analysing the Role of Education Policy in Increasing Equality Among Rural Students in Indonesia,” in which Muhammad Hisyam Syafii, Halim Purnomo, and Azam Syukur Rahmatullah explore the role of education policy in promoting inclusive education, and its impact on social transformation in rural areas of Indonesia. Through a combination of policy analysis and qualitative case studies, their findings suggest that inclusive education policies have the potential to reduce inequalities if they are sensitive to the contexts and engage the community optimally.

Ashnie Mahadew explores the issue of sustainable learning further in her self-reflective article on “Participatory Action Learning and Action Research for Sustainable Learning in a Higher Education Context.” Through the application of participatory action learning and action research (PALAR), she critically reflects on her past experiences as a learner to improve her pedagogical practice for sustainable learning in her university classes. By engaging in memory drawing, she critically reflects on how her childhood experiences as a learner in a traditional classroom have influenced her pedagogical practices in her current teaching context in a higher education institution. Her findings reveal that by reflecting on her past experiences, she

was able to re-examine her worldview for her own personal transformation and assert the significance of adopting PALAR principles for pedagogical change.

The issue of reflecting on one's practice was further explored by Bongiwe Ntombela, Makie Kortjass, and Carol Bertram in "A Teacher's Memories of Learning to Read at Home and School in Rural South Africa: Implications for Practice," in which the lead author reflects on her memories of learning to read at home and at school as a child in KwaZulu-Natal. Using the personal history method and memory drawing, she uncovers her story of how the primary school classroom ethos induced fear rather than a love for learning, reading, and writing. In her role as a Foundation Phase teacher in this self-study, she comes to the realisation that she could promote reading in her class by using a scaffolded approach and creating a positive classroom environment.

In "Contextualising PALAR to be Suitable for Use in Community–University Engagement in the African Context: The African Calabash Framework," Noluvo Rangana, Heloise Sathorar, and Deidre Geduld reflect on the significance of reconceptualising PALAR as a method of engagement with African communities given its Western origin. In their collaboration with an action learning set to understand how African participants experienced PALAR, they developed the African Calabash Framework, which enables PALAR to be more contextualised for community–university engagements within African contexts.

The issue of how we re-imagine our approaches to teaching and learning based on contextual experiences is examined by Martha L. Torres-Barreto, Miguel Angel Lobo-Rueda, and Luis Eduardo Bautista-Rojas in their article, "Design and Narrative Development of a Gamified Tool for Peace Education in the Colombian Post-Conflict." the authors investigate the conceptual and narrative design of a video game centred on the Colombian armed conflict to foster empathy and a critical understanding among users. Using a qualitative approach based on narrative analysis and a user-centred design, they collected historical testimonies through semi-structured interviews with participants who were directly or indirectly affected by the armed conflict. The data were analysed thematically and structured into storytelling experiences to create a technological game that enables users to explore various aspects of the conflict, while the game mechanics stimulate users to reflect on complex decisions and ethical dilemmas.

Collaborative self-study is also probed by Ntokozo Mkhize-Mthembu and Makie Kortjass who, in their article, "Navigating Evolving Digital Spaces of Teaching and Learning Through Critical Friendship: Arts-Based Self-Study of Two Teacher Educators," reflect on their critical friendship journey during the pandemic through arts-based methods to research the critical friendship they forged. In reflecting on this journey through self-study, they discovered how their critical friendship contributed positively to their lives by creating opportunities for support, and a space for their self-development and growth.

In their engagement with collaborative approaches to teaching practice Suné Erasmus, Carolina Botha, and Elma Marais explore the inter-dependability of the various systems in the teaching practice sphere in their article on "An Inter-Dependability of Systems: The Need for Holistic Support for Pre-service Teachers During Teaching Practice." Through PALAR and photo voice as a data collection tool involving pre-service teachers, the action set worked collaboratively to explore challenges and requirements for enhancing holistic support within the systems during and after teaching practice. Their findings highlight predominantly negative perceptions of support from the various role players involved in teaching practice, and advocates for structured support from mentor teachers, teacher educators, host schools, and higher education institutions to realise more sustainable and holistic outcomes.

The focus on collaboration is further explored in "Embedding Feedback in Self-Directed Learning: Distance Students' Active Engagement during Academic Writing," in which Marike Annandale, Maryna Reyneke, and Anitia Lubbe explore how distance students engage with feedback during academic writing using a revised Self-Directed Learning (SDL) framework that incorporates feedback as a cyclical and purposeful component. Through participatory action research involving 10 pre-service teachers who participated in interviews and responded to open-ended questionnaires, their findings reveal that when dialogic feedback is personalised, students' ability to identify learning needs, reflect critically, and take ownership of their learning, is enhanced.

Vuyani Matsha, Zuko Sokupe, and Pumla Bungane examine enhanced learning using storytelling for mathematics education in their "Mathematics Teacher Reflections on Storytelling in the Mother Tongue as a Learning Strategy." Through participatory action research involving in-service teachers as co-researchers, the authors explore how storytelling could be used as a strategy to teach mathematics, and the value of its implementation. The findings emerging from the study, based on the teachers' accounts, indicate that the strategy contributes to enhanced retention of mathematical concepts, enjoyment of the subject, and the development of an inquiring mind.

As usual, the issue closes with a book review and a conference report. The book, *Education and the Working Class: Is there Hope for an Inclusive Approach?*" by Sigamoney Manicka Naicker (African Sun Media, 2024) is reviewed by Cina P. Mosito who asserts that it makes a significant contribution to inclusive education because it questions the conventional position that learners' academic underperformance can be ascribed to individuals' effort and ability, placing blame on learners, their families, and teachers for failure. According to Naicker, the problem of school failure could be attributed to the inability of the education system to respond to a wide range of systemic inadequacies, which contributes to a vicious cycle of marginalisation among disadvantaged learners. The book proposes that to overcome this impasse, there must be commitment to a deepened social justice model for educational planning.

The issue is rounded off by Heloise Sathorar and Logamurthie Athiemoolam's report on the *Africanisation-Decolonisation Indaba* held 7–8 March 2024 at the Nelson Mandela University (NMU) Ocean Sciences Campus. The aim of the indaba was to facilitate a collective exploration of questions relating to what decolonisation at NMU looks like, and how it aligns with Mandela's social figure. The indaba was conceptualised to take the form of a university get-together where different modes of presentations in a variety of genres such as visual and artistic presentations, videos, exhibitions, and dialogues were encouraged to celebrate the work of various role players at the university. The two-day indaba aimed to celebrate the various forms of decolonisation and Africanisation work undertaken by colleagues, faculties, and entities across NMU. In reflecting on the road that the university has travelled in its decolonisation journey, the delegates agreed that the indaba was an eye-opening experience that enabled all role players to gain better insights into how decolonisation and Africanisation were engaged with across faculties and entities at NMU.

All the articles in this issue speak to the significance of collaborative research and self-reflection for enhanced meaning making in various educational contexts. Indeed, the authors demonstrate that through collective engagement and reflective practice, we are better disposed to addressing the range of challenges we are confronted with in education, thereby contributing more holistically to educational research for social change.