

## Editorial

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## Introduction

Technology, mentorship and inclusion in education: Showcasing exceptional masters' and doctoral student research

The collection of research articles presented in this Special Issue of the *Journal of Education* had its origins in a simple but promising idea: what if we put out a Call to master's and doctoral students around South Africa to submit exceptional papers for publication from their recently completed or ongoing research?

As joint editors, we had three goals in mind.

One, to identify and publish exceptional student research in the public domain. Too often, student theses and dissertations are relegated to the shelves of the university library seldom to be read and eventually buried in the institutional archives. A few students might publish out of their examined work, especially those seeking to build academic careers, but these are few and far between. Other students publish out of compulsion when their supervisor insists on co-publishing from their own work for purposes of benefitting from the generous subsidy returns to academics and their universities, but the ethics of this latter practice is a subject for another publication.

Two, to empower students through targeted capacity building to learn how to publish their research in accredited, peer-reviewed journals. Once shortlisted, we had a collective feedback session with the authors as well as individual tutoring sessions to enable first-time authors to turn their research for qualification purposes into a published journal article. In other words, these were not generic workshops on "how to publish out of your thesis" but feedback and evaluation that focused sharply on work emergent from degree studies. It was gratifying to us as editors to sense not only the eagerness to learn on the part of our new authors but also the willingness of some to share ideas with others.

Three, to help boost the careers of novice researchers in the field of education through high-level publication in a top South African journal. A scholarly publication record remains the single most important consideration in the appointment and promotion of academics in

universities, worldwide. Our hope was that being published in this way would motivate and encourage our novice researchers to continue to do good research and turn such work into published products whether in journal format (as in this instance) or a scholarly book.

There was, as one could expect, a rigorous process of selection using the double-blind peer review process in addition to our initial and ongoing evaluation as the two editors. Several submissions were not accepted given the standard set in the Call of “high levels of innovation and originality in conception or methodology or theoretical exploration.” We were not interested in run-of-the-mill research which dominates so much of contemporary masters’ and doctoral research in South Africa, such as the attitudes of principals towards corporal punishment or teacher opinions about the CAPS curriculum of the government.

These nine selected articles therefore represent the best research selected from a much larger pool of submissions and we are pleased to share these with readers of the journal.

The order in which the articles appear reflect three broad categories of focus that emerged from the selected manuscripts. The first concerns innovations in the varied uses of technology in education. Such a focus should not surprise given the explosion in research and development in the field of artificial intelligence and digital education, for example. We start with Jennifer Sheokarah’s fascinating research on gamification and its effects on learner motivation and anticipation. In her article titled “Game on! Improving reading habits: Using gamification to enhance learner motivation and participation” Jennifer explores the use of games in classroom activities as a novel way of increasing learner motivation and engagement. Ekaterina Ryzankina, in her article on “How engineering students use STEM e-textbooks” continues with her insightful work on how engineering students use STEM e-textbooks with the interesting observation about how students still drifted towards old technologies (handwritten notes) despite the power of new tools to enhance learning. It is, however, not only students but also teachers who struggle with new technologies on offer, such as the flipped classroom; Lizelle Pretorius, in her article on “Changing the Titanic’s trajectory: Introducing heutagogy to in-service teachers via the flipped classroom, writes about an intervention carried into schools by in-service teachers.

Tarryn Lovemore rounds off this section with a bold idea: she offers a task-design experiment in her article, “Exploring challenges around integrating music and mathematics for fraction understanding: A task-design experiment”, that sought to integrate music and mathematics in the teaching of fractions in primary schools. The problems of the world do not come to us in the form of disciplines, and this courageous study offers new ways of thinking about work in the inter-disciplines that can enhance learning in a subject still feared by many primary and high school students alike.

The second cluster of concerns revolve around mentorship. More than before, there is an increasing awareness in, and application of, ideas about mentorship in universities as well as schools. Teaching and learning the subject is not enough. The challenges of modern life affect students, teachers and academics in ways made very visible during the pandemic but

the challenge of wrap-around support, as it is called colloquially, is reflected in major budgetary investments in educational institutions.

Thokozane Princess Dyosini's article on "Mentorship as a professional development tool: Addressing early childhood female teachers' lived experiences and perceptions" focuses on the lived experiences of novice teachers in early childhood education and the critical role of structured mentorship in enabling them to cope with workload and power relationships in difficult spaces. Her application of Ubuntu's conceptual frames makes this an innovative contribution to the collection. LeAnne Goliath, in her article on "Reframing parental involvement as cultural wealth in the lives of black female first generation post-graduate students", sheds light on an absence of research on first-generation Black female students, particularly on the cultural wealth locked up in parent support. The assumption that parents in disadvantaged communities have little to add to the academic success of their children is not only wrong but this issue is poorly understood. How parental forms of mentorship are enacted is under researched as is the application of cultural wealth theory in places it is assumed not to exist.

The third section consists of two studies on inclusion, a very expansive topic, but also a contested one in educational studies. What makes Ben de Souza's article on "Sustainability-oriented teacher education for inclusive education in Southern Africa" different and interesting is its comparative focus on African countries participating in sustainable development initiatives that are very much aligned with the SDG (4) commitments of the United Nations. With the focus on disability inclusion, Ben finds that there is a correspondence between teachers' conceptual understanding of inclusive education and their teaching practices in the classroom, with clear implications for inclusion initiatives. Bridget Horner's article on "Mobile Knowings: Balancing spatial inequities in South African higher education" explores inclusion from a decolonial perspective in higher education. She demonstrates how a visual metaphor deepens our understanding of students' complex knowings of higher education spatiality, where dynamic properties—movement, balance, and response to external forces—illuminate the balancing act of students' spatial knowings in such spaces.

Johannes Buthelezi closes this Special Issue by examining up-close the microaggressions suffered by transgender students in four universities in his article on "Transgender students' resilience in compulsory cisnormative university environments." What is innovative in this article is the use of arts-based methods to elicit data from these students and an explanation of their understanding of the meanings of their experiences through self-efficacy theory. In institutions, and society more broadly, there is clearly the need for shifts in policy, planning, and programming that addresses the concerns and ambitions of transgender students on whom there is far too little research in the field of education.

We close by congratulating our nine new authors and hope that this Special Issue offers them all one more launch pad for successful professional and academic research careers.