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# Reflecting on our transdisciplinary contributions

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As we near the end of 2024, I thought it prudent to recap the exciting academic work our journal has published so far this year. The aim of this (very) brief review is to highlight the transdisciplinary contributions of the work as a collective, and to identify overlaps and opportunities in the transdisciplinary scientific pursuit of knowledge. At the time of writing, we published nine original research articles and two review articles.

Our first article of the year (Smidt and Waghid)[1] introduced an arts-based inquiry into critical self-awareness. The authors worked at the intersection of film literacy, digital technology and experiential learning. Through a short-film making project, they explored how young adults developed new competencies and expanded their awareness of their socio-personal realities. Interestingly, the work bridges the arts, non-formal education and social sciences by employing diverse but complementary methodologies. The authors thus demonstrated alternative pathways for knowledge production by highlighting the role of creative expression in fostering critical self-awareness.

Mpofu[2] fuses insights from teacher education, intercultural communication, language acquisition and cultural studies. By integrating findings from these disciplines, the article demonstrates how professional knowledge in higher education is informed by structured programmes and cross-cultural experiences. This research highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of teacher development and offers a model for professional growth that goes beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries.

Our third article (Barnes et al)[3] of the year explores the role of 'empathy' in (industrial) design through a systematic literature review. This work draws from design studies, neuroscience and psychology and offers a holistic and deepened understanding of empathy in the creative practice of design. The authors further explore practical and societal implications, observing that empathy is not only key to more effective products and systems but also to well-being and sustainable development.

Koen and colleagues[4] study the presence of disaster risk reduction – or DRR – components in South African university curricula, particularly in Urban and Regional Planning studies. They find that there is only a marginal recognition of DRR concepts, despite it being critical to building resilient cities. A foremost reason behind limited DRR integration is full curricula – Urban and Regional Planning courses are already packed with content. This leaves limited space for a significant component of city planning, thus leaving students ill-equipped to deal with risk mitigation.

The study by Nyandoro et al.[5] has a regional focus and examines the implementation and reception of health communication strategies across South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe during COVID-19. Health communication, as the authors argue, was critical to efforts to curb the pandemic, although communication strategies were often not culturally sensitive or relevant. For example, traditional beliefs and low literacy levels posed challenges in delivering health communication successfully, resulting in misinformation, myths and conspiracy theories.

In a departure from the conventional TD (transdisciplinary) article, Rathbone[6] offers an existential analysis of Adam Smith's, 'The Poor Man's Son' – a parable about happiness and wealth. Rathbone reflects on the narrative in terms of its relevance to modern life and argues that happiness stems from freedom of choice, authenticity and accountability as opposed to traditional external 'markers of success'. The article offers an existential critique of materialism by highlighting ongoing tensions in modern work culture, leading to disillusionment.

Hlatshwayo[7] critiques the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) as a policy instrument to address the challenges of academic staffing in the country's tertiary institutions.

They find that the policy is systemically insufficient in accommodating early career academics and postdoctoral fellows, who are key to growing robust human capital in universities. Furthermore, they argue that the framework is inadequate in terms of addressing structural inequalities that inhibit the fair representation of marginalised groups, particularly black African and female academics.

Chiyangwa and Rugunanan[8] study identity formation by Mozambican migrant youth living in South Africa. The study integrates ideas from anthropology, sociology, political studies and history to explore concepts around identity and belonging. This offers a more comprehensive understanding of how aspects such as cultural dynamics, legal residential status and social discrimination shape identity. Participants are found to experience a type of purgatory relationship in terms of belonging, where they are dislocated both from Mozambique and South Africa.

Our last original contribution of the year (Loots & Ntsala)[9] incorporates perspectives from environmental humanities, sociology and psychology (among others) to explore the role of informal recyclers in South Africa's recycling economy. The work challenges assumptions about informal workers by demonstrating that recyclers regard themselves with pride as environmental stewards, family providers and community builders. By fusing theories of disposability, entrepreneurship and resistance, the authors offer a deepened understanding of a marginalised group.

Our two review articles for 2024 solidify the empirical work carried out thus far. Van der Waldt[10] explores the inter- and trans-disciplinary role of theoretical frameworks in social science research. By developing a diverse theoretical foundation, scientists and especially early-career researchers can foster a richer understanding of complex social and environmental issues.

Finally, Tleane[11] explores the origins and influences of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa. The article is transdisciplinary in its approach by incorporating insights across political philosophy, history and sociology. By synthesising these fields, Tleane demonstrates how the BCM was shaped by a confluence of movements in the

Americas and in the Caribbean, carrying over to African liberation movements and eventually to black South Africans under apartheid. This, in turn, developed into a unique paradigm of black consciousness that shaped political resistance in South Africa at the time.

In conclusion, the articles we published thus far in 2024 reveal a marked and incredible diversity of perspectives from a multitude of fields across the (social) sciences and humanities. Each work tackles a complex social issue by fusing insights from seemingly incommensurate disciplines to enrich our understanding of the complexity of problems at the micro, meso and macro levels of society. The body of work demonstrates that our national and regional research landscape is conducive and receptive to transdisciplinary thinking and doing. This in itself is exciting, and I look forward to learning more about how current and future work transcends conventional scholarly boundaries.

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