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Editorial: 'Decolonising' Education Transformation

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Decolonisation, despite its conceptual slipperiness, is emerging as a productive framework for critiquing and renewing the education transformation project. It petitions for a more radical transformational praxis within our schools and universities, here and elsewhere. In a useful piece by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:15) the argument is made for appreciating decoloniality as a process of enabling liberatory thought and practices that invite possibilities of other knowledges and worlds. He states: "At the epistemic level decoloniality is about epistemological disobedience premised on three domains of power, knowledge, and being. At the political level, it is working in areas of new critical theory, new meaning-making and action. At the methodological level, it rebels against knowledges of equilibrium and those methods that operate as part of colonial matrices of power that prevent transformation."

This special issue on 'decolonising' education transformation emerged from the view that what is needed to propel current debates on decolonisation in education forward are expressions of enactments aimed at disrupting prevailing power structures and institutional cultures to shed light on democratised practices and spaces that bring to the fore previously marginalised voices and knowledges. As Keet, Sattarzadeh and Munene (2017:5) caution, for transformation and renewal practices to be impactful in the academy, "we should, with our students and through critique, contribute to the self-clarification of the struggles within our universities." Such introspection and dialogue might expose how, in epistemic terms, the "systemic anchoring of socio-economic inequalities and discriminations" in institutions (Keet et al., 2017:5) are, in part, constituted and reinforced by the everyday praxes of individual social agents.

In this themed issue of the journal, the imperative was to encourage a rethinking of 'decolonisation' in education as social transformation. Authors were challenged to be critical of theorising that has become rhetoric, to interrogate the calls to decolonise education which themselves are steeped in power hegemonies, and thus to advance emancipatory praxes in educational contexts that advance the notions of inclusive epistemologies and social justice. The authors included here each present a unique critical stance on interrogating efforts to 'decolonise' education which foreground a social justice orientation and practicality, thus making a valuable contribution to current discourses in the broader field of higher education transformation, specifically in the context of decolonisation. The collection of 12 articles shift the focus from theorising decolonisation as an end product to a critical analysis of its implication for promoting higher education pedagogy and praxis (Zembylas, 2018) as well as shaping curriculum development (Ismail, 2018; Mahabeer, 2018; Mampane, Omidire & Aluko, 2018; Mheta, Lungu & Govender, 2018; Sathorar & Geduld, 2018). Several contributors foreground decolonisation of education as a process of democratising knowledge and disrupting existing heterogeneous power structures inherent in higher education. Two authors offer perspectives on student voices, participation and agency in shaping education reform (Cherrington, 2018; Stuurman, 2018), while McAteer and Wood (2018) discuss the civic role of the university through meaningful community engagement. Other contributors showcase the ways in which decolonisation-in-praxis can open possibilities for fostering inclusive classrooms and schools (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018) in South Africa. We conclude the issue with a reflection on practices that might disrupt institutional spaces and democratise knowledge in the academy (Walters, 2018). We sought contributions that represent diverse cross-sectional thinking across disciplines, institutions and countries. As such, the idea is to feature the complexity and range of work being done by both leading and emerging scholars in higher education.

Michalinos Zembylas' (2018) article examines transformative possibilities by weaving the theoretical concepts underpinning decolonial theories with the notion of a 'humanising pedagogy.' His analysis is driven by the question of the possible links between humanisation and the decolonisation of higher education, and the implication this holds for pedagogical praxis. In the article he argues that there is a political and pragmatic need for higher education institutions in South Africa to reflect critically on what it means to decolonise pedagogies that can reclaim humanity in knowing and knowledge-making. This analysis offers valuable insight into the ways in which a humanising pedagogy can be reconceptualised within the decolonial and social transformative framework to challenge existing colonial powers within the academy. This article challenges educators in higher education to "interrogate the pedagogical practices emerging from Eurocentric knowledge approaches by drawing on and twisting these very practices."

The next grouping of articles shift the focus of decolonisation in education from theoretical discussions to case studies that demonstrate the importance of understanding the personal views, motivations and perceptions of students and academics on how to transform education at the curriculum level. These range from students' perceptions of decolonisation of education to the importance of student motivations and notions of the goals of socio-economic transformation in the design of new national qualifications in the Adult and Community

Education and Training Sector (ACET). Ruth M. Mampane, Margaret F. Omidire and Folake Ruth Aluko (2018) focus on issues of indigenous knowledge, culture, language, technology, and discourse in their article on decolonising higher education in Africa. Their research explores the paradigm of “decolonisation of education” through the lens of students from diverse nationalities across the African continent. The study found that students regarded decolonising education as a way of addressing past injustices and marginalisation by esteeming and leveraging indigenous languages and culture, while simultaneously integrating relevant and cost-effective technology, thus in a sense the best of both worlds, the past and present in service of a better future.

The Adult and Community Education and Training Sector (ACET) for Higher Education in South Africa is the focus of Salma Ismail's project, together with academics from 10 universities, who have developed new national qualifications for ACET to respond to the needs of the Adult Education Community. In their design of the qualification they endeavoured to include new policy requirements, critical transformative educational practises, input from community educators as well as student viewpoints on a decolonised curriculum. Ismail (2018:1) observes that at times these “frameworks are in contradiction to one another particularly in a neo-liberal context in which education has a strong focus on the workplace.”

For Heloise Satherar and Deidre Geduld, decolonising education involves disrupting dominant discourses and requires current Eurocentric content and methods to be challenged. In their article they reflect on discussions held by both academic staff and final year education students at the Nelson Mandela University Faculty of Education around the curriculum renewal process. They present that the newly developed, integrated Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curriculum draws on a critical, conceptual framework of teacher development, progressing from ‘bridging,’ through ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ towards ‘belonging’ as a teacher in the teaching profession. It encourages students to transform their thinking about teaching in South Africa by exposing them to a range of different educational contexts.

Pryah Mahabeer investigates in what ways, if at all, education has transformed in South Africa over the past two decades of democracy. She critically notes that even though there appears to be a commitment to change, South Africa continues to implement international requirements and standardisations in the quest for first world rankings. She proposes a rethinking of the curriculum and utilises Pinar's method of *currere* to demonstrate what curriculum decision-makers think about the curriculum. She highlights the dichotomy of Western ways of thinking versus a shift towards a ‘re-humanising’ approach to the curriculum. The article upholds that “curriculum decision-makers are catalytic agents of change and are neither complacent nor at the mercy of Western knowledge and ideologies” (Mahabeer, 2018:1). In the following article the decolonisation of the curriculum is explored through a case study at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Gift Mheta, Bwalya Nyangu Lungu and Thaivirie Govender (2018) argue that the DUT is still largely Eurocentric and in their paper discuss the benefits and importance of decolonisation at this institution. They propose a way forward by discussing different options and ways of (re)thinking university curricula and open the dialogue for further discussion on this seminal topic, not only for DUT, but for all Higher Education Institutions.

The need to hold critical conversations and engagements with students on their experiences and imaginings of decolonised and transformed education is further taken up by another two authors who also motivate for enabling student activism and agency. Sonwabo Stuurman examines student social activism in the higher education sector in South Africa, specifically at the Nelson Mandela University, where he looks at forms of student social activism in pursuit of ‘black power,’ as well as the solidarity amongst these student groups. A historical analysis of student activism in this country illustrates the longstanding student discontent and politics surrounding higher education. Similarly, Aviit Cherrington sought to stimulate student-led agency through mobilising a practice of hope in a teacher education programme. Based on a critical transformative study that made use of multiple visual participatory methods she demonstrates how bringing hope explicitly into conversations with student teachers about education and being agents of change had a positive transformative value for the participants and thus implications for higher education decolonising initiatives. She therefore asserts that understanding student-teachers’ experiences of hope has value as a catalyst for mobilising agency and is thus a valuable first step towards opening up a wider dialogue about decolonising education. She urges that critical reflection is needed to question how the universities’ decolonisation efforts might serve communities by enabling students to be critical thinkers and social change agents.

The pragmatics of coloniality are intricately tied to the purpose and character of the university (Keet et al., 2017) and how it seeks to engage with its internal and external communities. Mary McAteer and Lesley Wood call on the university to enact its civic-role through meaningful community-based projects. They advocate that creating partnerships with communities should be core to the university’s purposeful vision of transformation and social justice. In the context of a participatory action research project exploring school-community co-operation, the authors suggest that when university researchers move away from seeing themselves as ‘experts’ to ‘facilitators’ the engagement can be more effective and thus the process and products of knowledge democratised. The authors offer unique insight into the possibility of re-imagining the relationship between a university and its community as a position of “epistemic democracy” thus meaningfully contributing towards shared understandings of decoloniality and social justice.

It is also imperative to take discussions on decolonising education beyond the realm of the South African context. The following articles extend the theme of decolonising education transformation into the school system. They reflect on the challenges of implementing the policy of inclusion in schools, and protest that the ideology of inclusive education stems from the Global North and has been poorly transposed to the South. They call for a re-thinking of how quality education can be delivered to learners with special needs in under-resourced South African schools. Nithi Muthukrishna and Petra Engelbrecht draw on their own research and reflexive engagement with inclusive education policy formulation and implementation over five years in various Southern African contexts. Against the backdrop of these struggles and complexities, the authors argue for a critical inclusive education that has a social justice, anti-oppression orientation. They call for the need for equipping teachers with the skills to identify, analyse, and evaluate the ethical and social implications of the ideologies that guide their inclusive education practice. According to the authors, this would require a rigorous framework for critiquing ideology that play out in the context of quality education. Thembeka Mfuthwana and Lorna M. Dreyer tackle the poor implementation of inclusive education policy from a different perspective. Through conversations with a cohort of teachers in the Western Cape they sought to explore the challenges experienced in implementing inclusive education in schools. While the teachers mostly aligned the policy's poor implementation to the lack of appropriate training and support they receive, the authors critique that by not taking into account local contextual factors brought on in the first place by colonialism and apartheid legislation, any attempt to further impose inclusion in schools will be ineffective and instead perpetuate inequalities in education.

While some authors advocate for universities to be more assertive in internalising and mandating transformative pedagogical and organisational spaces for driving the decolonialisation project from within hierarchical systems of power, Walters (2018) believes that 'mainstreaming' such initiatives can bring about regulation rather than turbulence. In the following article Shirley Walters (2018) presents a case study of working the 'in-between' spaces for transformation within the academy. The article presents two activities held by the University of the Western Cape over a decade as forms of challenging dominant institutional culture and hegemonic power relations towards a 'de-colonised' university. Her critical reflection on these events supports the argument that creating alternative institutional practices for enacting 'knowledge democracies' plays a crucial role towards decolonising education. Unfortunately, in an effort to streamline the university's transformative process, the unit driving these initiatives was assimilated into the teaching and learning portfolio. Consequently, the author cautions that much can be lost in the decolonising agenda when transformative initiatives are internalised rather than given their own 'in-between' spaces to flourish.

Collectively, the articles in this issue bring into focus a number of issues that are key to advancing transformation in education that is linked to disrupting colonialised institutional structures and promoting a social justice orientation. Ultimately, the articles presented offer possibilities of democratising knowledge, reshaping institutional cultures and power structures, and re-imagining education transformation as a process of humanisation.

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