EDITORIAL COMMENT

African scholarship in the 21st Century

The words, "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come" (attributed to Victor Hugo), are an apt reminder that it is time for Africa to contend with the ideologies, cultural hegemonies, knowledge bases, philosophical frameworks and research methodologies of dominant forces that shape its education structures. In particular, the upheavals of the past few years which began with the Fallist movements (e.g. *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall*), and the continued protests actions in higher education institutions, service delivery grievances in un- and under-developed townships of South Africa and rampant corruption in government and industry are indicators of the imperatives to revolutionise its ethical regeneration by way of education.

At various fora, concerns about the values, relevance and usefulness of education at all levels are being questioned, disputed and pondered. Presumably, the blunders in education are linked to Eurocentric content, unresponsive pedagogies, linguistic imperialism, and inappropriate assessment strategies. Consequently, demands for decolonised curricula has intensified. Certainly, it is evident that the values, theories, concepts and frameworks imported for local consumption is incoherent with the contextual complexities of a continent recognised as the cradle of humankind. The articles that follow address some of these contextual complexities.

The first, by Bert Olivier, touches on the fragility of planet Earth and the absence in curricula of ways to sensitize those in our classrooms to the nature and the means to circumvent an impending catastrophe. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that many species are threatened with extinction. The planet is hotter, flatter and more crowded (Friedman, 2009), and an ecological crisis of immense proportions is inevitable, unless we, the creators of the crisis, change our habits. Drawing on a range of scholars, local and international, Olivier argues for an integrated, trans-disciplinary approach to education, which, he asserts, is more likely to produce innovative redemptive efforts. The crisis imperils all who live on the planet, hence the need for complementarity, which depends on harnessing the best thinking available, irrespective of nationality, race or South/West affiliation. Olivier contends that trans-disciplinarity is organic to Africa and Latin America as their cultures do not bifurcate the arts and the sciences (a dominant feature of western education). The potential for solving the ecological crisis, it seems, can be amplified through curriculum disobedience and intervention across all strata of education.

Two articles, one by Devarakshanam Govinden and another by Michael Samuel are innovative exemplars of African scholarship on teaching and learning. Both articles furnish

ideas for an African scholarship without sacrificing the rigour, quality and intellectual requirements of traditional academic writing genres.

Two purposes underpin the Govinden article: one, to challenge the formal, ritualistic modes of writing scholarly texts for publication and two, rethinking the teaching of disciplines through the example of History. She argues for active shattering of the artificial borders that constrain critical thinking and questioning of content, often stitched together by invisible authorities, and taught as an objective and irrefutable series of truths. The power and the decisions that guide the inclusions and exclusions to reconstruct bygone times (historiography) lie outside the consciousness of those who receive an education in History. More pointedly, Govinden's argument poses a challenge to the stranglehold of cognitive, developmental and educational psychology, behaviourism and constructivism on teaching and learning. For far too long, learning has been conceptualized as mere brain activity rather than the exercise of deliberate political and ideological manipulation of thinking. Bruner's exposition about the basic structure of a discipline is typical of a depoliticized conception of learning incongruent with social justice imperatives:

> Grasping the structure of a subject is understanding it in a way that permits many other things to be related to it meaningfully. To learn structure, in short, is to learn how things are related .... The teaching and learning of structure, rather than simply the mastery of facts and techniques, is at the center of the classic problem of transfer (Bruner, 1960, pp. 7 & 12).

To be fair to Bruner, his ideas about learning were revolutionary more than fifty years ago. However, his notions about disciplines now serve as fodder to resist the structure of predetermined, established curricula.

The article by Michael Samuel is another non-compliant stance against standard academic report writing practices. Academic conferences notoriously referred to as, "academic tourism" (see e.g. Steyn, 2015), are reconstructed as opportunities for counter hegemony scholarship. Through a comparative analysis captured through the aesthetics of poetry, Samuel subverts the purposes of conferences for intellectual growth and professional development. Consistent with Olivie'sr and Govinden's perspectives, the Samuel article intensifies the case for thwarting the restraints and weaknesses of disciplinary borders.

One of the undesirable outcomes of colonialism has been the uptake of the language of the colonial masters at the expense of local languages. Throughout the continent, one encounters the dominance of languages that have no resonance with the history of its populace – e.g. English, Portuguese, French and German. Formal education sectors have perniciously devalued and erased indigenous language use. Languages "do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them" (Phillips & Jørgensen 2006, p.1). In reality, language and cultural imperialism aided and abetted the objectives of colonisation. In recent times, there has been a surge to undo colonial

practices and to rehabilitate the languages marginalized during and after foreign occupation through multilingual policy endorsement.

The article by Pascal Nadal and Aruna Ankiah-Gangadeen explores the choices made by parents to enroll their children in Mauritian Kreol, (only recently accepted as an optional extra school subject). Personal factors motivated the decisions. The positive impact parents have on revitalizing a marginalized language is one of the lessons for decolonization emerging from the study. In a similar vein, a study by Rubby Dhunpath found that a concerted effort to support multilingualism beyond policy posturing by government was not sustainable. However, a key finding indicated that schools supported by non-governmental organizations were more likely to espouse multilingualism. Both studies, conducted in two different countries (Mauritius and South Africa) accentuate the importance of the involvement of communities for successful multilingual efforts.

The challenges women encounter predate colonisation. Patriarchy and toxic masculinities have oppressed, subjugated and orchestrated their lives for millennia despite evidence that educated girls transform societies and positively influence national development. At the turn of the 21st Century, millions of females are denied basic education. Unesco (2017) provides worrying statistics: two thirds of the 758 million who lack basic literacy are female while only 1% of girls from the most poverty-stricken populations in the world complete secondary education. It is not surprising, therefore, that boys outnumber girls in institutions of learning, more so in higher education because without secondary education, admission is denied. The reality is that gender equality has yet to be achieved. In Zimbabwe, for instance, a study by Chaminuka and Gunduza argues that access to higher education does not level the education opportunities of males and females. The curriculum is not gender sensitive and negative sociocultural factors in conjunction with economic hardship compromise access, participation and success in higher education.

The second article from Zimbabwe explores the perception of service quality in a higher education institution. Justina Mtezo's article is an uncommon quest to explain the actions of affluent students' choices to study outside the borders of the country despite the existence of higher education institutions within and the high costs involved in studying abroad. A critical finding was that the quality of service (administrative, academic, physical environment, support facilities) was perceived to be poor. It is clear that academic aspirations will be pursued in local institutions provided students feel confident that their needs and aspirations will be sufficiently supported.

The final article by Etta Daru and Georgina Njenwei examines the effect on internationalization on university culture in Cameroon. Internationalization, as contrasted to de-colonial agendas, actively seek intercultural encounters, intellectual dialogue, exchange and cross-pollination of ideas. The higher education sector is undergoing seismic shifts in terms of its roles and functions. There is greater demand for instance, for transformation, inclusivity, access, career preparation and massification, while improving its rankings, competitive edge, knowledge production capabilities and responsiveness to local and global trends. The dynamism of the sector is increasingly dependent on its ability to maintain high academic standards and quality for the production of world-class graduates, who Daru and Njenwei argue, can be counter-productive if it is more beneficial for the graduate export market. Quality university education, they suggest encompasses the use and the promotion of local knowledge while carefully negotiating international, commercial, economic, political forces to serve local rather than international needs.

To conclude, Africa is vested with a rich history of art, culture and science that can benefit the future as attested to by the selection of articles in this, the second issue of *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning*. The articles deal with matters that reclaim Africa's marginalised cultural knowledge, reinsert its contribution to the arts and sciences alongside other contributions, actively produce and share new knowledge, apply its teaching and learning approaches in addition to those currently used and demonstrate creative imagination. Reasserting erased histories and shifting the contributions from the margins to the centre is not a rejection, substitution or displacement of Western thought. The wisdom of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong' O (1986) is useful to clarify the nature of actions instigated:

> After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective … In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream.

Important though, is the imperative to examine received knowledge from African perspectives, purposes and prospects. This issue provides incisive insights into a range of matters, which build on the promises made by the Editor-in-chief in the first issue. The production of knowledge is a serious and valuable venture. The compendium of papers, we hope, will extinguish any lingering doubts.

Prof Nyna Amin
University of KwaZulu-Natal
(Sub Editor-APORTAL)

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