EDITORIAL COMMENT

African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning Journal (APoRTAL)

This is the first or maiden issue of *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning* conceived and produced by the University of Limpopo, Centre For Academic Excellence and steered by the Editor - in - Chief. As a new international peer reviewed journal on the block, it brings to the fore an African voice to transdisciplinary discourse on teaching and learning. A unique quality of this journal relates to its focus on disseminating empirically-based researches from a contemporary breed of African scholars committed to excellent and reflexive teaching. The intention is to promote educational research in complex African settings with a view to entrench a truly African perspective to a global audience. The current issue sets the tone by addressing diverse educational topics by some renowned and budding African researchers. The topics herein focus on the Primary, Secondary and University sectors. The intention is to initiate debate on contemporary teaching and learning issues at those levels. It is imperative that these issues be brought to the fore, given that the African Educational landscape is fraught with challenges whose solutions can be provided through empirical studies. In subsequent issues, our hope is to thematicise the debates.

The articles published herein are a demonstration of passionate engagement with African scholarship by Africans seeking an academic voice in a world overfed with Eurocentric world views. We need not belabour the need for an African perspective given the diverse nature of a continent whose philosophical, religious and academic thinking and educational access has long been distorted by years of direct and implied colonialism. The African Education Agenda seeks to undo the deleterious and undying effects of colonialism by focusing on providing quality education anchored in science and education. This notion is aptly placed in context in the first listed article by Overson Shumba who argues from Zambia that poor educational quality developed through science and technology education is a manifestation of poor facilitation of epistemological access. Shumba condemns a curriculum that is not adequately contextualised and lacking in inclusivity with respect to local examples and cultures. Curricula, he argues, should make connections to social-cultural, socio-ecological, and to personal, familial and other real life situations in the community. He proposes the adoption of learning as connection discourse developed in the context of educational research, especially in southern Africa. Such endeavours, he concludes, will portray learning as a connection that facilitates and reinforces epistemological access and learning for sustainable development in, and through, science and technology education in Africa.

Gamuchirai Tsitsi Ndamba takes the access debate further by highlighting language-related teaching challenges confronting teachers and learners alike. She laments the policy-practice dissonance in teaching in the mother tongue with the impact this has particularly on primary school learners. Using evidence from Zimbabwe, Ndamba decries the challenges of teaching learners in their mother tongue during the formative years of their primary school learning (as per policy). Such challenges stemmed from low self-esteem: a consequence of inadequate training in translation and in teaching using the home language. This trend has the

cumulative effect of curtailing learners' educational access in secondary and to higher education. In the secondary school sector, for instance, as Vurayai and Gumabati argue, school Heads and teachers faced challenges in the implementation of correlation and integration of knowledge as well as the role of correlation and integration of knowledge in curriculum planning. These challenges reportedly emanate from a conceptual (mis) understanding of the need by schools to marry theory and practice for the maximum benefit of students. The authors propose in-service programmes wherein a common philosophy and common objectives are set and the participation of educators and school administrators at all levels is secured for all school-related programmes.

The higher education sector presents its unique set of challenges. The South African higher education sector is beset with the student dropout scourge. Most students drop out despite access being unrestricted. In their article, Wadesango, Mabovula, Makura and Toni buttress the notion that the dropout scourge is symptomatic, *inter alia,* of low entry levels/requirements, low competencies, lack of financial and material resources and overcrowded classrooms. Wadesango *et al* suggest that Universities develop and sustain existing intervention programmes and services aimed at providing educational access whilst assuring student retention. A strategy that some South African higher education academics have utilised in mitigating pedagogical and research related challenges is the conducting of Writing Retreats, which also harness scholarship. This innovation is elaborated on in Marhaya, Malatji and Maphosa's article who demonstrate the efficacy of Writing Centres in promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning and enhancing collaboration among academics. Thus the role of Academic developers in such centres is instrumental in the provision of education. Kadhila, Nyathi, Shanyanana, and Iipumb's article provide compelling evidence on the critical role of academic developers in Namibia, in shaping and influencing university culture. The methods used by lecturers and what informs the choice of these methods is integral to the teaching learning milieu. They suggest that university academics need to be equipped with skills (by academic developers) to enhance their ability to facilitate, manage and assess student learning, using proven effective approaches.

Based on the idea that students from historically deprived backgrounds of South African regions confront issues of higher education access. Therefore, Makura A and Nkonki N decided conduct a study at selected institutions of Higher Learning in the Eastern Cape Province aimed at determining Higher Education stakeholders' perceptions of articulation enablers and constraints for learners articulating from the Further Education and Training sector (FET) into Higher Education Institutions. The authors found that there was blurred policy on issues of articulation from FET to university, with extremely few respondents who are aware of the South African Qualifications Authority's current career development pathways and initiatives that enhance such articulation. Furthermore, they revealed that none of the probed students have any knowledge of various articulation routes available in South Africa. Meanwhile, a need to mount training, and awareness workshops as well as professional teacher development initiatives on articulation from FET to university was recommend by researchers as the best solution, amongst the others.

Writing from Botswana, Modesto Tichapondwa S poses a million-dollar question: What effect does a distance education teachers' training programme have on teacher discourse effectiveness in the classroom? This is with reference to classroom situations in nomadic

communities of the Basarwa in Botswana. Modesto's study focused on the enhancement of oracy to achieve cognitive intentions. Comparison of pre-intervention and post-intervention discourse practices led to the conclusion that teachers who participated in the intervention programme dominate interaction less and choose more effective discourse to promote learning. In turn, learners show a higher degree of initiative than their counterparts. He therefore, recommends that an in-service course taking into account the culture and language of the Basarwa should be designed and offered as a way of enhancing teacher discourse and increased learner participation in the learning situation.

In parting, it is our hope that you benefit from this rich and diverse offering. These articles report on both plethora challenges and success stories, incidentally from the Southern African Development Community countries (SADC). A word of thanks to an array of people whose sweat has yielded this modest journal be they authors, administrator, editorial board, reviewer, secretarial etc. We want to assure readers that this is in no way a predatory or fly by night issue. We promise to offer more eclectic articles penned by scholars of international, academic stature and repute. Our collective endeavours are invaluable and should sustain Africa's global academic agenda to posterity. Enjoy!

Prof Newman Wadesango

Editor -in-Chief (APoRTAL)