SECTION B: EDITORIAL

HIGHER EDUCATION WELL-BEING: A BALANCING ACT

N. Chitanand*
e-mail: nalinic@dut.ac.za

S. Rathilal*
e-mail: shobar@dut.ac.za

S. Rambharos*
e-mail: rambhros@dut.ac.za

*Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
Durban University of Technology
Durban, South Africa

> "The connections between higher education and well-being 'matter for the individual lives of the student and those who teach; [they matter for the disciplines and professions]; they matter for the institutions; they matter for the promise of a democratic civic society; and they matter for whether or not the unique and full promise of higher education – its greater purpose – can be advanced and realized'." (Harward 2016, 3).

Higher Education has an important role to play in the development of individuals, professionals and society. Higher Education well-being is unarguably crucial but unpacking what that is, and sustaining it, is a complex exercise. It requires continued critical analysis of the broader context and purpose of higher education, the systems within which it operates, the policies that inform it, the type of institutions, programmes, teaching and learning, and practices of all stakeholders (students, staff, industries, communities and so forth).

Well-being as a construct has both an individual and relational dimension. One view of well-being, *hedonic*, emphasises feelings (life satisfaction and happiness), a subjective dimension. This approach is often criticised because of the emphasis on perceptions about their state of being (Ryff 2014; Harward 2016). On the other hand *Eudaemonic* well-being aligned to Aristotelian philosophy of Eudaemonia (Aristotle 1999; Capuccino 2013), is based on "the idea of striving towards excellence based on one's unique potential" (Ryff and Singer 2008, 14) and is associated with human flourishing and a common good (Arjoon et al. 2018) including but not limited to a sense of happiness.

According to Harward (2016), it is the *eudaemonic* dimension of well-being that is

insufficiently addressed in higher education contexts. While a *hedonic* approach to well-being has benefits (perceptions of happiness and life satisfaction), it is argued that hedonic well-being that is conceptualised as a pursuit for pleasurable experiences cannot be sustained in the absence of *eudaemonic* well-being (Fisher 2010). Drawing on Aristotle's notion of *Eudaemonia* (the highest human good) coupled with advances in humanistic and developmental psychology, Ryff (2014) proposed six components that could be used to describe and measure well-being that goes beyond subjectivity of perceptions. These are purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and self-acceptance (for detailed definitions see Ryff 2014).

Subscribing to the assumption that well-being is "anchored on how individuals negotiate their way through the challenges of life", (Ryff 2014, 13) we believe that well-being involves providing opportunities for individuals to flourish. However, as we move to the context of higher education we are conscious that individuals' growth and satisfaction must be promoted while also ensuring the flourishing of the social system to promote higher education well-being. This can often place enormous pressure as one deals with the tensions between individuals and system's or sector needs. Ryff and Singer (2008) argue that it is important to realise and maintain a balance of the different components of well-being. They caution against

> "a kind of wellbeing that is so solipsistic and individualist as to leave no room for human connection and the social good, or a version that is so focused on responsibilities and duties outside the self that inherent talents and capacities are neither recognized nor developed." (Ryff and Singer 2008, 33).

Well-being, seen as empowerment and fulfilment, is likely to be impacted on by the contexts of the individual's life. In higher education we are aware that the life contexts of the students, staff, universities that form part of the higher education sector is very different. In the South African higher education context, the challenge therefore becomes how do we embark on this process of improving well-being when we are dealing with inequitable lived experiences through lack of opportunities and oppression, how do we extend students expectations while not negating their right to live their life the way they choose.

As we grapple with these questions we draw from Waghid's (2017) notion of a "university as an institution-in-becoming". Within this dynamic context we consider higher education well-being not as a fixed entity or something finite to be achieved but rather also in a process of becoming. This is in keeping with Harward's (2016) view of well-being as a long term practice and requires an integration of knowing, acting and being as a process of becoming (Dall'Alba 2009).

Waghid argues that "in becoming", such a university would be one "committed to the democratic project of always questioning itself and preventing itself from ever being conceived as a finished product" (Waghid 2017, 5). Similarly, well-being "in becoming" will require a process of being aware and constantly questioning how the sector is contributing to individuals' (staff and students) self-realisations and growth about their purpose in life, the development of agency (autonomy), personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, self-acceptance. This will contribute to a reflexive awareness of self, other and society.

Melanie Walker draws on Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen to position the role of the university as being spaces dedicated to flourishing (Walker and McLean 2015, Wilson-Strydom and Walker 2015, Aristizábal et al. 2016). Walker (2015 proposes a capabilities approach as a measure of well-being and argues that education allows functioning of capabilities to be exercised. The university has a role in nurturing contexts in which capabilities can flourish. The educational experience can enhance well-being through the development of a combination of capabilities. This enhanced capabilities then increases autonomy and agency enabling students the freedom to draw on these capabilities as they negotiate their way through the uncertain future.

The articles in this special issue are contributions from the HELTASA 2017 Conference with the theme Higher Education Well-being: Transcending boundaries, Reframing excellence. Each of articles engage critically on various aspects of higher education theory and practice. Through questioning existing norms and values and researching their practices, the authors propose a continuum of possibilities for the development of capabilities that will lead to "professional contribution to society which will advance human well-being" (Walker 2015, 417).

Scholtz's and Bester's article focusses on project based learning as a student centred pedagogy. The authors draw on Billet's (2009) approach to Work Integrated learning (WIL) as a pedagogical practice that allows for students to learn through the integration of knowledge and experience from formal qualification and the work contexts. They propose project based learning (PJBL) in the work environment as one of the modalities of WIL. They suggest that it is necessary to go beyond the narrow definition of WIL as "applying theory to practice". PJBL allows for "new learnings in new settings" through the transfer of existing knowledge and experiences. The article highlights challenges and tensions associated with the different role players involved in the design and implementation of PJBL and suggest that there needs to be a consultative supportive environment to improve the capabilities of the university academic and support staff as well as the industry mentor in designing and monitoring such projects. The authors also highlight the tension of trying to fit such an approach within the constraints of

existing structure of programmes especially credit values. In addition, possible staff (both academic and workplace) underpreparedness could lead to PJBL, that is shown theoretically to have potential to address student transition to workplace, can just revert to the existing system.

The article by Cavanagh makes explicit that the higher education experience leads to adopting of a new identity. Specifically in vocational based programmes this involves "becoming" a professional. The process of moving from a student to a pattern maker as in the case of this article, or to any other profession, is a complex often confusing process. Through the action research process Cavanagh shows that sometimes although all theoretical considerations have been taken into account students can still experience difficulties in becoming. Through her critique of numerous implementations of an integrated assessment she shows that it is important to complement authentic assessments and student support in a way where the support is integrated in the assessments and students become aware of what they doing and why it is done in particular ways. On a broader level Cavanagh's article brings to the fore the need for constantly questioning one's practice with the intention of trying to make it better.

In her article Van den Berg draws attention to the rapidly changing contexts in which students are expected to function and highlights the challenges of designing curricula that adequately prepares them for this. The article presents a set of skills that is seen as being necessary for Information Systems students to better perform their role in their profession and society. These are core content knowledge, digital skills, cross disciplinary skills, communication, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity, life and job skills and emotional intelligence. Through an action research approach the author critically reflected on two iterations of the "project" and showed an improved design in the third iteration. Using a mixed methods research design the article suggests 8 design principles that can be used to develop the identified skills.

The article by Dos Reis and Yu reports on a study that aimed to explore how discipline-specific peer mentoring impacts first year students' academic performance. The findings of the study indicate that the mean continuous assessment mark of the mentees is significantly higher compared to students who were not mentees and the mentees' final examination performance was also higher. This study highlights the possibilities of using peer mentoring to improve first years' academic performance. The peer mentees indicated that their weekly motivational messages inspired them to continue with their studies and the continuous support from the peer mentors assisted them to understand the difficult concepts of Economics. Peer mentors (although not a focus of the study) participated voluntarily in the programme as they believed that there are multiple benefits to being a peer mentor. The authors argue that the

implementation of discipline-specific peer mentoring programmes across all disciplines could facilitate student retention and increase the overall pass rate of first year students.

Eybers's article is a theoretical analysis aimed at highlighting the conceptual differences between constructivist and realist ontologies as meta-theories for understanding students' well-being in institutions of higher learning and focuses on how first-year students attempt to master academic literacy practices. While constructivism and realism are distinct meta-theories towards understanding the lived experiences and well-being of first-year students engaging in academic literacy practices, they need not be perceived as theoretical foes. Both ontologies are applicable conceptual frameworks for illustrating how, at individual and interactive levels with significant others, the well-being of students may be approached as they attempt to demonstrate competence in conventions associated with academic literacy.

The study by Winberg et al. provides insight that could strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration between academic developers and STEM academics to contribute to a pedagogy of well-being and the development of the student as a whole person. This inter-institutional study that focused on the use of teaching portfolios for enhancing pedagogical competence highlighted challenges of STEM academics in navigating unfamiliar pedagogical terrains. The authors drew on the dimension of Specialization, from the Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) conceptual toolkit to explore the differences between Academic Development and STEM disciplines and fields. Understanding these disciplinary differences would be useful to enable STEM academics and academic developers to transcend disciplinary boundaries and domains in order to contribute to pedagogical competence and professional well-being.

In their article Padayachee et al. highlight the challenges of professional development especially with regards to curriculum design and development. They locate their research within the context of individual, institutional and societal well-being. They argue that the curriculum design and development process is especially important given the need to integrate national and global imperatives related to decolonisation and education for sustainable development. Their research with early career academics highlight that these topics are contentious and open to a variety of interpretations. The authors propose integrating these topics using the principles of epistemically diverse curricula may enhance students' reflexivity to bring about the desired "epistemological and ontological shifts". The authors have highlighted that the curriculum design process is complex and often challenging and even more so for academics that do not have experience with these processes. They propose that academic development programmes need to prioritise curriculum design and development as a critical component of professional development.

Maniram and Maistry claim that carefully structured authentic assessment that is theory

informed could enable students' epistemological access and their well-being in higher education. The authors use a combination of data generation instruments including interviews as well as online chats and journals to elicit students' experiences of the authentic assessment activities. While traditional understandings of improving students' success rests with the academics, this study proposes that collaborative learning among student could be a key strategy for enabling epistemic access and success.

Baron reports on a curriculum redesign processed aimed at decolonising knowledge. A cybernetic approach using conversation theory is presented as a sustainable solution to devising inclusive and ethical contextual curricula. The results show that students demonstrate increased participation, personal responsibility and higher motivation in performing assignments and introduce new and relevant topics into the curriculum. Students are more familiar with the personalized module content areas and there is increased social engagement in the classroom. Furthermore, the personalization improved retention of the module content.

The study by Naidoo and Sibiya examines the challenges influencing the facilitation of transnational nursing education (TNE) and in particular cross-border nursing education and partnerships. The study aimed to highlight regulatory, administrative and quality assurance factors that challenged the successful implementation of TNE and used a qualitative, multiple case-study approach. Participants included academic leaders and nurse graduates from local, national and international nursing education institutions. The study concluded that a culturally and socially inclusive teaching and learning environment should be provided for international students to adapt academically and socially and be in a position to fulfil the requirements of their respective academic programmes. This will ensure that the standard of the programme remained consistently high and globally competitive increasing the credibility of the educational institution and the country's higher education system

The academic writing process is challenging for many students and is an academic activity that may impact on their well-being in higher education. Most assessments are undertaken in writing and so this is a high stakes practice and one which is often assumed to be already in place when students enter the university. Writing is perceived as a generic neutral practice. However, within a new literacies perspective it is argued that writing is a social practice (Lea and Street 2006) that differ across different programmes and disciplines. Therefore students often need, but do not get, the kind of scaffolded support that might equip them to take on these practices. The next two articles focus on the support and development of academic writing for postgraduate and undergraduate students

In the first article Oluwole et al. focus on the well-being of postgraduate students in the academic writing process. They explore peer led postgraduate writing groups as sites for agency

development at one South African university. Drawing on an academic literacies' approach the authors argue that academic writing is a social practice and use this as the basis for creating collaborative learning spaces where students can critique and provide feedback to each other's work in a collegial environment. The findings from the discourse analysis of questionnaires indicate that the interdisciplinary writing groups contributed to developing agency and well-being of postgraduate students through providing opportunities to engage collaboratively to make explicit the norms of their disciplines in a safe, supportive and nurturing space and at the same time provided positive peer pressure to encourage students to pursue their writing activities.

Esambe's article, through the examination of formative feedback as a case study in a Dental Technology BTech research writing course, exposes important considerations that need to be taken account in the design and implementation of student support. While it is well documented that feedback is a critical activity in learning and teaching it often meets with resistance and tensions from both staff and students. This article draws on cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) to explore dialogical formative feedback as a way of improving students' research writing. Through diffractively reading some of the feedback, questioning how the feedback was generated, examining students' responses to the feedback and its impact on their writing the article emphasises the many challenges experienced by students when making sense of feedback. The article analyses various elements of the activity system to highlight the many tensions that exists in respect of what the purpose of the feedback is, how to respond to the feedback and who are the students to whom the feedback is provided. The article argues that dialogical feedback allows for critical engagement among lecturers, students and support staff on students written texts as well as the factors that are enable or constrains their writing

The last article in this Special Issue by Behari-Leak et al brings to the fore the challenges and possibilities of academic developers and the field of academic development in this dynamic higher education environment. It highlights the tensions that became evident during recent student protests for a field that prided itself on a focus of transformative learning and teaching but was also somehow contributing to the students' feelings of being outsiders. The article reports on an interesting approach of generating data through critical dialogue and reflections on these engagements. It is argued that the critical dialogue and reflections by facilitators on these sessions forced the HELTASA executive to question their underlying assumptions and make explicit "blindspots" in the practices of the field. Through critically reflecting on the dialogues around the role and positioning of AD, the philosophical underpinnings and blindspots within AD, the development of pedagogical practices that can serve the social justice

agendas, and the transcending of disciplinary and institutional boundaries towards becoming stronger change agents the authors raise many critical questions that need further deliberation. The authors argue that engagement with one such question: "how can AD contribute to a transformative discourse and programme that engenders a greater critical social justice worldview within the higher education sector in South Africa today", could signal a new phase of AD.

This special issue shares research across disciplinary contexts with a focus on higher education well-being. Through providing spaces for conversations on issues of feedback, assessment, epistemological access and professional learning the articles highlight education as a critically engaged, interactive and iterative process. This requires a pursuit of seeking meaning and purpose which are key considerations of eudemonic well-being, suggesting further that a focus on happiness (hedonic well-being) is insufficient in a complex sector such as ours.

We hope that the special issue will inspire continued conversations to bring us out of our silos to work together to enhance the "wholeness of our students" (Reich 2013, 2), our staff, our institutions and our society, for the common good.

> "It is not about some superficial or even transient experience of being happy or even about feeling happy, but rather it turns to that more important, sustainable quality of purpose that underlies our sense of self, our motivation to persist, our trust in agency, and our responsibility to act for the common good." (Reich in Pingree and Harward 2013, 2).

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