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Editorial

Many of the articles published in our 2016 edition have focused on the issue of quality education from a number of different perspectives. The current issue continues this journey and exploration but focuses more closely on three important aspects of the quality education debate: first, the focus is on higher education. Zeroing in on two professional programmes, one for teachers and another for engineers, several of the articles probe pertinent questions about the graduates' knowledge, competences and attributes. Taking the position that universities are critical to the development of knowledgeable, competent and well-disposed graduate professionals, the studies raise important concerns that challenge the entire higher education community to reflect more deeply on the relevance, designs and outcomes of the current programmes on offer, especially the professional programmes in teacher education and chemical engineering, in particular. Second, the focus is on exploring the possibilities and likely impact of more innovative designs and strategies, including new technologies and work- or school-based learning for teaching and learning of various subjects in the schools and universities. Third, the focus is on the broader question of quality education for what? Several of the articles begin to answer this question by pointing towards the overall objective of promoting quality education in pursuit of a broader social agenda on social justice.

Petro du Preez and Anne Becker begin the conversations with a critique of a human rights literacy project for teacher education students in the South African university context. In their article, entitled *"Ontologies and possibilities of human rights: Exploring dissensus to facilitate reconciliation in post-conflict education contexts"*, the authors puzzle over the participants' confessed lack of competence on human rights issues and their struggles and disillusionment with the human rights (in South Africa). This is in addition to the participants' perceptions of a conflict between what the human rights are (actual) and what they could or should be (ideal). The paper proposes an interesting approach for resolving this dilemma, one where the design and approach of the human rights education within the teacher education programme shifts away from engaging with human rights along fixed barriers to one where the education is a continual dissonant process, enabling moments of dissensus within intersecting spaces of (non)existing rights.

Thuthukile Jita pursues the theme on the efficacy of the teacher education programmes by measuring the perceived

competences of science pre-service teachers to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) for teaching specific subjects such as life sciences, physical sciences and natural sciences. In her article entitled *"Pre-service teachers' competence to teach science through information and communication technologies in South Africa"*, she argues that student teachers are more competent in the use of non-technology tools as opposed to the newer technology tools and gadgets for facilitating teaching and learning. Thuthukile argues that the major sources of the observed lack of competence by pre-service teachers on the use of ICTs have to do with the faulty design in the university programmes that neither provide adequate opportunities for student teachers to learn about the actual use of such tools during their training at university nor assesses their use by the students as part of the teaching practice requirements. The paper recommends the need to develop ICT standards or competence criteria and policies to guide the assessment of competence in and support for the use of ICT tools by student teachers.

Dipane Hlalele and Cias Tsotetsi continue the discussion on the design and implementation of innovative practices in the teacher education programmes at university. Their paper entitled*, "Promoting student teachers' adaptive capabilities through community engagement"* examines how one teacher education programme was deliberately designed to provide students with opportunities to assess and develop their capabilities to adapt to changing conditions of curriculum implementation in different schools. Through the infusion of a community engagement component in the teacher education programme, the students were offered the space to develop an awareness and demonstrate their capabilities to bridge the various challenges they experience with curriculum implementation in a number of rural schools in the Eastern Free State province of South Africa.

In her article entitled *"Why do they want to become English teachers: A case study of Taiwanese EFL teachers"*, Chih-Min Shih provides some research guidance to teacher educators and policymakers on the design of appropriate teacher education programmes for English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). She unpacks the reasons given by a sample of a diverse group of Taiwanese EFL teachers for wanting to become English teachers. Using the Watt and Richardson (2007) framework on Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT), she examines the expectancy value propositions of the sample teachers and concludes that their choice to become English teachers is influenced by multiple intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Pre-service teacher education has a much greater role in nurturing the intrinsic motivation required of teachers.

Thobeka Makhathini introduces the discussion on professional competence and the role of higher education programmes rather differently by examining the training of engineers within the context of universities of technology in South Africa. In her paper, entitled, *"Work integrated learning competencies: Industrial supervisors' perspectives"*, she identifies the strengths and shortfalls of the work integrated learning (WIL) experiences for students placed in the various chemical engineering companies in the eastern coastal seaboard of South Africa. Using a 4-point Likert-scale assessment tool that measures 23 work-related competencies, her data from the workplace supervisors shows that the engineering students performed well on the cognitive and/or "hard skills" while they did poorly on the behavioural and/or "soft skills". Makhathini thus argues for the need to redesign the engineering programmes to focus creatively on the hard and the soft skills that are required in the engineering industries.

The last three papers in this issue shift our focus back to the challenge of quality education in primary and secondary schools. Dovetailing on the discussion by Thuthukile Jita on the use of ICTs for teaching and learning, the authors Mavhunga, Kibirige, Ramaboka and Chigonga present descriptive statistical data on the use of smart phones by high school students for learning. Their paper on *"Smartphones in public secondary schools: Views of matric graduates"*, suggests that data searching and processing is the most prevalent activities for which the

smartphones are used by the grade 12 learners. Interestingly for teachers and policymakers, the study notes that most schools do not allow learners to use their smart phones in class and thereby limit the range of possibilities for using these ICT tools for teaching and learning purposes.

Vukile Mgijima and Leketi Makalela then present findings on the effects of translanguaging techniques on teaching grade 4 learners how to apply relevant background knowledge when drawing inferences during reading. Their paper entitled *"The effects of translanguaging on the bi-literate inferencing strategies of fourth grade learners"* examines the efficacy of simultaneously using the learners' home language and a second language in reading development among bilingual Xhosa-English readers in a rural school in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

In the final article of this issue, Aslam Fataar and Jennifer Feldman explore the potential of professional learning communities (PLCs) as vehicles for promoting deep reflection and pedagogical change among teachers in pursuit of a social justice agenda in schools. The paper provides tangible suggestions on how to overcome the two major challenges identified in the PLC: viz. the lack of a "didactic language" and "pedagogical reflexivity" among the participants.

All the papers contain an interesting thread in their attempt to answer the question: quality education for what? Whether it is about trying to bridge the digital divide, providing innovative solutions on issues of pedagogical change, to the local problems in rural schools or providing the means for accessing the dominant and/or trans-national languages to Taiwanese students or the primary school learners in the Eastern Cape in South Africa, concerns about social justice are not far off. Collectively, therefore the papers make a timely contribution and add insights to the debates on policy and practice for the provision of quality education in higher education generally but in professional education in particular.