Editorial

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Decolonisation remains one of the most controversial social justice issues in the Global South, including Africa, with its unique challenges, and beyond. However, the concept of decolonisation is contested in relation to what it means in general and, for our purposes, what it means in education specifically. While many educators recognise the validity of the decolonisation imperative and are committed to engaging with it at various levels, some struggle with how it can be applied in research, in engagement with learners, and in teaching and learning practices in general. We believe that decolonisation must be accorded priority as a social justice issue on the education agenda.

The aim of the SAERA 2017 conference was to encourage dialogue about teaching, learning, and research experiences in decolonising education and the furthering of engagement with, and work towards, the task of bringing theory and practice together in courageous and imaginative ways.

This conference enabled educators and researchers to share what we are currently engaging in, struggling with, experiencing, and questioning in our various education and research practices and contexts. In so doing key note addresses, papers, posters, and panel discussions focused on one or more of the following themes.

- Teaching, learning, research, and engagement in educational contexts
- Education for all
- Voice of the voiceless
- Resistance, re-envisioning, and renewal
- Pathways to decolonisation
- Decolonising research in education

There are six articles in this issue that engage with decolonisation, how the concept is contested, and that consider its applications in various disciplines.

The first article is a philosophical piece by Siseko H. Kumalo who uses a decolonial approach to interrogate the emancipatory role of higher education in South Africa today. Using Rawls's Theory of Justice and the Theory of Mutual (in)Fallibility he provides a nuanced critique of the extent to which South African higher education curricula have historically reinforced colonial epistemologies and continue to do so. These theories are also used to interrogate the legitimacy of the Fallist Movement's protest against the erasure and silencing of black voices in higher education institutions. Kumalo concludes that the Fallist Movement mimics the very colonial and masculine epistemological and ontological frameworks that it critiques by silencing and marginalising the voices of dissent in the movement. It is in this context that he is critical of the complete abandonment of historical ways of knowing and doing and argues for a more humanising approach which does not force unanimity but allows, rather, for critical reflection and the generation of ecologies of knowledge.

In their article, Namgamso Mtsatse and Celeste Combrinck make a noteworthy contribution to the decolonisation of language debate. They explain how the dialects of isiXhosa were reduced through colonisation into a single standardised language. This created the perception that isiXhosa is a single, homogenous language. The artificial standardisation of isiXhosa has had, and continues to have, dire consequences for learners who do not speak the officially recognised dialect. This article examines the influence of dialects and code-switching on the numeracy achievements of isiXhosa Grade 1 learners. Mtsatse and Combrinck provide a history of the lexicographical development of African languages in South Africa and foreground the role of language in the decolonisation of education. The findings of this study address the need to research the complexities of African languages and their dialects in the light of what this implies for policy and practice in providing access to education.

Patrick Mweli foregrounds the imperative to decolonize the use of English as the language of teaching and learning (LoLT). He argues that language is inherently social and is therefore inextricably connected not just to epistemic access but, in this case, to the development of African identity, dignity, and culture. He challenges the hegemony of English in education and other contexts and is critical of how the continued use of English as LoLT limits epistemic access and African ways of knowing and calls for an "epistemic decolonial LoLT" or EDLoLT. Mweli examines the lived experiences of Grade Four teachers and their attitudes about the use of English and isiXhosa in their classrooms. His findings indicate that both the teachers and learners struggle with accessing knowledge in general given the prevalence of English as LoLT.

Logamurthie Athiemoolam discusses his use of an arts-based pedagogical approach—drama-in-education—to teach a module to third year university students using teaching strategies aligned to the goal of decolonisation in a higher education classroom. He discusses how using a critical performative pedagogy that includes the use of tableaux, improvisation, and role plays fosters counter hegemonic practices that could not only subvert traditional notions of teaching and learning but could also contribute to alternative ways of knowing. Such an approach is also more congruent with constructivist notions of learning, teaching, and knowledge construction in that this particular pedagogical intervention, used here in order to

narrow the theory/practice divide, draws on the imagination, creativity, and spontaneity of students to embrace learning as an embodied experience. Athiemoolam points out that only one class participated and hence he is reluctant to make grand claims about this exploratory study, but his findings indicate that the students' understanding was deepened and enhanced by this drama-in-education pedagogical approach during which they gained a much better understanding of concepts such as hegemony, a humanising pedagogy, social justice, and diversity.

Callie Grant, Lynn Quinn, and Jo-Anne Vorster provide an interesting account of how Heads of Department (HoDs) from one historically white university responded to the 2015–2016 student protests that called for the decolonisation of higher education. Their article highlights the imperative to decolonise education and discusses conflicting conceptions of decolonisation. While some conceptualise decolonisation in terms of reconceptualising the academy as an institution, others see it more in terms of epistemic reform. Some HoDs recognise that decolonisation is necessary but whether this recognition will translate into changing the status quo remains to be seen. Although some were amenable to the call to decolonise the university others rejected it. Grant, Quinn, and Vorster provide a clear synopsis of the way in which the student protests influenced and affected how HoDS at this institution saw decolonisation and its imperatives for change.

Marguerite Müller veers away from traditional research methods in her use of a critical arts-based narrative approach based on her having researched the lived experiences of five educators teaching in a higher education institution during the time of intense transformational and decolonising debates. She argues that it is relatively easy to change the policies and the curricula in higher education institutions but if this effort is not accompanied by a similar thrust to include the teachers who are responsible for implementing the curriculum and pedagogy, change will be slow in coming. Critiquing traditional notions of positivist research that relies heavily on data and analysis, she opts instead for an arts-based methodology that counters the limitations of the rational approach; Müller provides us with a novel research method. The visual/textual portraits she uses explore the connections between educator identity and the demands on teachers in higher educational institutions to contribute to social justice imperatives. Although the article does not definitively spell out how educators' diverse backgrounds and histories, which are often in tension with the present demands of transformation and decolonisation, are to be resolved, Müller does indicate that this article and her use of portraits should be regarded as an entry point into a much larger and imperfect discourse that pays heed to the fact that educators' identities are complex and that these are uncertain times.