Sechaba Mahlomaholo (WSU)
mmahlomaholo@wsu.ac.za

Mzolisi Payi (WSU)

Editorial

Education for sustainable development in the era of decolonisation and transformation

The voices demanding the decolonisation and transformation of education have become louder, stronger and clearer. These happen when the whole of humanity has bound itself to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015–2030 building onto the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000–2015. What is unclear to many is whether decolonisation and transformation of education on the one hand, and education for sustainable development on the other, refer to the same processes. It is also unclear whether the intents and purposes are the same, whether mechanisms and strategies to operationalise them are similar or whether we are being confronted by irreconcilable contradictions that will make the realisation of either and/or all impossible.

To initiate this conversation, the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) seem to agree that transformation of education involves a movement from a culture of blame, confrontation, low morale, conflict and apathy among staff, students and management into a culture of respect, inclusion, responsibility, accountability, transparency and excellence. Furthermore, the National Development Plan 2013 for 2030, in line with the SDGs, regards education, training and innovation as central to the country's long-term development. These are seen as core elements in eliminating poverty, reducing inequality and laying the foundations of an equal society. The bottom line of sustainable development therefore is about responding to the challenges and creating more sustainable and resilient societies through quality education.

In the context of the above, contributions in the form of articles to this special issue of *Perspectives in Education* (PiE) attempt to unravel what the transformation and decolonisation of education means and implies, as well as what education for sustainable development includes within its explanatory scope. The ultimate intention of this

exercise is to theoretically and sometimes with empirical data show how "transformation and decolonisation of education" relates to "education for sustainable development" and map out how they are performed jointly or separately.

In order to systematise this discussion, articles in this volume are classified into six categories of expanding concentric circles. The first category looks at learners, that is; how they learn and perform academically as instances of transformation and decolonisation. Still on the theme of transformation and decolonisation, the second category looks at the other component of the educational project, namely teachers and the manner in which they see and play their roles of intensifying self-awareness; hence, better academic performance among their charges. The third category focuses on the school as the context for couching the transformation and decolonisation of the learners' academic performance, teachers' scaffolding practices and curriculum relevance, among others. The fourth category interrogates transformation and decolonisation within communities and instances of civil society that have direct influence on schools, learners, teachers and the curriculum. The fifth category looks at the epicentre of transformation and decolonisation during the past five years, namely, the higher education sector. Here the focus is on theorising these concepts and relating them to the praxis as well as processes of knowing and knowledge creation. The last category moves a step further in terms of higher education transformation and decolonisation by lifting out examples of what all these mean in the practice of the curriculum.

With an article titled, "*Quality education for sustainable development: Are we on the right track? Evidence from the TIMSS 2015 study in South Africa*", **Alex and Juan** initiate the conversation in the first category. This article investigates the contextual factors that exist as well as critically assess the progress made by senior phase mathematics learners in TIMSS 2015. It brings its investigation to a halt by making recommendations in order to accelerate this progress thereby positively contributing to learners' performance in the Eastern Cape and, in the long term, to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as laid out in the National Development Plan of 2030 for South Africa.

The argument above is taken further in **Malebese's** article titled *"A socially inclusive teaching strategy for transforming the teaching of English First Additional Language".* Herein she explores ways of including indigenous knowledge systems in the teaching of English First Additional Language (EFAL). The aim being to use a socially inclusive teaching strategy in such a manner that the imbalances that past oppressive regimes brought into the teaching and learning of a second language, EFAL in this case, is challenged and possibly reversed.

Qhosola, through her theorisation of what she calls "adequate descriptive feedback" demonstrates how learners' performance can be enhanced in the learning of Auditing as an aspect of Accounting. Her article titled *"Enhancing the teaching and learning of auditing: The case for descriptive feedback*" shows how descriptive feedback can create transformative spaces in the auditing classroom, make learners aware of multiple positions that can be assumed on any matter and ensure inclusivity of many forms of knowledges. The recommendation coming out of this article is that more classes of auditing should use descriptive feedback to transform and decolonise the learning of auditing therein.

Salami and Okeke in their article titled "*Transformation and decolonisation of Mathematics Education for sustainable development: A case study of its learning trend in Nigeria"* conclude their argument by noting that there is the need to review and contextualise Mathematics content from third year in primary/elementary school for effective learning. Activity-based and exploratory strategies using contextual experiences and resources to deliver Mathematics lessons were recommended for third year in primary/elementary schools and beyond. This, according to them, was a way of decolonising and transforming education through its curriculum.

Ojo and Adu deepen the above understanding of transformation and decoloniality as "excellence" through their article titled "*Transformation of teaching quality in secondary school education: Teachers' conception".* Therein they argue that teaching is a versatile and valued exercise that is geared towards bringing about achievement in students' learning. They thus recommend that policymakers should increase the budget on secondary school education as well as monitor the process of implementation to achieve the desired goal.

Through her article titled "*Teachers' perspectives on transforming teacher education curriculum for relevance to basic education for sustainable development",* **Cishe** investigates teachers' perspectives on how the teacher education curriculum could be transformed to be relevant for basic schooling and contribute to sustainable development. Findings revealed that the teacher education curriculum is not always relevant for basic schooling in that teacher trainees are not exposed to the curriculum offered in schools and that traditional teaching approaches are still used at the university, whereas schools use outcomes-based approaches. As a result, once they are qualified, teacher trainees find it difficult to navigate the system. The paper recommends that there is a need to transform the teacher education curriculum so that it becomes relevant and contributes to sustainable development.

To conclude the discussions in the second category of the articles in this volume, T**lali** focuses on the teaching of physical sciences through his contribution titled *"Creating sustainable physical sciences learning environments: A case for decolonised and transformative learning".* He quips that there is an urgent need for transformation and decolonisation of teaching and learning of physical sciences as well. He argues that this need is evidenced by, among other factors, the alarming rate at which learner enrolment in physical sciences and science education, in general, is decreasing. He concludes his article by suggesting that using service-learning projects to create sustainable (physical sciences) learning environments, contributes substantially to decolonising and transforming teaching and learning.

Buka, Matiwane-Mcengwa and Molepo open the discussion in the third category by noting that while there are perspectives on how to approach decolonisation and transformation of education in schools, the reality is that all rests with individuals and ways that they change their attitudes and mind-set. Their articled titled "*Sustaining good management practices in public schools: Decolonising principals' minds for effective schools"* is instructive as it comes up with findings that show that some school principals enjoyed being *"big baas"* (bosses) and displayed unprofessional conducts such as absenteeism or lack of punctuality where nepotism and corruption prevailed. This has thus necessitated the need for a radical transformation and decolonisation of how schools are managed.

In the same category, **Duku and Salami** through their contribution titled *"The relevance of the school governance body to the effective decolonisation of education in South Africa"* argue that the decolonisation of education is the means of formalising indigenous culture and knowledge within the formal school system. They point out that the involvement of people at the grassroots who are still endowed with vast knowledge on this cultural heritage should be considered as an option. Based on the above, they conclude by recommending that the composition of the members of School Governing Bodies should statutorily include a recognised knowledgeable individual (RKI) in the community to make the body a good source of indigenous knowledge to ensure decolonisation and transformation of education therein.

Moving further into the fourth category still pursuing the same line of argument, **Mampane** describes the socio-educational after-school intervention programme run by a drop-in centre to fight poverty, strengthen and build resilience in families and school microsystems. Through this programme, indigenous psychology is used as a theoretical lens to understand the school, family and community response to contextual challenges and how resilience is conceptualised. The community intervention programme uses a systems approach to achieve its objectives. Findings of the study Mampane reports on in the article titled "*Resilience of*

the socio-educational afterschool and community intervention drop-in centre" suggest that caregivers view the educational success and achievement of their children as an indication of their own success and accomplishment of their dreams, with the aim to uplift and dignify the family standing in society and to alleviate or eradicate poverty. Socio-educational programmes for children and families serve to strengthen resilience in families as well as decolonise the social programmes and policies.

The fifth category is opened by **Mutekwe's** article titled *"Unmasking the ramifications of the fees-must- fall-conundrum in higher education institutions in South Africa: A critical perspective".* Using a critical perspective the study argues that the shutting down of universities in the context of student protests was neither unique nor original to South Africa. According to Mutekwe, the fees-must-fall protests showed how challenging a colonised education system can lead to academic disruptions. The key conclusion drawn was that if tuition fees dry up as would be the case if a fee-free decolonised education policy were to be adopted prematurely, the country could suffer severe consequences such as inevitable budget cuts, compromised research standards, demoralised academics and curtailed university offerings.

Within the same fifth category, **Moodley and Toni** with their article titled "*Transformation within higher education leadership – In conversation within South African female deputy vice-chancellors"* argue that part of the decolonisation and transformation of higher education institutions is the re-construction of its leadership. This requires not only a review but also a dissolution of traditions, conventions and organisational forms which they have inherited, including a re-imagining thereof. These authors argue that decolonisation and transformation are not mutually exclusive processes in the South African context, but that transformational leadership is part thereof. The paper concludes with recommendations on the impact of psychological and cultural factors and the importance of the implementation of transformative policies, affirming male and female role models, institutional support structures and career planning which should form part of the decolonisation and transformation of conventions in capacity-building towards equity and sustainable leadership.

F**omunyam** takes the discussion further in his article titled *"Decolonising the future in the untransformed present in South African higher education"* when he concludes that funding structures, research politics, administrative structures and a lack of interest are among the reasons for the lack of transformation in the South African higher education sector. His point is that there will be no transformation until higher education institutions have been decolonised. Social transformation is therefore argued as the pathway for decolonisation. The paper recommends that transformation in higher education should go beyond the shelves where they are stored as policy, to the classroom and university environment for practice where universities need to revise their understandings of transformation under the guidance of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

In the same fifth category, **Maseko** explores the issue of transformation and decoloniality further in her article titled "*Codification, meritocracy and performativity: Debilitating factors for black pre-service teachers".* Herein she presents an argument and commentary about the concomitant effects of codification, meritocracy and performativity in the academic performance of a cohort of black African Foundation Phase Bachelor of Education degree students at a previously predominantly white institution of higher learning. This paper posits the viewpoint that the sociocultural backgrounds of the cohort predispose them to the resultant negative effects of an untransformed and colonised education. In conclusion, she proposes strategies to counter the effect of such.

Fomunyam and Teferra conclude the discussion in the fifth category through their article titled *"Curriculum responsiveness within the context of decolonisation in South African higher education"*. The point made by Maseko above is elaborated further in this paper. Fomunyam and Teferra point to the inability of the curriculum to respond to contextual issues, empower

students to come of age, while at the same time remaining committed to giving them a plurality of voices. In line with Morrison, they argue that curriculum discourse should be marked by a multiplicity of voices, articulating a hundred thousand theories thereby creating avenues for a just and caring curriculum. This curriculum is only possible in spaces that are open to construction and reconstruction of responsive knowledge. The paper concludes that curriculum encounters are vital for the effectiveness of the decolonisation process and the enhancement of curriculum responsiveness.

The last paper in this volume is by **Chaka, Lephalala and Ngesi** and it is titled "*English studies: Decolonisation, deparochialising knowledge, and the null curriculum".* This is the only paper in the sixth and final category. It concludes that decolonisation as an aspect of the curriculum currently has very limited presence in higher education discourses and that efforts should not be spared to ensure that it constitutes the bases of all curriculum going forward.

The contributions in this volume seem to agree that transformation and decoloniality relate to each other in many ways and that they both talk to the strife towards excellence; be it in education, the economy or socially and that this has to be inclusive for all.