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# EDITORIAL

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*Editor-in-Chief*

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It is with great pleasure and a sense of relief that we present this fifth issue of JOVACET. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching repercussions on every aspect of life the world over, including in academia. Practitioner researchers in education and training, in particular, we are informed, have been preoccupied with the many challenges of remote teaching and learning and keeping academic programmes on track, which have necessitated relegating those well-intended papers for publication to the back burner. We are therefore exceedingly grateful to those authors who managed to submit their articles for this issue earlier this year and who stayed the course of the lengthy peer-review process towards achieving the final product.

In spite of the pressure on academics, though, we received many submissions for this issue. Part of the reason for this has to be attributed to the emerging writers' workshops held online in 2020 over a period of four weeks, for which we engaged respected scholar and prolific author Prof. Jonathan Jansen as facilitator. The workshop was aimed particularly at emerging writers and was attended by about 60 participants. Potential articles for the JOVACET 2021 issue that could be completed within the journal's time frames were accepted. Authors were then offered a further opportunity during the first half of this year to be mentored by Prof. Jansen for a period of six weeks in order to complete their articles and navigate their way through the peer-review cycle. Authors who were part of the process, some of whom had published previously, reported that they had benefited immensely from the sharp critical input and the expert oversight to which their articles were subjected. This has certainly been a wonderfully productive initiative that JOVACET would be keen to repeat.

Turning to the articles in this 2021 volume, I'm pleased to report that a fairly even spread of topics covering TVET and Adult and Continuing Education emerged from the successful

peer-review process. Here again we must acknowledge our peer reviewers and editorial committee members who were willing to go the extra mile to assist us in meeting our time limits. Some articles went back and forth between reviewers and authors, testing the patience and the resilience of both parties, whose perseverance we deeply appreciate.

Two articles cover the topic of adult educators in community education and training centres, but from different perspectives. Hendricks and Aploon-Zokufa reflect on the process of curriculum building for a planned new adult educator qualification – the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education and Training (ACET) – and consider the various ‘drivers’ that may influence the way a curriculum is implemented and received at the point of delivery, notwithstanding the lofty intentions expressed in policies. They draw on work done in an existing training programme for adult educators to illustrate the powerful experiential knowledge that educators at community sites of adult education have acquired. They also draw attention to the implications of these insights for curriculum design – an activity usually undertaken by academics in higher education. The authors argue that in preparing for the roll-out of new ACET programmes, higher education is faced with a curriculum moment that ought not to marginalise the voices of adult educators and adult learners when decisions are made about ‘valuable knowledge’ that should be included in the curriculum.

In the second article situated in the field of adult educators in community education and training, Land takes a closer look at the work contexts of the state-employed corps of adult educators and the parlous conditions that most of them have to contend with in poorly resourced institutions. Through a study conducted at a sample of adult education centres across the nine provinces of South Africa, a big picture of the cadre of adult educators is constructed. Despite policy intentions to increase provision in this education sector, the numbers of adult educators are shown to be declining steadily, which begs the question as to where the educator capacity will be found when the numbers of adult learners being encouraged to enrol at the new Community Education and Training Colleges (CETC) are increased. Nonetheless, Land reports that even under trying circumstances the remaining adult educators displayed a positive commitment to community development and a strong common identity as a mutually supportive group of adult education practitioners.

In the vocational and work-related sphere, Paterson, Herholdt, Keevy and Akoobhai adopt an interesting angle on the meaning of employability skills in their study that introduces ‘work-based values’ to young people entering workplaces for the first time. In a specially designed programme, TVET college students were enabled to reflect on attitudes and behaviours in the workplace, namely, respect, accountability, self-improvement and perseverance. After learning about and reflecting on these attributes, the students were afforded a period of work placement in which they were asked to reflect on the values conveyed in the workplace through their own and colleagues’ behaviours. The focus of the study described in this article was on the assessment instrument piloted in South Africa and in Kenya, and the extent to which it was able to measure changes in participants’ understanding of the values and their meanings to employees in practice. The researchers display a careful and rigorous approach

in generating an assessment instrument for such elusive concepts as work-based values. They acknowledge, however, that the instrument now needs to undergo further application in larger-scale studies, but early indications are that it shows great potential.

The question of TVET lecturers and curricula keeping abreast of the rapid advances in technology in the light of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is raised by Teis and Els. In a large-scale study in which more than 500 technical engineering lecturers across TVET colleges in South Africa were asked about their awareness of current knowledge of technology and their pedagogical practices in engineering programmes, the authors produced some disturbing findings. Moving from the assumption that changes in the technology environment should drive curriculum review so that students are appropriately prepared for the world of work in technical engineering, they also ask how advancements in the world of technology outside the classroom might influence future technical training. Their findings reveal that just over half of the lecturers surveyed were not aware of the changes in their field and consequently could not comment on how technology curricula might be affected (or adapted) as a result. These findings should raise warning signals among TVET authorities about the lack of continuing professional development for TVET lecturers and the paucity of their exposure to work environments that serve to sensitise them to crucial changes in industry – an awareness that can only be to the benefit of technical engineering graduates.

Regarding research methodologies, this issue attracted three ‘perceptions studies’. At their most basic, perceptions studies attempt to help us understand the world through the observations of participants. In the case of Mukeredzi’s study, the writer attempted to gather from prison educators their perceptions of what motivates prisoners to engage in adult education and training. The author explains that since it was not possible to gather these perceptions on prisoner motivations from inmates themselves, the study sought to investigate, through the eyes of the educators, what prisoners were hoping to achieve through education. The deliberate choice made by prison inmates to pursue training, as reported by education officials, indicated their future-focused desire for self-improvement and to avoid a return to incarceration.

In the second perceptions study, set in Ghanaian higher education, Owusu-Agyeman and Fourie-Malherbe explore among adult learners in telecommunications and electrical engineering programmes what these adult learners believe enhances their vocational knowledge and skills at their institutions. It should come as no surprise that the learners feel they would benefit from having advanced technology applied in their courses, in both practice-based experiences and work-related knowledge being imparted. Ample empirical evidence exists in the literature regarding the value of relevant resources and appropriate pedagogical approaches in vocational settings; however, the authors considered it important to reinforce that evidence through the contextualised impressions of the adult learners themselves.

A third perceptions study, by Sibiya, Nyembezi and Bogopa, investigates the ways in which TVET engineering students perceive their qualifications and employment prospects in the

light of the high rate of youth unemployment, especially among TVET graduates, in South Africa. These young graduates grasped fully that their engineering qualification was no guarantee of employment, not because the qualification has no value, or as a result of inadequate training, but owing to the lack of jobs in a sluggish South African economy. Nonetheless, they maintained hope in their electrical engineering qualification as they believed the country needs their technical skills, given recent crises initiated by electricity deficiencies. The recommendations made by these young graduates about, among other things, voluntary service being made available in the public and private sectors and funding for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) were insightful outcomes of the research. In addition, they are sharply critical of the insistence on the part of prospective employers that young people must have experience prior to being employed – a barrier perceived to be nonsensical by young graduates eager to put their newfound skills into practice and obtain such experience through their first jobs.

Finally in this issue, there is an article by Mutambisi, Madondo, Mavesera and Dube that highlights concern about gender sensitivity mainstreaming in the curricula and practices of an agricultural training college in Zimbabwe. Agricultural training there had historically been undertaken mainly by males, but in the rural setting of the study equal numbers of male and female students were enrolled at the college. The study sought to determine whether the curricula in any way reflected a sensitivity towards gender in the pedagogies employed and the attitudes expressed. Based on the data gathered from a range of respondents – both students and lecturers – an analysis of policy and curriculum documents, and classroom observations, the authors conclude that in practice the agricultural training programme materials and activities reveal that scant attention is being given to considerations of gender mainstreaming, or even to silences on the matter, despite stated commitments to the contrary in national policies.

As stated earlier, with our country still in the throes of a pandemic, this issue of JOVACET placed authors, reviewers and our editorial board members under tremendous pressure. We are also aware of the many other authors who were keen to submit articles but who informed us that they regrettably had to withdraw their contributions owing to the stresses of work, family and so on. Our hope is that we will continue to attract both established and emerging scholars from South Africa and internationally to publish high-quality research that contributes to our understanding of the issues relevant to vocational, adult and continuing education and training, but which also pushes theoretical and methodological boundaries. We look forward to your continued support in building JOVACET as a vehicle for disseminating your research endeavours, and wish you well as you continue on your research pathways. Congratulations and sincere thanks to all our contributors featured in this issue!