

Responsiveness of higher education beyond apartheid in the spotlight at Teaching and Learning Indaba

THE Teaching and Learning Centre, of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), shone the spotlight on the pertinent issue of responsiveness of higher education post-apartheid during its two-day Teaching and Learning Conference, held recently at uMfolozi Casino in Empangeni.

This year's theme was inspired by technology and the manner in which its use in all facets of our lives was changing how we do things. Dr Yasmin Rugbeer, the Director of Teaching and Learning at the Centre, elaborated.

"We need to come together, from time to time, to share our knowledge and experiences in this area so that we remain relevant (in higher education)," Dr Rugbeer said.

To unpack the topic, the centre invited Prof Matthew Montebello, a lecturer in the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology at the University of Malta, and Prof Sue McKenna from Rhodes University, who delivered keynote addresses during the plenary sessions on October 10 and 11, 2018, respectively.

Prof Montebello shed light

on artificial intelligence (AI), crowdsourcing and assessment, unpacking how the three areas could revolutionise teaching and learning in higher education.

Using various examples, Prof Montebello demonstrated how technology could be utilised to enhance the learning and teaching experience for students and teachers.

He said that AI played a pivotal role in online learning as it assisted educators with profiling their learners, in relation to what their varied interests are, to impart knowledge effectively to them using relatable examples.

He elaborated on the notion of crowdsourcing, which he indicated was a form of knowledge sharing and accessing via social networking platforms such as Moodle, before touching on how technology could assist with formative assessment.

Prof McKenna's address was a more critical and retrospective approach to the conference theme, in the South African context. Making reference to the 1997 White Paper on Higher Education, which tasked higher

education institutions with responding to the needs and interests of society, Prof McKenna analysed the progress made thus far by the higher education system in relation to responsiveness.

Quoting an extract from the White Paper, she reminded attendees of the fundamentals of responsiveness, which she said was a shift from a closed to a more open and interactive higher education system responding to social, cultural, political and economic changes in its environment.

Although successful in some areas, Prof McKenna noted that responsiveness had been rather steady in others.

"Higher education has been tasked by the White Paper to take an important role in social cohesion. We have to respond to the need to face the social inequalities of our country.

"Have our universities done that since 1997? No. We are much certainly more financially inequitable," she conceded.

Prof McKenna questioned the role of universities as knowledge producers. "We are meant to be producing

knowledge. Depending on how you could measure this, you could say our universities are doing well. The number of postgraduate scholars and PhD publications have increased.

"There are questions sometimes around quality and around whether that is producing knowledge or numbers. But I think on a metric level, we have been successful," she said.

Among the reasons for the gradual responsiveness of higher education was that universities were expected to do far more things with far less money, Prof McKenna said.

Student intake has drastically increased since 1997, yet the total number of lecturers does not aggregate with this. The issue of fees remains a critical matter, on top of the graduate unemployment rate and the recent concerns about decoloniality of the curriculum. The latter, according to Prof McKenna, suggests that complete responsiveness may take much longer to be realised.

Having said this, Prof McKenna stated: "There is an important niche for all our universities for responsiveness in



Prof Matthew Motebello, a lecturer in the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology at the University of Malta, talking artificial intelligence, crowd sourcing and formative assessment at the recent Teaching and Learning Conference.

the gaps between our jobs. It is in the spaces between the three core functions of universities – teaching and learning, research and community engagement – that responsiveness needs to take place. It is that nexus where teaching and learning and research become one. It is that nexus where teaching and learning

and community engagement become one. There is a real space for engaged research."

She said rural universities were more successful in their responsiveness to teaching and learning, research, as well as community engagement nexuses.

Humanities and Social Sciences Conference grows by leaps and bounds



Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation Prof Gideon de Wet, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Arts Prof Antonia Nzama, keynote speaker Prof Stephen Mutula and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts Prof Dennis Ocholla.

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) held its 9th Humanities and Social Sciences Conference on October 17 to 19 at the UNIZULU Science Centre in Richards Bay.

The theme of this year's conference was "The Social Sciences and Human Basic Needs". The concept of human basic needs provided an opportunity for academics and people interested in improving the quality of life in African societies to interrogate different aspects of human survival under extremely difficult conditions.

The conference brought together a wide range of audience, which was engaged and participated in a fruitful discussion.

According to Prof Dennis Ocholla, the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts, the conference is part of the university's research strategy that focuses on research development and capacity building of current and future researchers for the country.

He said: "We recognise that one of the major challenges faced by African countries is that of economic

performance by individual states and the African continent at large. The major theme arising from this is the extent to which citizens have been able or not to meet their production and reproduction needs as individuals and groups. This has led to an analysis of poverty levels and the extent to which African countries have achieved economic development.

"Some scholars have paid particular attention to an analysis of economic development and attainment of human basic needs. This approach borrows substantially from Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs. This is a concept that deals with issues of absolute poverty, especially their measurement," Prof Ocholla said.

In his keynote address, University of KwaZulu-Natal's Prof Stephen Mutula spoke about the role higher education institutions are required to play in the lives of students.

"Students are our customers. They are the most important people, while (a) few exist as universities.

Without the students, the buildings will be useless. The students want high experience whenever they go to an institution. They want to know what it is that can be offered beyond education," Prof Mutula said.

He urged universities to evaluate the kind of help they offered to their students.

He spoke about the reputation of institutions, saying they needed to create an environment where people learnt to become job creators rather than seekers.

"Right now in South Africa, we are faced with the challenge of no jobs.

"We also need to transform the lives of the people in communities where we are situated. We must be able to make some kind of contribution to the community," he said.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the conference next year, Prof Ocholla said the Faculty of Arts intended to increase the number of national and international participants/speakers, and increase conference attendance and participation.

UNIZULU academic makes case for multiple intelligences in teaching and learning

ON FRIDAY, October 12, 2018, Prof Mncedisi Maphalala, the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), presented his Inaugural Lecture at the Council Chambers at the KwaDlangezwa Campus.

The lecture formed part of a series of lectures held to recognise and acknowledge academic excellence by providing a space for scholars to share their research with the university community.

In his lecture entitled, "Embracing Multiple Intelligences (MI): Catalyst for Enhancing Inclusive Teaching and Learning", Prof Maphalala unpacked the multiple intelligences that exist and proposed the development of broader curriculum opportunities to accommodate learners' multiple intelligences in schools. Prof Maphalala's paper was based on American psychologist Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences that radically transformed teaching and learning practices in the US and the rest of the world since 1983. According to the academic, embracing MI provides extended opportunities for teaching and learning development in

South Africa. "Schools (in South Africa) teach in the dominant traditional style which utilises linguistic and logical mathematical intelligences such as IQ tests. This restricts learners with an affinity for other intelligences to progress. These learners will get lost and ignored in the classroom because they are misunderstood," he said. Gardner's theory positions the notion of teaching and learning as a far more flexible practice as opposed to the traditional way of imparting knowledge to learners who would receive and later repeat the information.

This theory explores a combined usage of eight different intelligences to reach the disengaged learners. These include the use of visual aesthetic, bodily kinaesthetic, musical elements, interpersonal and interpersonal skills, linguistics, logical mathematics and naturalistic sensitivity of the natural world. These methods can be applied to any kind of learner regardless of age. Although the theory has been received well by educators and most school systems in the world, it has not been immune to challenges.

"The major challenges educators have experienced is incorrectly



Prof Mncedisi Maphalala, the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand.

identifying the unique intelligences individual learners have. However, there are methods one can subscribe to to assist, but nothing beats the knowledge of years of tried and tested experience," said Prof Maphalala.

He has dedicated his career to empowering learners. Through his work and extensive research, he proves that the use of Gardner's theory can greatly improve the teaching and learning curriculum offered in South African schools, thus enhancing learner capabilities by providing an inclusive learning environment where all learners will be given an opportunity to succeed.

Urgent call for the protection of Zulu sheep

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) held the fourth of its Inaugural Lecture series for 2018 on October 15. It was delivered by the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, Prof Nokuthula Winfred Kunene.

Prof Kunene's topic, "Nguni sheep in KwaZulu-Natal: A Valuable Food Resource, Are We Losing It?", focused predominantly on the Zulu sheep, the significance of the breed, its production management system in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), as well as how and why people need to act urgently towards addressing critical issues that threaten the survival of the sheep.

Explaining the essential role played by Zulu sheep in KZN, she said: "This breed is a good source of livelihood in this area. The breed primarily serves as the source of meat and income to poor rural farmers. It depends entirely on the natural feed for its nutritional requirements without any supplements."

She said more than 67% of

historically disadvantaged livestock farmers in South Africa operated under village production systems that are inherently isolated, and lacking in resources and infrastructure.

It accounts for some of the reasons why KZN is the region most affected by the extinction of the Nguni sheep breed, in comparison to other provinces.

"The main source of Zulu sheep deaths is droughts and diseases. In a five-year period, the Zulu sheep have declined by 7.5%, but the cattle and goats' numbers have increased. These statistics are in line with various government sources. The sheep breed has been experiencing high mortality of its lambs, with 3.1% of lambs killed by gastro-internal parasites, as well as dogs and other predators.

"It is very important to have extension services in rural areas that will assist (in fighting the extinction of this breed)," she said.

Amid the grim statistics, Prof Kunene said she hoped that the Department of



Prof Nokuthula Winfred Kunene, the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at the University of Zululand.

Agriculture, which has identified the breed as under threat, would devise a strategy that would save it. The academic also called for the public's participation in tackling the pressing issue.

Prof Leon Vivier, the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, congratulated Prof Kunene on her "inspiring and valuable research".

He commended her on being strategic in choosing a topic that was relevant to the environment UNIZULU is based in.