



UNIZULU hosts International Education Week

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) launched its first International Education Week earlier this month. The three-day conference was hosted by the Internationalisation Office under the office of the Vice-Chancellor in the iconic King Bhekuzulu Hall on the KwaDlangezwa Campus.

UNIZULU staff and students came in numbers to participate in the event; learning and exploring about various topics and relishing the overall celebratory mood of the gathering.

The theme for the international week was "Internationalisation at the University of Zululand".

During her welcome address, Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Xoliswa Mtose stated that the launch could not have come at a more

opportune moment, as it was held shortly after the Senate of the university adopted its internationalisation strategy in higher education. At the same time, the launch built on the strategic vision of turning the university into a node for African thought. The adoption of this ideological posture is to enable the university to advance African scholarship by exploiting its geostrategic location. "I trust that this launch is a precursor of many of such events. This is a significant step in the evolution of the scholarship. We hope to tap into the richness of the history of the African people in a fountain of knowledge that remains largely unexplored," Prof Mtose said.

Clarifying the purpose of the event, the director of the Internationalisation Office, Professor Nontokozo Mashiya mentioned that one of the strategic goals of the university was to produce



Professor Nontokozo Mashiya, Director of the Internationalisation Office at the University of Zululand. Picture: Samkele Sokhela

global competitive graduates. Therefore, the event also aimed to motivate staff and students

who have not yet started to implement internationalisation, to ensure that they include this component. "This occasion also aims to create a platform for staff and students to engage on internationalisation matters, as well as to showcase international collaborative activities that are spearheaded by faculties," said Prof Mashiya. One of the keynote speakers was Professor Mats Johnsson from Malmo University in Sweden. He highlighted the importance of internationalisation of higher education in Africa. "It is an integral part of the programme to produce teachers who are globally competent and students to be globally competent. It supports and enhances students' achievements in all content areas at all levels," he said.

Another keynote speaker was Dr Valindawo Valile Dwayi, Director in the Internationalisation office at Walter Sisulu University. He spoke on

deconstructing internationalisation in the context of structural and historical disadvantage.

"We need to be able to draw from powerful theories if we need to explain some social phenomena like internationalisation. If we don't do that, we will be subscribing to just reproducing the status quo. The whole idea about the HDIs is that they need to up their ante to be the best in terms of the communities in which they are located. Internationalisation is a very value-laden exercise. It can only be done well if we disrupt our ways of thinking about it," Dr Dwayi said.

He then proposed a thinking tool that would help implement a model drawn from critical realist thinking from the theory of Margaret Archer, which argues that any social concept you are thinking of must always be "context-specific, must be understood as concept dependency and as anchor driven".

UNIZULU hosts 5th mathematics educators seminar

SINENHLANHLA NGCONGO

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted its fifth mathematics conference for educators working within the King Cetshwayo District, in an effort to find ways to improve the mathematics pass rate in the district.

Professor Khoboso Lehloeny, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering gave the official welcome to the attendees. The two key speakers of the conference were Prof Bambihlelo Majuqwana from the Department of Engineering at UNIZULU and Tony Moodley, who is a chief education specialist.

The seminar took place at the Bon Hotel in Empangeni and was facilitated by Jurgens Johannes Basson, a respected mathematician and mathematics textbooks author.

Moodley spoke about the concerning performance of the district. "The bachelor pass rate verses the NSC pass rate in the King Cetshwayo District office in 2009, up to term two of 2021, is concerning. In 2017, the Grade 12s had a 62% participation in mathematics, which has dropped in 2022 to 42.5% participation in mathematics. Grade 11s had a 30% and Grade 10s had a 40% pass rate.

"In 2021, just over a third of our learners managed to score a bachelor pass. The district achieved a 50% pass rate in 2021 and they are striving for an 80% pass rate this year, as they achieved a 72.8% pass percentage in 2021," Moodley highlighted.

He raised a concern regarding the declining pass rate, adding that the Department of Education was looking to improve the poor performance. To tackle this matter, the department was scrutinising the number of learners who are scoring above 50%. Moodley urged educators to encourage learners to participate in mathematics and make them realise the significant role that the subject plays in the country and its economy. He concluded by saying that maths teachers should not only see themselves as teachers, but as mathematicians as well.

When asked about the role and significance of the seminar, an educator from Nongweleza High School, Sibonelo Xulu, said: "The seminar was good, especially for Grade 12 teachers who are about to do revision for



Educators from the King Cetshwayo District pictured at the mathematics educators seminar held at Bon Hotel in Empangeni.

exams that will start in less than a month. It was beneficial for us because we are going to revise the strategies that we got from our facilitator and pass the knowledge to our learners so that they can prepare for their final examinations. We are also thankful to the University of Zululand and the Department of Education for such an informative conference."

Gcina Nhleko, Director of the UNIZULU Communications and Marketing Division, delivered the vote of thanks, saying that the conference was remarkable. "The full turn out is a testimony to where there is a will, there is a way. Thank you to the educators for making the event possible," she said. She also acknowledged the university, colleagues from the King Cetshwayo District, the district director, and the event speakers.

Conference emphasises central role of academics in ensuring a just and democratic society

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE vital role played by academics in moulding future leaders who are conscious of, and have a zeal to resolve social issues was revisited during the recent three-day 6th Teaching and Learning Conference, held at the Premier Hotel in Richards Bay.

The conference takes place annually and is organised by the Teaching and Learning Centre at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU). Its purpose is to provide a platform for networking, sharing information and having discourse about challenging issues in higher education in terms of transformative pedagogies and teaching and learning. According to Professor Maria Sewela Mabusela, Director of Teaching and Learning, the conference is a space to "jointly explore and exchange ideas and insight that could grow the higher education system in South Africa and beyond".

This year's theme was "Reimagining Teaching and Learning for a Just and Democratic Society". It covered multiple areas that included teaching and learning in higher education; African realities; insight and perspective; transformation and innovation in teaching and learning practices, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; reimagining postgraduate studies and the supervision model; technology advancement in higher education; student initiative and the community engagement project; social innovation and entrepreneurship; internationalisation trends; and reimagining teaching post-Covid.

Prof Omiumota Ukpokodu, a full professor at the University of Missouri, Kansas



Professor Maria Sewela Mabusela, Director of Teaching and Learning. Picture: James Thwala

City in the United States, was invited as a guest speaker. She boasts more than 30 years experience in transformative education. She therefore unpacked the theme in great detail, as it is very close to her heart.

In the professor's view, the current disconnect between ideas and lived experiences in society calls for a paradigm shift – it requires academics to "interrogate, challenge, disrupt and change" the status quo. To emphasise her point, she reminded the attendees of how integral education is in the social context. Quoting Ernest Boyer, she said the purpose of education, apart from preparation for careers, is to enable students to live a life of dignity and purpose. She shared three practices she conceptualised for the reimagining of teaching and learning for a just and democratic society: habit of

mind, habit of thought and habit of action.

"The habit of mind centres on knowledge of who we are as cultural human beings. Who are we who teach? What is our identity? What is the purpose of our teaching? Do we ask how our subjects prepare students to be citizens? How does it respond to realities? How does my course empower my students to develop the disposition to reconstruct the society for a just and democratic society?" Prof Ukpokodu asked.

She added: "How inclusive is the curriculum when we create it? How is our teaching? Is it transformative? Research shows that a lot of what we teach is transmissive; where we deposit information and have students regurgitate it. This is not going to prepare our students adequately for the world they live in. When we teach, we must be intentional, deliberate in integrating social justice issues, welcoming them."

Prof Ukpokodu described the habit of thought as the capacity to uphold humanity for other humans. It deals with how the academics' beliefs and values nurture a sense of justice, equity and humanity and responsibility.

Finally, she spoke about the habit of action, saying this entails actualising ideologies on democracy and social justice. It also is about acknowledging the voices of students, facilitating their engagement in issues that affect their spheres of contact, and being cognisant of their preferred mode of learning.

The conference brought together academics from different institutions and disciplines, who presented on pressing issues pertaining to teaching and learning.

Academic handbook calls for higher education pedagogy reform in African countries

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

PROFESSOR Byron Brown, the newly appointed director of research and innovation at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), recently co-authored a book titled *The Emerald Handbook of Higher Education in a Post-Covid World*. It focuses on higher education institutions in developing countries in Africa and the Global South.

The book, which was written in collaboration with Professor Alastair Irons, Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Abertay University, Scotland as well as other contributors, highlights the urgent need to reform pedagogical approaches and expand

the range of teaching models, practices and learning interaction options for students.

The co-authors address the importance of supporting students and safeguarding their social and emotional wellbeing as they engage in learning methods that have significantly changed since the pandemic, such as the introduction of blended learning.

Chapters in the book cover a range of themes including the opportunities of gamification and blockchain technology, cybersecurity in digital classrooms, culture and policy concerns, and priorities for African education systems post-Covid.

Professor Brown said: "The book is a response to a crisis in higher education, triggered by the Covid-19

pandemic in March 2020. The pandemic forced the African higher education sector, and indeed, the global higher education system, to adapt its pedagogical approaches, and to embrace changes in educational technology at a rapid and unprecedented scale. Covid-19 sparked disruptive innovation. This book offers insights for teaching staff, researchers, policy makers and education interest groups on how our universities and colleges can rebuild in the wake of the pandemic to ensure we are delivering the best quality learning experience to our students – aligned to their needs."

The Emerald Handbook of Higher Education in a Post-Covid World is available from Emerald Bookstore.



Professor Byron Brown is co-author of *The Emerald Handbook of Higher Education in a Post-Covid World*, a book which stresses the need for improved teaching and learning practices. Picture: Samkele Sokhela

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