**Editorial**

Recent student protests have highlighted the persistent underfunding of higher education in South Africa with state contributions to university education declining from 49% in 2000 to 40% in 2012. At the same time the post-apartheid era has seen student numbers in higher education double. What is seldom mentioned in the media coverage given to the #FeesMustFall protests is the impact that all this has had on university staff. Staff have had to do more with less. Larger classes, more marking and growing pressure to offer quality teaching has led to a more demanding working environment with less time for research. Yet the pressure to publish has not gone away. Academic staff are still expected to do the scholarly work and to publish it, in fact their jobs may depend on this. The international literature indicates that writing retreats offer university teachers space and time away from work and an opportunity to obtain support and feedback in the process of writing for publication (Morss and Murray 2001, Moore 2003, Grant 2006, Murray and Newton 2009) and writing retreats have become popular in South Africa too.

However these retreats at peaceful and remote venues are an expensive privilege and those of us who organise and facilitate them need to be sure that they add real value. One way of monitoring their value is measuring output from the retreats but this should not be all. Publication counts provide only one rather unreliable lens on the effectiveness of writing because writing development is notoriously tricky to measure (Witte and Faigley 1983, White 1990) and measurable outcomes from writing retreats are difficult to achieve (Grant 2006). For instance, how do we really know when a research article is finally published, how much of an impact the writing retreat had on attaining that goal? Therefore, in addition to measuring outcomes, we need more qualitative research and evaluation which will enable a reflection on and a rethinking of our pedagogies. The literature on writing retreats has tended to concentrate on the importance of retreating to write and on the different models for writing retreats (Murray 2010). It has seldom, however, focused critically on the complexities of teaching and learning to write for publication.

This special issue sponsored by a Department of Higher Education National Collaborative Teaching Development Grant has encouraged contributors to rethink and re-imagine the pedagogies for writers’ retreats with more in depth and theoretically framed understandings of how particular writing pedagogies work and why they are effective. The special edition offers an exciting diversity of approaches to learning and teaching on writers’ retreats. Some articles in this volume focus on philosophies for more fruitful writing experiences such as mindfulness, free writing and slow pedagogy, while others consider writing retreats as communities of practice, open spaces and as a third space which can open up ways of potentially enhancing learning experiences. Then at the other end of the continuum there are articles on knowledge building and genre based research. This wide variety of topics should offer something of interest to all who have been involved in writing retreats and writing development and allow organisers and facilitators to share ideas.

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