Towards Cultivating a Critical Pedagogy of 'Splace': A Response to Teaching Practices in Higher Education amidst COVID-19

Krystle Ontong
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0591-2570

Zayd Waghid
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3404-1041

Abstract

In the context of the global pandemic, many educational institutions across the globe were propelled to halt face-to-face classes and switch to online learning environments to ensure the continuity of education during the time of crisis. Although a significant number of university educators, students and administrators were caught off-guard by restrictive measures caused by the pandemic such as social distancing, various public universities in South Africa began implementing online teaching and learning by mid-April. Despite the fact that this mode of instruction can be of high value and quality, especially in the case of Higher Education, the lack of adequate time to prepare was a major constraining factor. Most university educators who have been tasked with moving all learning activities online had a matter of days or a few weeks at their disposal. Furthermore, online education is a completely new experience for many lecturers and students, and effortless adjustment to it cannot be expected to be immediate. With such a narrow preparation window, it would be unfair to expect lecturers to become online teaching experts overnight. These unprecedented circumstances resulted in what is called emergency remote teaching (ERT). In this chapter, we stress some of the main measures taken by a particular university in the Western Cape in response to ERT. The transition to remote teaching and learning can be overwhelming for both

academics and students. Hence, we wish to present a conceptual framework for academics to consider during this transition phase and thereafter by drawing on the works of Greenwood (2003; 2013) and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). Greenwood (2003; 2013) advocates for a critical inquiry to education, using place as a point of departure, and Garrison *et al.* (2000) present a framework, namely a Community of Inquiry (CoI), which may be necessary for creating spaces for effective learning within an online sphere. Our argument is based on the premise that the intersections of place, space, and technology within a CoI framework create new e-learning *splaces*, which might be useful conceptual tools for rethinking Eurocentric epistemologies underpinning current pedagogies. We conclude this paper by deliberating on some implications, and propose the adoption of flat ontology for successful navigation of e-learning *splaces* in Higher Education.

Keywords: teaching, learning, assessment, higher education, curriculum, place, flat ontology

1 Introduction

The global Higher Education sector has been dramatically transformed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has created a new normal for the higher education sector by redesigning curricula, reshaping teaching, learning, and assessment models and revolutionising the online learning landscape. For decades, academic institutions have been criticised for their lamentable slow pace, centuries-old lecture-based approaches to teaching, entrenched institutional biases, and outmoded classrooms (Tam & El-Azar 2020). COVID-19 has placed universities in a slightly uncomfortable environment, and has become a catalyst for many educational institutions worldwide and in South Africa to search for innovative solutions in a relatively short period.

In the quest to salvage the 2020 academic year, universities across the globe embraced the 'learning anywhere, anytime' concept of digital education (Martin, McGill, Sudweeks 2013: 51)). These authors (Martin *et.al.*) define this type of learning as 'learning that takes place in a variety of contexts, within and beyond traditional learning environments, utilising any type of mobile device'. Remote teaching, the pass/fail system and the suspension of mid-year

exams are just a few of the proposals that were considered by universities in South Africa. While remote teaching may be presented by its advocates as a welcome addition to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in contrast, it has been contested by critics who may argue that the majority of historically disadvantaged students who are unaccustomed to remote forms of teaching and learning may experience marginalisation and isolation.

However, we aver that the new *splaces* of learning could assist lecturers in re-imagining how Higher Education ought to transform in order to better prepare students for what the future might hold. We divide this chapter into four sections. Firstly, we provide some context for emergency remote teaching (ERT). Secondly, we discuss some of the primary measures that were taken by the University of Cape Town to continue the academic programme. Thirdly, we elaborate on the essential notions of *place, space* and *technology* within a CoI framework, as well as the new e-learning *splaces*, of which lecturers ought to be cognisant as they transition to ERT.

2 A Shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

In order to prevent or slow down the spread of the highly-contagious virus, namely COVID-19, governments around the world implemented social distancing measures. These included limiting large group gatherings, closing buildings, cancelling events, and suspending all public and private educational institutions. Many countries, paired with lockdown regulations, decided to close their borders and restrict all domestic and international travel. For example, in South Africa, all ports of entry were closed to the movement of people during the lockdown period, which commenced on 27 March 2020. In addition, people were restricted to their homes and were only allowed to leave their houses for essential goods and services. Although the restrictions had various implications for all sectors, these were quite evident in the higher education sector, as universities desperately attempted to salvage the academic year.

Although remote teaching is not an unfamiliar practice in Higher Education, and many institutions in South Africa already embraced various aspects of technology-enhanced learning before the epidemic, the reality was somewhat different when 600 courses (as in the case at UCT) suddenly had to be converted to e-learning in the middle of the first semester. This shift in the mode of instruction is what many refer to as emergency remote teaching (ERT)

(Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond 2020). It is, however, essential to distinguish between typical effective online instruction and ERT. The latter refers to a temporary shift to an alternate instructional delivery mode with bare minimum resources and within limited time due to crisis circumstances (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond 2020). Furthermore, it includes all remote teaching solutions for teaching that would otherwise have been delivered as face-to-face, blended or hybrid courses, and that will return to that format once the emergency has abated. Hodges *et al.* (2020) assert that the main goal in these circumstances is not to re-invent a robust educational ecosystem, but rather, to ensure temporary access to teaching and teaching resources in a way that is easy and quick to set up, as well as dependently available during an emergency or crisis. Under normal circumstances, commencement of planning, developing and preparing for a fully online university course would vary between six and nine months before the course is delivered (Clow 2020). Once ERT is understood in this manner, we can start to divorce it from 'online learning'. Yet, just as in the case with face-to-face teaching, ERT also requires the steering of a sound Community of Inquiry (CoI). This will be expanded on later in the chapter. Next, we discuss the University of Cape Town's response to the crisis.

3 The University of Cape Town's Response to the COVID-19 Epidemic

In this section, we discuss some of the primary measures taken by the University of Cape Town (UCT) to continue the academic programme remotely. After intense consultations with academic and support staff, the Teaching Online Task Team (TOTT) at UCT developed a framework for ERT underpinned by principles such as inclusivity and pedagogy of recognition. Furthermore, TOTT also proposed a new academic calendar indicating that the second quarter would commence on 20 April 2020, with an orientation week lasting until 25 April 2020. Online lectures would commence on 28 April 2020 (Lange 2020a). The calendar was organised on the assumption that students would be brought back to campus as from 1 September 2020. Deputy Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning, Associate Professor Lis Lange, stated the following in one circular: 'We understand that each individual's use of time and space is determined by the class needs, so from the very beginning we have focused on how to provide an equitable learning experience to all our students'

(Lange 2020a: 1). As a first step to ensuring this, a survey was conducted to determine students' available resources for remote learning, and the necessary analytics were developed to monitor the level of student engagement down to course level. All guidelines for curriculum development were redesigned with the vulnerable students in mind. This group included all those students who were not able to study remotely due to various reasons, for example, connectivity issues, financial aid problems, or those living with disabilities or other illnesses. Those students who were not able to access the survey were contacted by phone by the University in order to determine their state of affairs.

Some of the prioritised support measures for students included, but were not limited to, access to data, regular communication, ensuring access to learning material, and introducing a new online learning environment. For example, the university allocated loan laptops to students based on financial need. Each student with a valid South African cell phone number also received 30-40GB of data, depending on their network provider, which was valid for 30 days. In addition, cell phone providers agreed to the university's request to zero-rate access to certain UCT websites (Lange 2020b). In cases of no access to the internet, printed learning materials and USB drives were to be delivered to those students. In order to accommodate all students as far as possible, it was decided to make remote teaching asynchronous, employ low-tech options and to reduce student engagement to 30 hours per week. The Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) also launched various webinars on the effective use of the learning management system at UCT as a means to support and prepare staff for remote teaching.

In the area of assessment, it was agreed that continuous assessment would be the norm and that invigilated examinations for courses during the first semester would be suspended with the exception of the Faculty of Law and exit level courses (Lange 2020b). The annual courses would have invigilated examinations at the end of the year. The university also adopted a pass/fail system for final marks in first-semester courses. Furthermore, a Call Centre and Referral System (CARES) was set up to manage queries about connectivity as well as health and psychosocial issues. This centre continued to reach out to those students who did not respond to the survey in order to better understand their needs. It also monitored student participation in remote learning through the university's learning management system and alerted individual faculties accordingly. Likewise, the office of inclusivity and change hosted online survivor support groups for staff and students who experienced

sexual and domestic violence during that time. A COVID-19 emergency fund was also set up to assist in the fight against the virus and its impact on the UCT community (Lange 2020c). These were just some of the primary measures that the university put in place to salvage the academic year. There were other measures beyond the scope of this chapter.

4 The Importance of Place, Space, Technology and a CoI Framework in ERT

4.1 Exploring the Notions of Place and Space

The above response of UCT indicating the new teaching framework calls attention to the importance of three powerful concepts, namely, *place, space,* and *technology*. The measures discussed above demonstrate how a place of living can become a space for learning through technology. It further signifies that assessment is more concerned with the solidification of knowledge and enhancement of learning than with the grading of memory. In this section, we elaborate on the first two concepts, namely, place and space. Place refers to either a location somewhere, or to the occupation of that location. By way of analogy, in the first sense, it refers to having an address and, in the second sense, to living at that address. Agnew (2011) notes that this distinction is often pushed further to distinguish the physical place from the remarkable space in which the place is located. Hence, place becomes a particular, or lived space, within a broader conceptualisation of space.

For decades, human geographers have challenged the technical view of place in terms of scale, arguing that neither place nor scale is a fixed or given category, but is rather a contested social construct that is continually being made and reconfigured (Ontong & Le Grange 2015; Le Grange & Ontong 2018). Nowhere has this been more obvious as with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It not only foregrounded the politics around national, international and local borders, but also made humans more aware of personal boundaries, in terms of those related to their immediate places. COVID-19 propelled humans to form new places and spaces of work, teaching, learning, and connection (often subconsciously). According to Orr (1992), as humans, we rarely acknowledge the fundamental role that place fulfils in our lives, simply because we are so embedded in it. Sense of place is therefore not something we consider on a daily basis. In fact, Orr describes this oversight as

'the ease with which we miss the immediate and mundane' (Orr 1992: 126). However, it is not arbitrary to infer that social distancing and the lockdown affected and redefined the sense of place for many if not most human beings. The global pandemic has demonstrated that place is far more than just a bounded space, location or site and that people do not live in a placeless world of geometric relationships, but rather in one of meaning (Buttimer & Seamon 1980; Ley 1983; Relph 1976; and Tuan 1977). It presents a world where neither place nor scale is a fixed or given category, but is fluid and contingent (Marston 2000). Albeit the case that various geographers claim that place represents a sort of bounded space, Malpas (2016) argues that its bounds do not take the form of dividing lines in space. According to him, place is neither spatial nor temporal, but encompasses both while refusing identification with either. He writes the following: 'to suppose otherwise would be to suppose that place somehow came after space, as a modification of it, whereas the reality is that it is place that comes first, and it is space that is the dependent phenomenon' (Malpas 2016: 384).

Despite being a useful concept in education, place remains difficult to conceptualise because of its multiple meanings in different contexts (Cresswell 2004). Various scholars, however, attempt to provide an expanded view of the term. For example, Cresswell (2004) provides three fundamental aspects of place to distinguish between the term's technical meaning and daily usage, namely, *place as area*, *locality*, and *sense of place*. Gruenewald (2003) introduces the multidimensionality of the term comprising the perceptual, ideological, sociological, ecological, and political dimensions (Gruenewald 2003), and invites educators to look beyond its technical meaning in terms of location on a map (for a more detailed discussion on this, see Ontong and Le Grange 2015, 2016, 2018). In this chapter, we use an expanded notion of place instead of its representation in technical terms, i.e. as coordinates on a map.

Albeit the case that the conflict between the dominant meanings of space versus place is longstanding, outside of geography, Agnew (2011) claims that little critical attention has been given to either definition. Nevertheless, the new modes of teaching propels us to critically examine the new and emerging places of meaning and learning for both students and academics. Remote teaching further illuminates the important yet often overlooked intersections of teaching, learning, place, space, and technology. The first two intersections are often the primary focus of attention, while the last three, i.e. place, space, and technology, are either viewed as supplementary to, or enhancers of the teaching

and learning process. Notwithstanding, transitioning to this mode of teaching, we now know that place, space and technology are more than supplementary enhancers and, in fact, are integral counterparts of every pedagogical encounter (Gruenewald 2008; Clow 2020). The abrupt change to ERT demonstrated not only this, but also how human knowledge (including students' learning) are inextricably bound within places. Places are, therefore, powerfully complex contexts and should always be critically reflected upon in education (Greenwood 2013).

The surveys conducted by UCT, on the one hand, highlighted once again how practices of subjugation as spatial acts map the worlds of students, especially those most vulnerable. On the other hand, what is also clear from the university's response is the fluidity of place – it can enable and continue learning. Thus, one can infer that place is always in the making and re-making, i.e. always in *becoming*.

Gruenewald (2003b) claims that discourses of accountability and economic competitiveness often fail to recognise the mediating role that [universities] play in the production of space (social context) and in the education of place-makers (citizens). Frequently in traditional face-to-face classroom settings, lecturers may spend more time thinking about how to minimise cheating in assessments and exams than how to enhance places of learning. Now, with this new mode of teaching, students can engage in assessments from the comfort and containment of their homes – 'making' or creating their own 'learning place(s)'. Thus, remote teaching provides the opportunity for lecturers to design assignments that mirror and prepare students for the 'real world', where they will have books, internet resources and colleagues for help. In fact, after graduation, students will seldom be told to produce work in total isolation. In this sense, place and space are performative entities, always in the process of becoming more than they intended to be. Moreover, using place as a starting point in remote teaching programmes might enable both lecturers and students to understand the localness of problems, even those that transcend national boundaries (Gruenwald 2003; 2008; Greenwood 2013). It might assist all participants in realising that solutions to real-world problems often require local action, as is the case with COVID-19. Although we are facing this global pandemic, it is only through local action such as social distancing, quarantining and self-isolating within our immediate places or dwellings, that we will overcome this virus. Additionally, in rural areas, where students live close to the land, using a place lens in education

might be useful to understand better how students' livelihoods depend on the land and could also serve as a basis for integrating indigenous cultural practices and philosophies such as *ubuntu* (reciprocal humanness) into education processes (Ontong & Le Grange 2015, 2016).

4.2 Towards Cultivating New e-(s)places for Learning

The question of space and place from a geographical perspective is ultimately not just about whether the question of 'where' matters, it is also about how and why something matters. Given the fact that both these concepts are about the 'where' of things, Agnew (2011) asserts that it is best to examine them together. This also makes sense considering the conflation of living places and learning spaces with remote teaching. Agnew (2011) further claims that the main current challenge to both of the dominant meanings of place and space comes from the idea that the world itself is increasingly 'placeless', as space-spanning connections and flows of information, things, and people, undermine the rootedness of a wide range of processes anywhere in particular. According to Friedman (2005), space is conquering place. From this perspective, new technologies - the container, the internet, the cell phone – are making places obsolete. This notion can, however, be challenged given the current pandemic that we are facing. COVID-19 has shown just the opposite, namely that the world is neither placeless nor obsolete, but that human connections and actions in/on/with places are 'intra-actional' (Barad 2007:33) i.e., bound by places and spaces. The new mode of teaching demonstrates the conflation of place and space through the medium of technology by introducing new e-learning *splaces*. According to the urban dictionary, *splace* is a term that can be used when describing 'space within a place or a place within a space' (Urban Dictionary 2020:1).

The idea of teaching in the cyberspace classroom requires educators to move beyond the idea of transferring traditional pedagogical approaches to a different medium (Palloff & Pratt 2011). Simply substituting face-to-face teaching with remote or online teaching may not assist in the realisation of meaningful educational encounters. Moreover, if we are to connect the notion of a community with place, then we need to identify further ways that power limits possibilities for human encounters (Gruenewald 2008). Transitioning to remote teaching can create a great sense of anxiety, fear, and hopelessness amongst students if power is not disrupted. This is where the political and

ideological dimensions of place would be useful lenses, as they serve to expose the spatial divisions and power embedded in places, structures, and society (Gruenewald2003). Put more aptly, any form of premature remote teaching used to address the current COVID-19 pandemic crises that places the university educator at the cornerstone of the teaching and learning process may not reach the desired outcomes of the curriculum. As university educators, we cannot, therefore, coerce students to adopt remote teaching and learning practices without negotiating intended outcomes with students. Otherwise, we risk making our teaching further oppressive under the guise of an online system. One may sympathise with academics who are now more pressured into addressing the concern regarding the completion of the academic project. However, if students are not included in the design of remote teaching practices, then any opportunity of such teaching being implemented may be met with a significant level of resistance.

Hence, we agree with Gruenewald (2008) that the curriculum should, therefore, be redesigned towards exploring place and cyberspace in order to potentially deepen the empathetic connections between students and academics with possibilities of learning outwards as one community. A more in-depth analysis of what makes learning interactive and engaging within the context of place is needed if academics are to develop meaningful courses appropriate for higher learning. If remote teaching and learning are to be successful, then developing a sense of community in the virtual classroom is essential (Palloff & Pratt 2011). The creation of conducive and safe e-splaces where students can share their perceptions, whether optimistic or undesirable, is necessary to alleviate any fears or anxieties concerning remote teaching and learning. Here, we propose the seminal works of Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) framework for establishing a CoI.

The CoI was developed to offer educators an ordered understanding and a methodology for studying and practising online or remote teaching and learning (Garrison 2015). However, in the context of our preceding discussion on place and space, the CoI is not limited to online learning. Therefore, it may be easily adapted to different forms of learning and thinking collaboratively whether in cyberspace or a traditional place of learning, such as the lecture theatre or classroom (Garrison 2015). At the core of the CoI are three presences that include the cognitive, social, and teaching presences. The cognitive presence, which is operationalised through what Garrison calls the Practical Inquiry model, aims to initiate a triggering event with subsequent phases of

exploration, integration, and resolution materialisation (Garrison 2015). The second core element of the CoI framework is the social presence, which focuses on the capacities of participants to identify with the group, to communicate purposefully within a trusting environment, and to develop affective and personal relationships with participants in the group (Garrison 2011). The third presence is the teaching presence which aims to provide an essential leadership dimension that sustains the community effectively and efficiently through the realisation of three progressive responsibilities, namely, the design, the facilitation, and the direction of social and cognitive presences (Garrison 2015).

If university educators are to develop a conducive cyberspace environment for students whereby such students can collaboratively construct knowledge, then what Garrison (2015) calls for, shared metacognition, may further be necessary for the realisation of safe spaces. Often in the face-to-face classroom, which reflects the power dynamics and systemic inequalities of our societies, safe spaces may serve simply to make privileged people in the room comfortable, at the expense of marginalised ones (Sykes & Gachago 2018). However, in a virtual classroom, it is the opposite. This is because the cultivation of a CoI requires shared metacognitive awareness (Garrison 2015). In other words, metacognition within the context of a community materialises when there is meaningful engagement between an individual, or group of individuals, and a surrounding context or place (Iiskala, Vauras, Lehtinen & Salonen 2011 in Garrison 2015).

According to Garrison (2015), the teaching presence necessitates that individuals undertake a degree of responsibility in regulating learning while accepting the encouragement and focus of the community. The rationale of this approach is to encourage a degree of autonomy amongst each individual in the group. In this regard, the student would, in some instances, assume the role of a facilitator, mentor, director, or learner. Each individual should, therefore, develop a metacognitive awareness of intended content goals and the inquiry process (Garrison 2015). For Garrison (2015) the notion of working collaboratively within the context of a CoI, therefore, extends beyond the self to engage with others' metacognitive awareness, thoughts and activities. However, we argue that the idea of safe e-splaces is necessary for empowering students to act on their situationality (Gruenewald 2008). According to Freire (1995), human beings *are* because they are in a situation, and they will be more once they reflect and act on their situationality. Reflecting on one's situation

corresponds to reflecting on the space(s) one inhabits. Acting on one's situation often corresponds to changing one's relationship to a place or, in this case, a *splace*. If students are to feel empowered in a remote teaching and learning setting, then such students ought to develop a sense of trust in the learning process that may ensue. In such an environment, students ought to be free from any form of coercion from their peers or educators which, in contrast to traditional rigid classroom settings, prohibit autonomous decision-making, and critical inquiry (Waghid 2016). Emerging forms of social interaction within an online splace may be further dependent on the provision of appropriate stimuli (Waghid 2016). Hence, uncovering students' epistemological and metacognitive awareness within the context of a CoI may be a further step in assisting them to look beyond the use of technology as a restrictive element in their learning.

5 Implications for Higher Education

For the successful implementation of remote teaching, we argue for a reconfiguration in ontology and propose a flat ontology to be considered among all stakeholders involved with the generation of e-learning splaces. A flat ontology argues that all entities are on the equal ontological footing and that no entity, whether artificial or natural, symbolic or physical, possesses greater ontological dignity than other objects. While some objects might indeed influence the collectives to which they belong more than others do, it does not imply that these objects are more real than other objects (Bryant 2010). This implies that in an e-learning splace, neither educator, student, nor technology is at the centre of the pedagogical encounter, but each exists in its own right. What is critical here is the notion of intentional correlation: all counterparts intend one another, and all interaction between them is based on a kind of intentional transaction. For example, while the tool or technology is used to facilitate the task of the human agent, it is also performing its task. This is because 'things' are becoming more networked in the 21st-century context and are thus increasingly designed around their capability to interact and communicate with each other through a network or online sphere (Lindley, Colton & Cooper 2017). However, the tool or technology may further serve as a map in enhancing students' experiences (Waghid & Waghid 2018). In the words of John Dewey, 'the map does not take the place of the actual journey' (Hickman & Alexander 1998: 242). Instead, the tool or technology as 'map'

may assist students in extracting deeper meanings from their learning experiences in their educational contexts (Waghid & Waghid 2018).

According to Norman (1998), an individual ought to learn the task, and not the technology. If the task in an educational context is for one to communicate with students, then learning practices should not be designed with the tool necessarily in mind. This is what Norman (1998: xii) alludes to when he argues that an ideal system aims to allow individuals spaces to continue with their activities, with technology enhancing their productivity, power and enjoyment to the extent that the technology itself is rendered invisible by the individual. Put more aptly, in the words of Norman (1998: xii), an individual 'should be able to take the tool to the task, not as today, where we must take the task to the tool'. Norman (1998) further claims that information appliances or software applications should be designed following three axioms, namely simplicity, versatility, and pleasurability. The simplicity design axiom is a major driving force for disrupting the complexity of information appliances. For the second axiom, versatility, appliances ought to be designed to allow and encourage novel, creative interaction (Norman 1998). The third axiom of pleasurability of information appliances aims to remove the drudgery of tasks by creating a sense of pride in owning, caring for, and using the appliance (Norman 1998).

From a flat ontology perspective, the design of teaching practices needs to take into account these three axioms to enhance the tasks of learning that are both effective and efficient while the tool remains invisible to the user. However, while the design of teaching and learning practices has to ensure that a learning task such as communication is considered essential, the absence of any form of social presence may serve as a significant barrier to effective communication in educational contexts.

Furthermore, we also propose that lecturers should be critical when creating e-learning splaces. According to Gruenewald (2003b), it is a crucial response to educational reform policies and practices that disregard places. As in the case of ERT, where some students experience connectivity and internet problems, guided by a restrictive curriculum that does not address such concerns, we recommend that lecturers practise a *critical pedagogy of splace*. Such a pedagogy would enable both lecturers and students to reflect on how power works through the places they inhabit and the spaces within which they teach and learn. Any muted student could quickly become accustomed to being told what to do, serving as a passive recipient of information or as a safety

deposit box (Freire 1970). To a large degree, this undoubtedly exacerbates a high level of non-criticality amongst students (Waghid & Waghid 2018). Eventually, by acting on these powers, they would change their relationship with such places. This could be applied, should lecturers integrate actual events such as the current pandemic into their pedagogies.

The implications for Higher Education are considered. Firstly, universities should realise that they are message-sending institutions and silent teachers of the ethos and scholarship they wish to promote. Iconic universities, like UCT, are a form of cultural currency, and each student will set his/her exchange rate for this currency. This should be acknowledged and embraced by academics. The dominant epistemologies, ontologies, and narratives (the silent teachers) are embodied in how the university creates and orders space. COVID-19 presents opportunities for higher education institutions to create conducive and just e-learning splaces should they operate from the premise of a flat ontology and consider students' sense of splace during recurriculation and assessment processes. It may also be the time to reassess examination processes that are deeply rooted in Eurocentric practices and to explore the pass/fail system post-COVID-19. The navigation of these processes encompasses the re-ordering of the relations between academics, students, the institutional culture, communities, and technology. Space and time should be allocated for rethinking how traditional practices and structures of teaching, learning and assessment can be sustainably transformed beyond this crisis. This would further imply that universities continuously challenge the spatial divisions among themselves, students, communities, and their supposed naturalness and legitimacy. This not only refers to contextual spatial divisions, but also to those centred on identity and cultural politics. Thus, it is essential to consider critical interventions by which e-learning splaces can be re-ordered to create a sense of community underpinned by the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. To act in the community through a spirit of *ubuntu* invokes an understanding that individuals ought to collaborate and co-exist in the quest to attain an internal good, which is a matter at stake in the advancement of the cause of social justice (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid 2018). The CoI discussed in this chapter can be considered a useful starting point in this regard.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to provide a conceptual framework for uni-

versity educators regarding emergency remote teaching during times of crises. We argued that place, space and technology in a CoI framework might be useful conceptual tools to consider in creating conducive e-learning splaces. However, this would require that lecturers look beyond the technical meaning of place, celebrate the potential of cyberspace, and establish a sound CoI. In achieving this, a profound shift at the level of ontology is necessary to ensure that educator, student and technology possess equal dignity and intentionally correlate to one another. Our contribution to the discourse concerning emergency remote teaching in a time of crisis in Higher Education is certainly not an end, but rather an invitation for further investigation. This chapter is intended to contribute to the establishment of the grounds for new curriculum design and pedagogies that are best suited to address the complex challenges that we currently face in the higher education environment in South Africa and abroad.

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Krystle Ontong
Senior Lecturer
Construction Economics and Management Department
Engineering and the Built Environment Faculty
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Krystle.ontong@uct.ac.za

Zayd Waghid
Senior Lecturer
Economic and Management Sciences Department
Faculty of Education
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Mowbray
waghidz@cput.ac.za