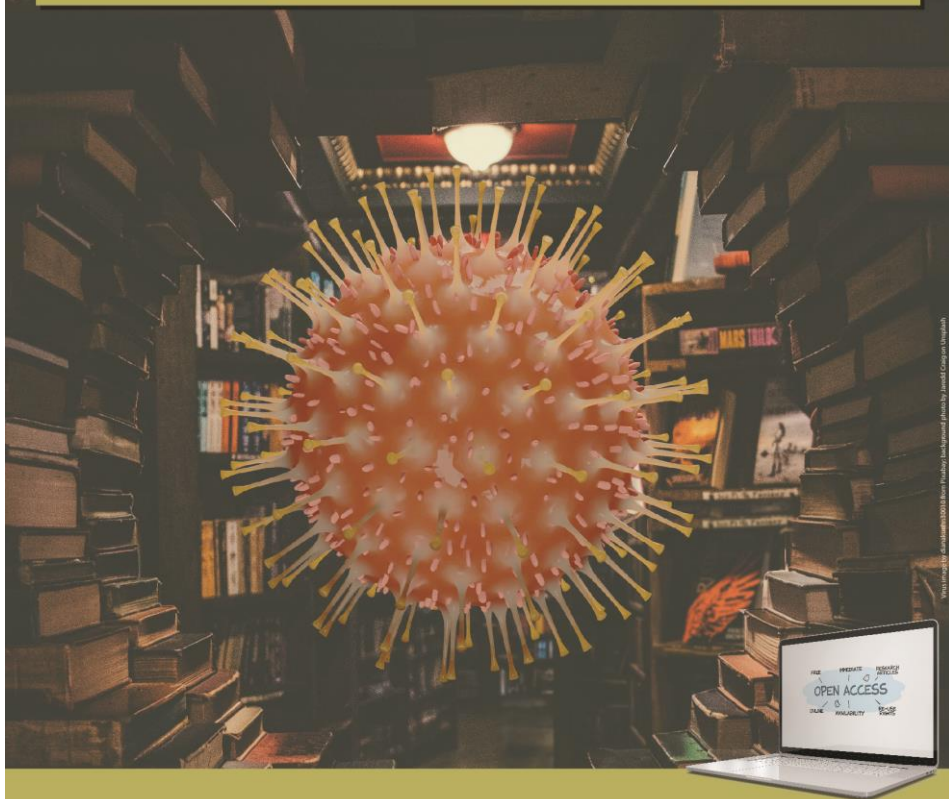# Re-thinking the Humanities Curriculum in the Time of COVID-19

Editors:
Labby Ramrathan, Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa, Nhlanhla Mkhize, Johannes A. Smit

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A list of 2020 published titles follows overleaf

Re-thinking the Humanities Curriculum in the Time of COVID-19

Editors
Labby Ramrathan
Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa
Nhlanhla Mkhize
Johannes A. Smit

2020

Preface

Emerging first in Wuhan, China, followed by its spread to other parts of the world, COVID-19 has had governments globally, systematically initiate a variety of forms of intervention, to curb its spread. These include lockdowns, the restriction of movement, forms of social distancing and sanitizing practices, as well as the requirement that citizens wear face-masks. Since the responses took place according to regional exigencies and directives, and were not uniform and equally comprehensive, internationally, they have also had diverse effects. Ranging from shortcomings in medical and health care provisioning, through economic downturns and fears of the increase in practices of governance surveillance, to the disrupting of schooling and tertiary education systems, sports, and cultural and religious events and practices, COVID-19 bodily, mentally, materially and socially, destructively affected the whole world as we know it. Apart from its continued deadly impacts, and barring the arrival of universally effective vaccines, the spectre of COVID-19's expected second surge with the arrival of winter in the northern hemisphere, also have populations across the world readying themselves to learn to live with the presence of infection on a continuous basis.

Given this very brief and though limited scenario, this Preface provides the context for the first seven volumes of the *Alter*nation African Scholarship Book Series (AASBS).

Focused on the impacts of COVID-19 on the Higher Education sector, especially from curriculum perspectives, at all levels and a sample of disciplines and subjects, the first four volumes were in principle conceptualised by the *Alter*nation Editorial Committee (AEC), on 31 March 2020.

This initial project problematisation has grown into twelve research groups with seven AASBS volumes, and five *Alter*nation Journal issues in production. Indications are that even if the world is rid of COVID-19 through vaccination – which might not happen in the near future – its impacts will be lasting. In the short to medium term we may also have to learn to live with the reality of the presence of the pandemic, and possibilities of infection and potential resultant death. These dynamics are being traced in the research, in, as well as outside academe, as we learn to transform and adapt to new realities, possibilities, risks, and drawbacks, of digital education and media.

In many ways COVID-19 brought communities of teaching and learning closer together across the usual social and professional divides. The hope is to ensure the optimal wellbeing for the greatest possible number of our fellow human beings (*Ubuntu*), and for staff and students to benefit from available existing and (digitally-) constructed resources. This outcome motivates each moment of our collective research-led teaching and learning, even though distance and disease threaten all.

The research produced by the *Alter*nation research groups constitute a small part of how academia attempts to both engage the conundrums and provide academic leadership amidst the effects and educational and learning opportunities of COVID-19. And for this we want to thank the lead-editors and their teams, as well as all the colleagues from across southern Africa who have responded positively, and affirmatively to our call.

And for their endeavor, and sleepless days and nights of rescuing our sick, and caring for those passing away, we want to dedicate these, the first number of volumes of our *Alter*nation African Scholarship Book Series, to our courageous medical staff, those who provide comfort, relief and succor to our sick and those passing away, as well as the singular worker, mostly unrecognized, that kept the wheels of life and optimal wellbeing turning. Thank you, colleagues. And go well. *Siyabonga, hamba kahle!*

Prof Johannes A. Smit
Editor-in-Chief: AASBS

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Editorial

Re-thinking the Humanities Curriculum in the Time of COVID-19

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The news around the novel coronavirus began circulating across the globe in the early part of this year. This relatively unknown virus was deemed to be a major challenge to the world, both in its biological and economical effects that could have devastating implications for the well-being of individuals and of countries across the globe. Being confronted by the reality of the coronavirus within our country, there was little information about the virus, its medical catastrophe on the humans and its effects on society and humanity. The disease was deemed to be in the same category as other significant pandemics, like the Spanish flu in the 1917/18 and others before. The 1917/ 19718 pandemic that reportedly infected 500 million of one third of the world's population, and around 50 million across the world (cf. 1918 Pandemic). As concerns about the effects of this coronavirus began to increase, countries began to take steps in preventing the spread of the disease, some of which included social distancing

amongst people, increasing travel restrictions across countries and within countries. More drastic measures included lockdown of towns and countries where people were being confined to their homes with minimal travel being allowed to procure basic necessities. Industries, educational institutions and other economic and social activities outside of critical services were being closed across the globe as a way of attempting to reduce the spread of the disease. COVID-19, as the coronavirus has come to be known, had left nations across the world with no vaccines, treatments or cures available to assist in the curbing of transmission of this highly infectious disease. It is in this emerging pandemic that this book was conceptualised.

The closure of universities and the uncertainty of how long institutions would be closed for, created a concern for the teaching and learning aspects of higher education studies. The integrity of the academic year across all programmes, including undergraduate, post-graduate and research pro-grammes, were in jeopardy as the uncertainty of the disease and its trajectory across the nation and globally increased. In response to the early indications of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and implications that the lockdown would have on curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment within higher education, the editors of this book deemed it most appropriate to record the initial reactions to the concerns around higher education studies. The scope of this intent is vast and, as such, this volume is the first of a number of book volumes and journal issues being produced. The different volumes and journal issues provide a sample of approaches and interventions on the impacts of COVID-19 on academe, especially from Humanities perspectives. With its primary focus on curriculum theory and practice, this volume, the first, then opens the research and critical and constructive reflections on the re-thinking the Humanities curriculum in the context of COVID-19.

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COVID-19 has become a threat to the health and wellbeing of the world population. Its global pandemic nature has the potential to destabilise systems and processes that have defined human existence, epistemology and knowledge up to now. New ways of thinking, new responses to systems and processes and new boundaries are being formed as a result of this rapidly spreading disease. In responding to the disruption to higher education, we ask, in this volume, a key question of: *how have institutions responded to the*

institutional closures and the protection of integrity of what is being taught, learnt and assessed across programmes in the Humanities. In response to this key question, a compilation of ten chapters in this volume addresses initial insights, problematisations, opportunities and actions taken by institutions on the Humanities curriculum within the context of COVID-19.

The volume commences with a chapter that fundamentally questions the nature of the Humanities curriculum. Labby Ramrathan asks a very fundamental curriculum question of what knowledge and whose knowledge is most worthwhile during this pandemic context. Through a review of the actions taken by universities in response to university closures to continue with the teaching, learning and assessment, he argues that we may lose an opportune moment to re-visit what we teach, ask students to learn and assess their learning. COVID-19 has provided a moment of deep reflection on the curriculum and this moment may be lost due to a pedantic focus on curriculum coverage and on-line teaching and learning to complete the academic year despite the disruptions caused by the disease. Shan Simmonds picks up the on-going and copious cycles of curriculations and re-curriculations and the demands that they placed on academics and considers the possible repercussion of academics encountering the curriculum as a stranger. She proposes that the challenges emanating from this pandemic could open our eyes to the beauty and power of disruption so that we can think anew about curriculum. As such, academia needs to especially consider the significance of slow pedagogy theory as a possibility to engendering a curriculum as lived.

Nokukhanya Ndlovu and her co-authors have argued, in their chapter, that the massification of higher education had necessitated a move toward on-line teaching and learning to address the increasing enrolment of students within higher education institutions. They further argue that COVID-19 has become the catalyst towards pushing institutions to move beyond even blended approaches and to utilize online teaching and learning and as such this shift was an expectation from a curriculum perspective. Krystle Ontong and Zayd Waghid take this catalytic change further by arguing that 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 – conceptualised as emergency remote teaching (ERT). Furthermore, online education is a completely new experience for many lecturers and students. In their chapter, drawing on the main measures taken by a particular university in the Western Cape in response to emergency remote teaching, and emphasising the significance of space and

place in e-learning – or 'splace' – they propose a framework, namely a Community of Inquiry (CoI), which may be necessary for creating spaces for effective learning within an online space.

This volume then delves into the issue of inequities that may be inherent and be perpetuated and carried over in the shift to on-line teaching and learning. Suriamurthee Maistry engages the shift to on-line teaching and learning from a critical neoliberalism perspective. In his chapter he argues that COVID-19 has refocussed attention on curriculum overload, and elaborate neoliberal assessment regimes that suffocate quality and materially- and socially-conscious teaching and learning. With the advent of COVID-19, we have an 'opportune' moment to reflect on much in education that has become normative but also problematic over time. More closer to home, Petro du Preez and Lesley le Grange, in the race to go on-line for teaching and learning argue that few would question the affordances of new technologies to expand learning into virtual spaces. In a country like South Africa, there is an acute digital divide which the COVID-19 crisis has laid bare. Online teaching and learning poses a threat to both formal and epistemological access, not because of digital literacy, but that students may not be enjoying equitable benefits from the affordances of new technologies. Kasturi Behari-Leak and her team of authors extended on this challenge but from an African *Ubuntu* perspective. Using *Ubuntu* as meta-theoretical underpinning, and through a critical autoethnography approach, they 'deep dive' into reflexive explorations to engage in an in-depth analysis of curriculum complexities in times of change, especially for new academics in transition.

The final three chapters of this book take on a broader focus on universities and on society in the context of COVID-19. Mlamuli Hlatshwayo takes a broad view of universities as affected by COVID-19 and says that universities have not been immune from this crisis, with most of them grappling to finish the academic year, ensure quality in the curricula itself, and move towards online methods of teaching and learning as a substitute for contact classes. In his chapter, he theorizes what he terms the 'lockdown University' – a quarantined university that pretends that it is still 'business as usual' and still attempts at reinforcing its traditional practices and institutional behaviour during the COVID-19 crisis. Oscar and Karen Koopman argue that university face-to-face teaching will gradually be replaced in the future with online teaching. They draw their arguments from the Fallist movement that has affected the university sector for the last five years and more recently, the

current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In bringing to this volume to a close, Ashwin Desai, using E.M. Foster's short story, 'The Machine Stops', shifts us into society's conundrum brought about by the uncertainties of COVID-19. The discerning reader will be quick to realise that the chapter is guilty of what it sets out to expose; a con-fusion of ideas. 'How else could it be', Desai asks, 'at a time when the only certainty, is uncertainty', and we may add, where the word development in national plans are replaced by the word disaster. Thus, is the intent of this volume – a con-fusion of ideas in the early stages of COVID-19 as a response to the pandemic and the Humanities Curriculum in a time of crisis. The volume captures the early curriculum responses to COVID-19 with a view to document the trajectories of the Humanities curriculum into the depths of COVID-19 and beyond.

The next three volumes of the book focus on digital teaching and learning, teaching and learning as such, and the perspectives on all being learners, across the Tertiary Education spectrum, in the time of COVID-19.

And, for up-to-date information about COVID-19 in South Africa, visit the site that the South African Department of Health has opened to this effect. It provides resources, news and updates, as well as information on South Africa's Risk Adjusted Strategy, or the *Draft Framework for Consultation on COVID-19 Risk Adjusted Strategy* (2020), FAQs, and the COVID Alert SA app (cf. under References).

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What Knowledge is Most Worthwhile in Crisis Conditions? Re-engineering our Curriculum in the Context of COVID-19

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Abstract

The novel coronavirus has jetted institutions of higher education into uncharted territory that requires a rapid response due to its potential to exponentially affect peoples' overall health and result in high mortality rates. This means that institutions are now required to shift teaching, learning and assessment processes, within a context of extreme uncertainty and rapidly changing circumstances. Within this pandemic context, this chapter explores, through a review of notices, guidelines, and instructions, the response by educational authorities to potentially long periods of closure of educational institutions. The review suggests that the common focus is to shift teaching, learning and assessment to digital platforms. The chapter, therefore, highlights the absence of engagement with curriculum issues and asks a fundamental curriculum question of: what knowledge is most worthwhile during this COVID-19 influenced extended university closure. The chapter makes an argument to shift the discourse into curriculum spaces to find appropriate responses to the academic disruption of its study programme.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, higher education, curriculum spaces, curriculum responses to higher education closure

1   Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most universities were engaged in curriculum transformation as a response to various drivers. These drivers included changes to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), evolving professional requirements (e.g. Minimum requirements for the Teacher Education Qualifications), decolonisation imperatives brought about by the sustained student protest of 2015/2016, and an increasing presence of online platforms to promote teaching and learning within a learner centred pedagogy. Hence, curriculum transformation had become somewhat of a norm within higher education institutions. As the world is gearing towards the fourth industrial revolution, artificial intelligence is becoming more prominent in our engagement on innovations for teaching, learning, and assessment. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a seemingly new way of life for the immediate and near future. This new way of life has impacted almost every sector of the country, including the education sector. The social distancing demand as a response to curb the rapidly spreading of disease, has prompted several guidelines to be immediately implemented in societies across the world, including total shutdown, except for critical services. In the face of severe lockdown regulations and in the absence of any forms of cure or vaccines, societies are compelled to socially distance as a way of life for a long while to come. No clear indications are available to suggest when such lockdown conditions will become relaxed enough to allow for the kind of social interaction to which we are accustomed. In this period of high levels of uncertainty, it becomes extremely difficult to develop plans for social integrations across all sectors of the economy, and of society. In this respect, education, both school and post-school education, have been touted by some esteemed educationists, amongst them Jonathan Jansen, as the end of the academic year as we know it, suggesting that new insights and new ways of educating the learners and students is needed within this academic year and perhaps beyond. What then are these new insights and new ways being proposed to save the integrity of the academic year?

This chapter reviews suggestions, guidelines, and proposals for teaching, learning, and assessment by institutions, scholars and governing bodies, including the state. The review includes an analysis of documents, notices and training initiatives across higher education institutions, to guide and support staff in developing on-line teaching, learning, and assessment

strategies for continuing the academic year. Documents and media reports that are in the public domain were also reviewed. Through this review of suggestions, guidelines, and proposals, I argue in this chapter, that the focus has largely been on curriculum coverage, use of digital learning platforms, and extension of the academic year. Little focus was given to curriculum issues in terms of addressing a fundamental curriculum question regarding 'what knowledge is most worthwhile?' (Spencer 1884), particularly within the context of COVID-19. I also argue that, despite the sustained focus on curriculum transformation over the past decade within higher education, modes of delivery of existing curriculum became the default line of action. In a previous publication of moving beyond counting the numbers (Ramrathan 2016), I argued for a shift in focus on technical issues like counting the numbers of staff and students that prevailed within the discourses of higher education transformation, and to taking transformation into curriculum spaces. In this chapter, I also argue that we have lost, or are about to lose, yet another opportunity to shift our higher education transformation into curriculum spaces by a failure to introspect, and consider the content of what we teach, and what students should learn within higher education. The focus of what students should learn and who determines what learning should unfold, is more critical now within the context of a global pandemic, where more questions are being asked than answers being given within the high levels of uncertainty that currently exists. The 21st century has been characterised as a period of fast-changing, unpredictable, and often disruptive contextual challenges and opportunities (Marope 2017). COVID-19 is an example of the disruption, fast-changing, and unpredictable events and occurrences that is characteristic of this 21st century.

2   Curriculum within Higher Education

While the concept curriculum is widely used within the school education system, it is less prevalent in higher education, largely because concepts like degrees, study programmes, courses, and module content occupy greater expression (Marope, 2017) in this sphere of education. The field of Curriculum Studies remains poorly defined in South Africa (Le Grange 2014), without a generally or universally accepted definition of the concept 'curriculum'. The concept came into the educational discourse through the appropriation of the Latin word *currere,* meaning a racecourse, or a course to follow, and has come to mean a course of study or a plan for learning (Pinar 2004; Le Grange 2010;

2017; Marope 2017). Based on this conception, the Tylerian view of curriculum focusing on the attainment of learning objectives over this course of study or plan for learning (Tyler 1949), became the dominant conception of curriculum and still persists as a powerful influence on school and higher education curriculum. Tyler's (1949) conception of curriculum comprised four domains. These include the aims and objectives domain, the content to be taught, the methods of teaching and the assessment of learning (Le Grange 2014) and corresponds with Tyler's (1949) key curriculum questions which are:

- What educational purposes should the school (higher education programmes) seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to help attain these objectives?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organised?
- How can we determine whether the objectives are being met?

Further scholarship of the discourses in curriculum have expanded the notion of curriculum to include inter-relationships between curriculum, individual, and place (Pinar 2004), ushering in a level of complexity. The complexity associated with more current thinking makes the curriculum both a complex and a controversial endeavour (Pacheco 2009), a concept of complexity which it is difficult to pin a precise meaning, and for which the politics behind curriculum determination is controversial. Pinar (2010) re-introduced the concept *currere* within this complexity as being autobiographical, based on lived experiences with both an inward and an outward reflection and imagination; and in practice, it is temporal, tentative, historical, and social. He argues that curriculum inquiry constitutes a complicated conversation around these constructs.

More recent engagement on curriculum within the context of the 21st century knowledge and skills debates suggests that the concept of the curriculum is entering into more dynamic and responsive discourse. Marope (2017: 15), in his attempts to re-position curriculum within a supra or global discourse for the 21st century, suggests a new definition of curriculum as a 'dynamic and transformative articulation of collective expectations of the purpose, quality, and relevance of education and learning to holistic, inclusive, just, peaceful, and sustainable development, and to the well-being and

fulfillment of current and future generations'. This certainly is a loaded conception of curriculum, suggesting that curriculum is an omnipresent concept that includes transformation, relevance, and inclusiveness of current and future generations of the people. In line with this, Di Giacomo, Fishbein, Monthey and Pack (2013) as cited in Soudien and Harvey (2020), suggest that no single static curriculum will fulfill the growing needs of the changing global education field. These authors maintain that the knowledge, skills, disposition and content will need to be, through critical reflection, adaptable and responsive to innovation.

More relevant to this chapter is a focus on the learning that is located within a curriculum. Several philosophies on teaching and learning have come to influence education, especially school and higher education. Teacher-centred and learner centred approaches to teaching and learning have, in cyclic periods of dominance across decades of education, influenced what happens at sites of teaching and learning, including higher education. Earlier conceptions of learner-centredness included a location, and spheres of influence on the learner. In teacher-dominated periods of teaching and learning, what is taught and how it is taught was largely under the control of the teachers (lecturers). In more recent learner-centred periods of domination, the learner is, once again, placed at the centre of decision-making within a developmental and constructivist framing. At the cutting edge of scholarship on learning, a return to biology has re-introduced the cognitive domains of influence in learning. Both Marope (2017) and Soudien and Harvey (2020) alert us to the leaps made in brain physiology to help us more deeply understand human learning. They argue that neuroscience as a field is progressively shedding light on deep learning, and on deep pedagogies that include creating and learning in rewarding environments so that learners can realise their full potential.

What then does all of this engagement around the curriculum mean to academics within higher education, more especially in the humanities and social sciences domains within the context of the closure of universities due to the novel coronavirus pandemic? Several points emerge for consideration that have largely been avoided through the suggestions, proposals and guidance given to academics in preparing for curriculum coveragem and saving the integrity of the academic year. These include an attention to deep learning and deep pedagogies in a time of complexity, uncertainty, deeply inequitable home environments, advanced technologiesm and the fast pace of change that continues to privilege the elite.

3 University Responses to Campus Closures due to the COVID-19 Lockdown Regulations

Currently, all universities are closed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. This closure of educational institutions comes in response to the national and perhaps global lockdown imperatives that curb the spread of COVID-19. The expected implication is that little or no teaching and learning is currently taking place across higher education institutions. In instances where online and digital teaching is not the norm, academic staff are being asked to prepare for the delivery of their planned curriculum in alternate modes of delivery. The closure of universities is not a new concept within the South African context. Protest actions by students and staff have led to closures of universities due to the rampant destruction of university property, intimidation of non-protesting students and staff, and safety issues. Over the decades, protests have been seen as a mechanism for expressing dissatisfaction with systems and processes and in making explicit demands for radical transformational changes within and beyond the universities arms of control. According to Badat (2015), student protests have become a predictable event, due to their sustained occurrence. He (Badat) refers to this as an organic crisis within the South African higher education landscape. The sustained protest action of students is often accompanied by intimidation, violence, and massive destruction of infrastructure (Badat 2015; Butler-Adam 2015). Badat (2015) goes further by acknowledging these forms of protest, as student assertiveness for their right for quality higher education experiences. It is in this striving for the assertiveness for quality higher education experience that I turn to reflect on the actions proposed or taken, to continue teaching and learning within an extended lockdown situation, that will see universities staying shut for a considerable time to come.

A review of notices to academic staff in response to the broader university closures suggests that the immediate instructions given to staff across university contexts was to exploit the online system to develop teaching, learning and assessment materials, by using the various digital platforms that are currently available, including the exploitation of their own existing learner management systems. This initial reaction by university authorities suggests that they hold curriculum coverage and teaching, learning and assessment as their central concern to save the integrity of the academic year. Subsequent plans for online teaching, learning and assessment were somewhat cautious, as

concerns were being raised regarding issues of access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and social justice issues.

The initial responses are captured in italics, and have been drawn from notices, invitations to staff, and institutional plans. It must be acknowledged that the extracts from these notices, invitations and plans may have been taken out of context with respect to those documents that were presented to staff and as such, may obscure the spectrum of responses of institutions to maintain their academic integrity of the programme design and delivery.

The response to the closure of the University of KwaZulu-Natal commenced with a *call for a review of our current **modes of delivery and assessment strategies** and for innovative and creative approaches to be adopted.* This call focused on creative approaches to modes of delivery and strategies for assessment. Further notices to staff featured only online modes of delivery, and within that strategy, there was a call for innovative and creative ways of teaching and learning through the digital platforms. The School of Education, for example, stipulated a review of the module templates and course outlines and provided guidelines that supported the online teaching, learning and assessment strategy. These guidelines included:

- identify what can be learnt remotely and what cannot;
- individual academics working with colleagues in their Discipline to identify the skills, outcomes and content that need to be covered and how activities will need to be adjusted;
- list all teaching and learning activities that can be achieved remotely; and
- identify materials that you have access to, or can create, to teach remotely.

In these guidelines, the separation of content material into what can be taught and learnt through online technology was privileged. A critical review of curriculum content itself was not the intent. This suggests that a focus on delivery and curriculum coverage was privileged as a response to the university closure. Furthermore, the guidelines do not advise staff on what to do with aspects of the curriculum that cannot be taught remotely through online platforms. Collaboration amongst staff were encouraged in this period of review, suggesting that there may have been opportunities to review what was being taught, and what intended learning was expected.

At the institutional level, invitations to staff to participate in workshops and training sessions focused on enabling teaching effectively with technology, as per the following example: 'UKZN Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO) invites you to participate in The Activated Classroom Teaching (ACT) approach. This online course […] enables academics to **learn how to teach effectively** with technology'.

The institution, through its recovery plan, illuminates the potential challenges of going online for the teaching, learning and assessment of its programme to maintaining the integrity of its programmes and the academic year. In its plan, called *Teaching & Learning Framework Recovery of the Academic Programme 2020,* the university acknowledges that, while it is not immune to the effects of the disease, 'its obligations to both staff and students for the **delivery of** robust lectures and spaces for critical engagement, it will inherently need to relook at **the way we conduct** our business to ensure that students and staff are not prejudiced this year. The chosen pathway was to go digital. Consequently, this requires all of us to **move the academic content of our courses onto virtual platforms** so that the maximum benefit for students and staff is realised – staff can deliver their **mandates** while students can learn'.

Some of the principles underpinning this plan may have slowed the process of going into online teaching, learning, and assessment. For example, the principle of 'Students should be placed at the centre of all decisions taken and should be consulted in whatever solution is proposed; and Equitable and quality access for all students should be foregrounded in our approach', centred the student in plans. In this respect, the institution had to consult with students and ascertain the capacities and capabilities of students to access and engage with online teaching, learning, and assessment.

Centring the students during the lockdown has also spurred a group of concerned academics across the country to put together a document entitled *Public Universities with a Public Conscience: A Proposed Plan for a Social Pedagogy Alternative in the Time of Pandemic*, which calls for a halt to the envisaged plans to go online for teaching, learning, and assessment across all higher education institutions. The document claims as follows: 'Our contextual analysis shows that the current unilateral implementation of online teaching and learning by education institutions will result in an academic disaster and will exacerbate the COVID-19 humanitarian disaster. Neither teaching staff nor students possess the means to make this shift right now. 'Going online'

immediately will simply widen existing inequalities and make meaningful learning impossible for the vast majority of students'. Meaningful learning was of concern by this group of academics, and this concern shifts the discourse into learning domains, rather than a curriculum coverage and teaching methodology domain.

A review across universities in several provinces of South Africa reveals that universities are turning to virtual worlds through various digital technologies to continue with the teaching, learning and assessment processes, whilst recognising that a sizable number of students do not have access to the digital platforms either because of internet connectivity or digital devices. Shoba (2020), in the *Daily Maverick* (17 April 2020 edition), has suggested that 'online teaching and learning has been **touted as the top solution to save the academic year** in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the extended lockdown period', and further adds that challenges of student access and staff competence in developing virtual learning materials has brought about a feeling of anxiousness about its success. Some institutions have engaged with mobile network companies to zero rate access sites. For example, in one of the institutions in the Eastern Cape, a notice was sent to staff and students indicating that 'due to the impact of the COVID-19 on the University's academic year, cellular service providers have offered to zero-rate certain learning websites for all universities. This means a user can access content via their cellular service at no cost'. In another memo sent to its staff, it stated that 'we are working on multiple pathways that range from digital to face-to-face contact, and a blended approach to these extremes, to enable all students to fulfil their study obligations'. In recognition of the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to undermine this academic year, a university in the North West Province in a memo to students, indicated that preparing for online teaching and learning is on-going and that they 'realise that if this **academic year is not salvaged,** it would greatly impact on everyone's lives and, therefore, we have to work together and support each other as best we can, to ensure success at the end of this year'. This memo suggested that collaboration and support amongst staff and students would greatly help in saving the academic year and that online teaching and learning is the mode of delivery that would save the academic year.

From these accounts of responses to university closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that focus was placed on curriculum coverage, protecting the integrity of the academic year, and use of digital technology and

virtual platforms to meet academic obligations. It is also clear that there are several concerns about a rapid transition to the digital platforms for continuing with the academic programme. which include access to reliable internet connectivity, access to and availability of digital devices, social justice issues related to current inequalities and fear of entrenching and expanding such inequalities. There is also a realisation that there are few alternatives, but that these alternatives are dependent upon when and how universities will re-open.

4   What does Bringing the Discourse into Curriculum Spaces Mean?

Noting the evolving conceptualisation of curriculum from a course of study to a highly complex intersection of, amongst others, persons, knowledge, learning, context, social, cultural, complicated conversation, dynamic and transformative drivers, it is too simplistic to consider online teaching, learning and assessment as the only possibility to continue with a programme of study or retain its academic integrity. That is, it is possible to take the existing curriculum of a study programme and transform it into an electronic form to enable teaching and learning within a digital platform, free from the disruption and the implications of the disruptions to what we teach and learn within a university context. Drawing from the memos, guidelines and plans that universities had given to their staff and students, it seems that this simplistic solution will be insufficient to ensuring adequate teaching and learning will take place based on curriculum coverage. By asking a fundamental curriculum question of what knowledge is most worthwhile (Spencer 1884) within the context of extended university closure and within the context of a dreadful disease that has brought the entire global population to a near standstill, one would be moving into curriculum spaces. This move would allow for introspection regarding the curriculum that has been planned, the purpose for which it was planned, what was it responding to, and how students should be engaged in is crucial for deep learning of higher education students within a learning programme. By reviewing these questions within the current context of complexity, complicated conversations, dynamism and fast-paced changes that may not always be predictable, like that of the COVID-19 novel virus, then one would be entering into the domain of curriculum space.

There are four possible considerations for curriculum review. The *first* is based on Apple's (2018) simple curriculum questions that he has been posing

across his five decades of work in curriculum studies. Apple points to us as academics by saying that 'rather than simply asking whether students have mastered a particular subject matter and have done well on our all too common tests, we should ask a different set of questions: Whose knowledge is this? How did it become 'official'? What is the relationship between this knowledge and how it is organized [sic] and taught?' (2018: 686). This means that we should be interrogating the curriculum that we teach in our modules by asking these simple but fundamental curriculum questions. These questions then open up spaces to understand and act on education in its complicated connections to the larger society (Apple 2018). These questions are fundamental in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and could illuminate what and how we teach our modules, knowing the broad scale inequalities and injustices that prevail within South Africa, as educational and other responses to the disease have exposed. For example, higher education institutions' plans to go online using digital technologies, has exposed the inequalities amongst students, in that their plans may not reach a significant number of students based on geographical location and socio-economic situations. What we have been doing by focusing on curriculum coverage and preservation of the integrity of the academic year, is that rather than politicising the academic, we are simply academising the political (Apple 2018). This means that we should fundamentally question the very nature of the curriculum that we teach in our modules. Perhaps the question to academics is, whose curriculum are you academising?

The *second* consideration is based on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level descriptors (South African Qualifications Authority, 2011) that guide what and how content is taught and learnt within the programme design. Key to the level descriptors are particular words that distinguished NQF levels within the programme design. For example, the word 'fundamental' is related to the basic introductory learnings at Level 5 on the NQF; 'sound knowledge and understanding' characterises learning at level 6 of the NQF; and 'well-rounded' knowledge characterises learning at the NQF level 7. What do these key descriptive words mean within the discipline and modules that one teaches? An interrogation of the module content using these key level descriptors would then enable one to understand progression competence across the programme design. Through this understanding one can then, in the context of university closures, re-examine at the module content to extract the crucial learnings that will allow for the development of competence

that will enable the student to cope with the curriculum demands of the following year of study. Hence, curriculum coverage may not be necessary within a constricted academic year, due to unforeseen circumstances which seem to characterise higher education studies over the last decade. Rather, what is needed is a focus on key learning within the discipline and module that will enable the student to engage with more complex learning at the next level.

The *third* consideration is to exploit the circumstances of the context. This means that we could use the COVID-19 pandemic as a context through which disciplinary knowledge, skills and means of inquiry could be developed. One could, for example explore the socio-economic influence of COVID-19 on the population of South Africa globally, or determine how social work could be re-imagined from a disease control perspective. The humanitarian aspect of the disease and lockdown could become an opportunity to enhance post-colonial attitudes to humanism. Almost all traditional and emerging discipline learnings and responses could be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in some way. Hence, it is possible to focus the curriculum on the COVID-19 pandemic as a medium through which to develop critical thinking, inquiry skills, and innovative solutions of problems and challenges faced by society from a disciplinary or multi-disciplinary perspective through a responsive curriculum.

The *fourth* consideration is to exploit the current lockdown situation and extended closure of universities to enhance a student self-study and guided self-study attitude to learning. Students in this context have the potential to develop attitudes and processes to take more responsibility in their learning. All modules have module outlines and students are made familiar with the intended and expected learning. Independent learning is key to higher education studies and lectures constitute an additional resource to enable students' intended learning. The credit bearing system used for engaging in the learning of a module or programme suggest that students engage with approximately 30% of the required engagement time to achieve competence in that module or programme. This means that guided self-study and independent self-study are the main forms of learning, and constitute more than 60% of the required time for learning and demonstrating competence in a unit of learning. Therefore, lectures should not be the major focus of engaging in teaching and learning, but rather, the student ought to take the initiative to engage in learning through guided instructions. Hence, the curriculum needs to be reviewed so as to allow for greater involvement of students in developing their competence expected of the module. Fast-paced changes and increasing access to and

exploitation of the digital platforms are increasingly becoming the norm in the 21st century context (Marope 2017), and as such, pointers to student self-learning should equally become the norm for higher education studies, especially in the context of an exploding body of knowledge available at the fingertips with advanced technology. Learning and recall of the knowledge and skills are not what university education should be in this fast-paced knowledge explosion context. Rather, it ought to be asked how to access such knowledge and skills, innovations in problem-solving and new insights, where there is a need to foreground higher education studies within the context of the 21st century complexities, increasing disruptions to and fragmentation of society broadly conceived, and attendant unpredictability. Hence, traditional teaching of students within higher education is slowly fading, as the digital technology within the fourth industrial revolution increasingly takes its foothold in education and beyond, where students need to take centre stage in what they want to and need to learn.

5   Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that, in the context of COVID-19 and beyond, taking into cognisance the disruptive uncertainties that we will continue to experience in this fast-changing world. We need to go back into curriculum spaces to re-ask fundamental curriculum questions on teaching, learning, and assessment. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the extended closure of universities and left all in a quandary as to how to maintain the integrity of the academic year. The chapter noted the immediate response to save the academic year was conversion of teaching, learning, and assessment into digital platforms, without understanding the complexities associated with a deeply unequal and unjust society. Taking this response into consideration, I argued for a shift into the curriculum spaces to find suitable and responsive alternatives, noting that frequent disruptions to higher education studies has been and is likely to continue. The chapter concluded with some suggestions of what might be possible within curriculum spaces to address the challenges of long closures of universities that will have disruptive influence on what is taught, learned, and assessed.

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Don't let the Curriculum become a Stranger! Embracing Slow Pedagogy to Engender a Curriculum as Lived

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has put educational institutions to the test. Traditional conceptions of education have had to be challenged to make room for teaching-learning during times of no human physical contact and interaction. Nestled within habits of classroom teaching, teachers and lecturers now find themselves behind screens as e-educators of e-learning. For many educators this transformation came too swiftly, creating uncertainties and challenges like no other, due to the copious cycles of curriculations and re-curriculations and the demands that they place on those educators who must design and implement the curriculum. This chapter considers the possible repercussion of educators encountering the curriculum as a stranger. It proposes, instead, that the challenges emanating from this pandemic could open our eyes to the beauty and power of disruption so that we can think anew about curriculum. To start such a complicated conversation, this chapter embraces slow pedagogy theory as a possibility to engendering a curriculum as lived.

Keywords: curriculum as stranger, curriculum as lived, slow pedagogy

1 Introduction

For the past two years I have been teaching my B.Ed. Hons students a Curriculum Studies module about how to be critical about the 21st century. What should this curriculum look like? What sort of questions should we be asking? I taught this in light of what were then (and continue to be) heated debates, such as decolonising the curriculum. In light of COVID-19, I find myself raising these questions once more. I am reminded of how I try to instill in my students the importance of thinking about curriculum in times that are VUCA (viz. volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) (Schwab 2016). The Four Cs of critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity (Harari 2018) are widely understood to be the core 21st century skills for living and learning in VUCA times. This has led me to complicate the realities of what we are currently facing in this pandemic, where what I teach in theory is starting to be a lived reality. How should we be approaching a curriculum in these times, where curriculum and re-curriculation is a daily or weekly affair? Curriculum lies at the centre, not the margin of Education. The consequence of constant change is that we need to think differently about the curriculum (Aoki 1999; Pinar 2015).

This chapter attests to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has put education institutions to the test. With no traditional human physical contact and interaction, lecturers now find themselves in front of screens as e-educators of e-learning. For many, this transformation came too swiftly, creating uncertainties and challenges like no other, due to the copious cycles of curriculations and re-curriculations and the resulting demands. This chapter argues that for some lecturers, the curriculum has become a stranger, and this has sparked complicated conversations. This chapter aims to unlock the potentials within a slow pedagogy towards a lived curriculum.

2 Higher Education Curriculum: An Institutional Response

The current state of the higher education curriculum is directly affected by the pandemic. Lecturers can no longer rely on their planned curriculum and templates of standardisation. They cannot sit comfortably within the semester plans that were so meticulously designed and communicated at the start of the teaching semester. As lecturers, we need to become uncomfortable and even frustrated within our own curricula, where how we teach, learn, and assess is

forced to change. Communiques provided by top management to lecturers at North-West University have given rise to different waves of curriculum expectation for both the lecturer and the student. I reflect on the communique spanning the short period from 17 March to 25 April 2020 (NWU 2020), just to illustrate some of the curriculum discourses that are unfolding in the COVID-19 pandemic. At first, the discourse was centred on measuring learning and how students would be assessed to meet module outcomes. This ***assessment as learning*** response could be seen in light of Management's expectations for curriculum to continue, with a change of mode from in-contact to online. Assessment is being emphasised more than learning, in a need to meet end of semester outcomes that are looming, potentially representing the need to re-curriculate as a way of retroactively designing from assessment outwards, so as to ensure qualification (Biesta 2009). The second discourse exposed the difficulties around student involvement in their online assessment and learning due to technology-related and other challenges inhibiting ***access to learning***. This put an end to the infatuation with designing online learning and assessment to focus on meeting the needs of student's contextual circumstances (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe 2016) in terms of aspects such as learning devices, network coverage, and other online learning necessities needed in order to again access to the curriculum.

Next was the discourse driving online learning, with a focus on continued teaching-learning, but without assessment. ***Learning without assessment*** was chosen due to various reasons that draw on the previous two discourses, as well as the idea for no student to be left behind. The lockdown period made it difficult for students to meet assessment expectations due to the inabilities (on various levels) to access learning, where lecturers were instructed that no assessment due dates may fall within the lockdown period. Again, a speculation could be that management's vision is to minimise student disadvantage, in this way trying to avoid any learning inequalities or discrimination (Walker 2018). Lastly, yet another curriculum mandate was communicated that raised concern on the part of student representatives. This mandate included the need for lecturers to disseminate their curricula in such a way that allows for ***learning with heightened support and apprehension***. Support, in terms of being cognisant of the expectations that students must meet in the short semester period that still remained, and apprehension in terms of approaching this expectation with care and understanding (Noddings 2013). Student representatives raised matters that directly impact the curriculum in

their outcry for lecturers to provide: guidance to students in terms of time management and other self-study skills; more explicit guidelines and advice on how to approach the curriculum at hand; a revised number of assessments that students are expected to complete within a module to make room for assessments within the different modules; and apprehension of language limitations as well as resource restraints that could inhibit learners in their learning and assessment. Although these discourses reveal the urgency for deep curriculum engagements in all their complexity, these are only interpretations of written communique requiring greater clarity through deliberations with top management so as to more meaningfully extrapolate their curriculum decisions.

The point to be made is that in such a short time, various curriculum discourses have unfolded. Each discourse also gives rise to other nuances, and this divulges the nature of curriculum as cyclical, fluid, and without stringent boarders. Although its plasticity is one of its greatest attributes, it can create theoretical ambiguities, as different role players design, interpret, and implement the curriculum in varying ways. As Breault and Marshall (2010: 179) rightly emphasise, curriculum discourses do not arise from curriculum scholars alone, where …

> … every pedagogue, parent, pundit, policy maker and politician has one too. Today's conflicting definitions reflect different vantage points from which curriculum is engaged with as well as different philosophies and foci regarding the relationship between schools and society … the multiplication of curriculum definitions is not an urgent problem to be solved, but rather a state of affairs to be acknowledged as inevitable.

Where does this leave me as lecturer and curriculum leader? When we approach the curriculum as lived (Aoki 1993 & 1999; Pinar 2012 & 2015) then pandemics such as COVID-19 disrupt the planned curriculum and put a lived curriculum to its most ultimate test. Although on different scales and to intensities, we are reminded of re-curriculations in response to, for example, the HIV/Aids outbreaks, and student outcries to decolonise the curriculum. I am also reminded of the numerous re-curriculations at school level (Simmonds 2014), where we learnt that although necessary, constant change leaves the designers and implementers of the curriculum (such as teachers) dissolute, anxious, and frustrated (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani 2002; Jansen 2002).

Amongst the now normative pattern of constant change, curriculum becomes messy and confusing, and leaves, for the context of this chapter, lecturers to become either lost or rebellious, which could lead to an encounter with curriculum as a stranger.

3 Encountering the Curriculum as a Stranger

Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (Kristeva 1991) positions the 'stranger' as the foreigner or outsider in a country or society that is not their own. She also refers to the idea of 'strangeness' experienced within oneself and through the other. It is insightful to contemplate Kristeva's (1991) idea of the foreigner as stranger within the context of the curriculum as stranger. As with Kristeva's depiction of foreigner, the curriculum as stranger can become 'a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, [an] unfathomable spur' (Kristeva 1991: 1). Labelled with hatred or as the 'other', the curriculum's aloofness results in it not belonging to any one place, any time, or any love and is therefore lost at origin. Kristeva (1991: 7) describes this by comparing it to a moving train or flying plane, as there is no stopping; it is nomadic. Melancholia also surfaces through its strangeness when a sense of nostalgia can be experienced due to a part that is lost or unrecoverable (Kristeva 1991: 9). For Kristeva (1991: 10), two possible scenarios can emanate from this. On one continuum is a 'stranger as ironist', which are advocates of emptiness who waste away between the agony of what no longer is and what will never be. On the end of the other continuum are the 'strangers as believers', who transcend, neither living in the past or the present, but beyond, they are tenacious and will forever remain unsatisfied, because they have a passion for change (ibid.). Whether ironist or believer, it is the strangeness of this other that 'leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, […] make[s] us feel that we are not in touch with our own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them – we feel 'stupid' we have 'been had'' (Kristeva 1991: 187). Kristeva (1991:187) further postulates possible repercussions of this stranger that we tend to simultaneously reject and identify with, where she elaborates:

> I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel 'lost', 'indistinct', 'hazy'. The uncanny strangeness

allows for many variations: they all repeat difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy.

When management instils curriculum pathways that demand rapid re-curriculation within short timespans, and where lecturers are expected to continuously communicate re-designed curricula to management through uniform templates, curricula become a structural means of control. The curriculum is made no more than an artefact, a form of political symbolism (Jansen 2002) that represents adherence and assimilation. When management projects top-down decisions onto lecturers, the curriculum we once knew is taken away from us, becoming unbeknown to its creator, as if a stranger.

The tendency to connote strangeness in this way should not be perceived as a longing for uniformity, standardisation or predictability of the curriculum (Tyler 2013: 61). Nor should it be perceived as what scholars such as Aoki (1999) term the curriculum-as-planned. This hegemonic representation of curriculum reduces teaching to instruction, learning to acquisition and assessment to the measurement of what has been acquired or not (Aoki 1999: 180). Pinar (2015) shares in this sentiment, but expresses the over-emphasis on a planned curriculum as a means to market ideologies such as to develop students merely for a workforce. Pinar (2015: 115) posits:

> Subjects seem absent in cram schools, where so-called skills replace academic knowledge, decontextualized [sic] puzzles preparing for employment in jobs without meaning, itself a causality of capitalism's compulsion to profit no matter what it takes… human subjects become numbers, e.g. test scores.

Experiencing the state of curriculum at university as a stranger during these early COVID-19 times is possibly inevitable. The point I want to make is that amongst the confusion and the disruption must lie some introspection, a type of resilience to the way lecturers encounter the curriculum. As the curriculum leader, lecturers cannot escape management's curriculum expectations, but can be curriculum agents who breathe life into the curriculum.

When we regard the curriculum as lived (Aoki 1999; Pinar 2015), it transcends being an artefact (noun) to being an action (verb). Curriculum

ceases to be a policy artefact, or what is known as the official or planned curriculum, or a mere noun, when it is engaged with as an inquiry and 'becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope' (Pinar 2010: 178). It explores and theorises social, economic and political assumptions and underpinning ideologies (Chisholm 2005; Reed *et al.* 2012) and how these disrupt curriculum spaces (Cary 2007), making it a normative endeavour more than a descriptive one. This form of theorising accentuates the political motives, ethical dilemmas and social concerns that lie at the heart of lived experience. Pinar (2015) has conceptualised this as complicated conversations. As a complicated conversation, the curriculum becomes a platform not only for us to learn *from* and *with* the particularities of each other, but *through* these. For Pinar (2015: 111) this means that complicated conversations create 'an educational opportunity to understand difference within resemblance, and not only across our species but life on earth, as well as within our own individuality, as subjectivity itself is an ongoing conversation'. This dovetails eloquently with Aoki's (1999: 181) emphasis on the tensions created between a curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. He refers to this tension as 'a site that beckons pedagogic struggle, for such a human site of becoming, where newness can come into being. The space moves and is alive!' For Pinar (2015: 112) this is a 'creative tensionality' that can enable 'constant transformation' because the curriculum acknowledges and embraces life in all its complexity, informed by 'intellectual, psychological, and physical structures as allegorical' and imagined as a world 'simultaneously empirical and poetical, phenomeno-logical and historical'.

In these times of curriculum strangeness, we need to face any possible curriculum fears and uncertainties with the hope of disrupting entrenched perception. As curriculum agents, lecturers should not be intimidated by top management's communique and attendant threats that non-compliance will lead to dismissal, but rather, focus on the possibilities of creative tension, by being curriculum leaders who are proactive and not reactive. When lecturers are reactive they resort to curriculum management and become consumed by curriculum instructions and prescriptions. The chief concern, business efficiency and positional authority, rather than collaborative engagements with various stakeholders to inform curriculum decisions (Henderson 2010: 221). To be proactive, another approach is needed. Next, I look to the ideals of a slow pedagogy for inspiration.

4 Unlocking the Potentials within a Slow Pedagogy so that a Curriculum as Lived can be Engendered

In the 1980s, what is now known as the Slow Food movement was partly initiated through what has been explained as 'gatherings of an inner circle of dreamers' of food and wine connoisseurs in Italy's vineyards during the summer of 1986 (Petrini 2013: 11). At the core was a drive toward sustainable foods and promotion of local small businesses to challenge political agenda of the globalisation of agricultural products. As expressed in the Slow Food Manifesto (Petrini 2001: xxiii - xxiv), this movement is a response to neoliberalism and marketisation as it strives for a move way from Fast Life subsumed in efficiency and output at the detriment of the environment and sustainability. It is critical of our enslavement to a lifestyle namely, 'Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods' (Petrini 2001: xxiii). Instead, it wants to make reclaiming cultural heritage, material pleasure, sensory experience, societal contexts and lived histories, the first prize. Although its symbol is a little snail, it does not represent lack of speed. 'Slow' instead emphasises the thought and attentiveness required to bring about new meaning through depth of engagement. It is envisaged that through slowing down, 'we are able to reconnect with ourselves and others and nurture relationships to improve the quality of life and work' (Collett *et al.* 2018:120). In academia, we have come to see the imprint of this philosophy expressed through the conceptions of Slow Science, Slow Pedagogy, Slow Ontology, Slow Philosophy and the Slow Professor (Berg & Seeber 2016; Boulous Walker 2016; Collett *et al.* 2018; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018; Stengers 2011; Ulmer 2017). Whilst this 'slowness' is often perceived as unproductive in academic circles, its urgency proves valuable and might rather be professed as 'differently productive' rather than unproductive (Ulmer 2017: 201).

In her foreword to Carlo Petrini's book *Slow Food: The Case for Taste* (2001), Alice Waters (well-known American chef, restaurateur, activist and author) highlights five key aspects that Slow Food endorses. Each of these aspects are now drawn on with particular interest for conceptualising a curriculum as lived underpinned by a philosophy of a slow pedagogy.

First, Waters (2001: ix) opines that 'Slow Food reminds us that our natural resources are limited, and that we must resist the ethic of disposability that is reflected everywhere in our culture'. This introspection echoes

environmentalists' advocacy of sustainability and the outcry for urgent action to avoid or minimise extinction and other forms of permanent damage to all forms of species and things. For a curriculum as lived, this necessitates a posthuman discourse. Although posthumanists vary enormously, 'they share in turning toward the legacies of humanism and using posthumanist reconceptualisations of human/animal/machine/thing relations to diagnose how humanism ignores, obscures, and disavows the real relations among beings and things that make up the stuff of the world' (Snaza & Weaver 2015: 1). Braidotti (2013) argues for decentring humans as the measure of all things through a qualitative shift in terms of how humans position themselves in relation to other inhabitants and things of the planet. For Braidotti (2019: 28), this creates a condition that evokes an expectation of the scholar to challenge the curriculum's classical model of the humanistic 'Man of Reason', and move towards,

> an intensive form of trans-disciplinarity and boundary-crossings among a range of discourses. This movement enacts a transversal embrace of conceptual diversity in scholarship. It favours hybrid mixtures of practical and applied knowledge, and relies on the defamiliarization [sic] of our institutional habits of thought.

As a lecturer this necessitates cultivating a curriculum that is consciousness raising and critical. A starting point could be to use this pandemic in one's lecturing to (re)configure what we teach and how we teach. COVID-19 is not the first of its kind, our curricula will encounter potentially many more such pandemics, so asking these questions remains crucial for current and future times.

Second, 'Slow Food reminds us that food is more than fuel to be consumed as quickly as possible and that, like anything worth doing, eating takes time' (Waters 2001: ix - x). A critique of the neoliberal culture, coupled with the marketisation of education, resonates closely with this aspect of slow food. The discourses on theory fatigue and data-mining prove noteworthy in this regard. Theory fatigue extrapolates Western democracies continued faith in critical reason to apprehend and transform society (Braidotti 2019: 20). A post-theoretical malaise post-Cold War initiated post-theory shifts under the gaze of free market economies and anti-intellectualism, causing theory to lose status and be dismissed as fantasy or narcissistic self-indulgence and amount

to nothing more than data-mining (Braidotti 2013:4). The obsession with theory generation for its own sake of production for neoliberalist consumption, leads to mere data-mining if it has no vision for an alternative way of being or to create the spaces needed for authentic and deep levels of engagement. It is within this context of theory fatigue that pleas have been made for the curriculum to return to a materialism informed by ethico-political and aesthetic considerations (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018:983). Slow pedagogy provides an avenue to disengage from instrumentalist approaches such as these (Collett *et al.* 2018:121). For curriculum leaders, this could manifest when lecturers prioritise what matters and what is meaningful, rather than what management determines as economically expedient and efficient (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018: 983). I have witnessed this at my institution when management is obsessed with saving the academic year and operating with a 'business as usual' mentality, even at the cost of quality.

Third, 'Slow Food reminds us of the importance of knowing where our food comes from. When we understand the connection between the food on our table and the field where it grows, our everyday meals can anchor us to nature and the place where we live' (Waters 2001: x). For a curriculum as lived, this couples eloquently with Pinar's (2007) conception of disciplinarity. Disciplinarity is underpinned by the intellectual labour of reaching understanding through 'comprehension, critique, and reconceptualization [sic]' of what constitutes a discipline (Pinar 2007: xii). The intellectual dispositions of disciplinarity are enabled through disciplinary conversations conveyed by Pinar (2007) as 'verticality' and 'horizontality'. Verticality constitutes the 'intellectual history of the discipline' through which its disciplinarity resonates (Pinar 2007: xiii). In effect, what constitutes verticality are the trends and nuances that are at the core of curriculum and how these have evolved and are still evolving. Horizontality approaches curriculum from the periphery instead of the centre. Its focus is on analysing 'present circumstances' in conjunction with 'the social and political milieu, which influence, and all too often, structure this set' (Pinar 2007: xiv). For curriculum to be anchored and connected, a synergetic disciplinarity as a tributary of verticality-horizontality (intertwined and inseparable) is paramount, and has as one of its offspring projects decolonisation. For lecturers and students to make connections between the curriculum and the place in which it is lived, the curriculum needs to, amongst other aspects, explore ways of developing and designing locally and regionally relevant content where Western

epistemologies continue to dominate, and unequal power relations still remain (Le Grange 2016). When knowledge is performative, it can decentre (not destroy) dominant knowledge and produce third spaces (as spaces in-between) so that seemingly disparate knowledges can be equitably compared, and can function together (Le Grange 2016: 10). So lecturers could use their curricula as social organisations of trust (ibid.) so that intellectual histories foster knowledges that are embedded and situated rather than focussed on verification or falsification. Curriculum spaces can then be proactive, rather than reactive. In their understanding of a slow scholarship, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018: 984) speak directly to this point when they emphasise the necessity of curriculum as 'situated, affective and embodied, troubling conventionality of both what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is acquired and produced'.

Fourth, 'Slow Food reminds us that cooking a meal at home can feed our imaginations and educate our senses. For the ritual of cooking and eating together constitutes the basic element of family and community life' (Waters 2001: x). A curriculum as lived accentuates the novelty of relational ontology and supersedes the binaries such as individual/society toward a holistic monist view of the world as entangled and vital (Braidotti 2013). Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018:984) place a relational ontology as central to slow scholarship, where 'individual people and entities do not pre-exist relationships, but come into being through relationships', as is often the case in many Southern and indigenous ways of engendering all aspect of live including pedagogy. Furthermore, it necessitates 'producing socially relevant knowledge that is attuned to basic principles of social justice, the respect for human decency and diversity, the rejection of false universalisms; the affirmation of positivity of difference; the principles of academic freedom, anti-racism, openness to others and conviviality' (Braidotti 2019: 11). Through a slow pedagogy, our curriculum as lived can be 'materially embedded and embodied, differential, affective and relational' (ibid.). This entails taking distance from abstract universalism, decentring transcendental consciousnesses and contemplating alternatives to individualist autonomy to foster situated knowledge that 'enhances the singular and collective capacity for both ethical responsibility and alternative ways of producing knowledge' (Braidotti 2019: 12).

Lastly, Water (2001: x) avers that 'Slow Food can teach us the things that really matter – compassion, beauty, commitment and sensuality – all the best that humans are capable of'. This speaks closely to the four points already

raised and could perhaps be the key actions and harvests of a slow pedagogy. As Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018: 983) put it, 'the emphasis is quality rather than quantity, depth of engagement and a willingness to engage across differences of discipline and ideas'. When the curriculum is engendered in this way, it opens up pathways for 'attentiveness, deliberation thoughtfulness, open-enquiry, a receptive attitude, creativity, intensity, discernment, cultivating pleasure and creating dialogues between natural and social sciences' (ibid.). This proves valuable as it forces us to dwell with, stop and steep ourselves in the revision and reimagining of life as we know it so that it can be contemplated anew (ibid.). A pandemic such as COVID-19 is exactly the time for lecturers to use their curricula to captivate the deep learning required to transgress to the unknown, so that the new can be imagined.

The profusion of these five aspects and how they enable a different conceptualisation of a curriculum as lived through a slow pedagogy could provide us with perspective on how to navigate these uncertain times of constant re-curriculation and the stranger that it might create. A COVID-19 pandemic creates curriculum expectations like no other. These are changing as we learn of the implications of the pandemic, and as we push the boundaries of education. I am certain that this is only the beginning of the many possibilities and challenges that curriculum will encounter during this pandemic.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has necessitated the need to think differently about the curriculum. The curriculum is a central aspect of Education and it displays the direct and deep-seated effects of COVID-19 in the teaching-learning practices of education institutions. Amongst the most prominent has been the demands for online learning, which poses many challenges, and can be insightful to peruse in further research that deciphers online learning and the curriculum as lived. To start the conversation, this paper argues for the need to instil philosophies such as a slow pedagogy so as to ensure that we do not become consumed by the curriculum as a stranger within neoliberalist effects of life lived at a fast pace. This is paramount in higher education institutions, where top management dictates and does not consult curriculum decisions with lecturers. For lecturers to be curriculum leaders, this pandemic ought to create avenues that reveal the beauty and power of disruption, even when this is

daunting and uncertain, and through its strangeness it can reveal our vulnerabilities and tensions, paradoxes, pain, and anxiety. We are reminded now more than ever that engendering a curriculum as lived through a slow pedagogy will enable us to experience and apply what really matters, such that it might become sustainable.

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COVID-19 and *Currere*: Looking Back and Going Forward

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Abstract

The massification of higher education in the late 1990s in South Africa signalled the need for concerted efforts towards implementing dual modes of teaching and learning. Studies on mass higher education indicate that, while massification is driven by a social justice agenda, the increasing student enrolment and the low staff numbers require augmented technological and innovative ways of teaching and assessment. While higher education institutions have been engaging in this discussion, COVID-19 has become the catalyst towards pushing institutions to move beyond even blended approaches and to utilise online teaching and learning. We argue that the push towards blended or complete online learning is not new – this remains old wine in a new bottle. Pinar's four reflective stages of *currere* are useful to assist in explaining how our personal and institutional histories as academics are central in responding to the need for new ways of conducting teaching, learning and assessment. Drawing from Pinar's framework, this chapter seeks to examine the missed opportunities during massification, explore aspects that might have obstructed response to these opportunities and argue how they can be seized in the time of COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, massification, *currere*, blended learning, online learning

Nokukhanya Ndlovu, Nosipho Mbatha & Vusi Msiza

1 Introduction

The massification of higher education institutions (hereafter HEIs) in the early 1990s signalled in South Africa the need for concerted efforts towards implementing dual modes of teaching and learning. By massification, we mean the increase in the enrolment of students that are accessing higher education (Mohamedbhai 2014). Ensuring access to higher education for persons of all races and from all socioeconomic backgrounds was a national social justice call, heeding constitutional rights, and redressing the injustice of the apartheid system (Bill of Rights 1996; DHET 2001). Consequentially, increasing access to higher education placed increased demand on HEIs for new pedagogical and learning methods to support students and their diverse needs. Massification, though challenging to HEIs, was an opportunity to genuinely explore and integrate online teaching and learning (asynchronous) with contact teaching and learning (synchronous), creating a model of teaching and learning known as blended or hybrid teaching and learning, which has been adopted by various international institutions (Garrison & Kanuka 2004). The adoption of this approach has been observed to result in improved student outcomes; satisfaction, and positive experiences for academics and students alike; flexibility, accessibility and convenience that reduces location dependency and time constraints; environmental, technological and cost efficiencies and the potential for the establishment of new revenue sources that are not possible through contact teaching (Selim 2007; Coskuncay & Ozkan 2013; Graham 2013). The positive effects associated with the approach would have served as an effective response to the demands that were leveraged by massification. While this approach has its strengths, it also has some limitations. Amongst others, these include heavy workloads for instructors, with setting up and creating content for online platforms, and difficulties in maintaining an online presence, especially when chats are rapid and there are multiple voices and challenges in engaging and supporting isolated students (Gillet-Swan 2017). The insurgence of COVID-19 has amplified the significant gaps that were left from the inadequate implementation of blended learning in HEIs.

To curb the spread of this global pandemic, unprecedented containment and mitigation strategies have been enforced in the form of national lockdowns, which restrict the operations of non-essential services, the closing of borders for non-essential travel, and the promotion of various health and hygiene measures such as handwashing, respiratory etiquette, social and

physical distancing (Bedford *et al.* 2020). In line with these strategies, from about mid-March, South African universities shut down their doors in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus and to flatten the curve. The impact of these has necessitated for the need to conduct work remotely through online platforms, in context where they had blended learning, they are now limping on one foot— online remote teaching.

Globally, some universities have fully transitioned to online learning and are continuing with the academic year. Though it is challenging to have contact teaching removed, we believe universities that optimally integrated blending learning before COVID-19 are better positioned and will be able to survive this global catastrophe. In South Africa, online platforms for teaching and learning have existed in our universities for many years, as universities have adopted Learning Management Systems (LMSs), such as Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (Moodle), Sakai, and Blackboard as part of their enhanced learning experience provided to students. However, the optimal use and functions of these LMSs has not been fully explored (Ssekakubo, Suleman & Marsden 2012). The under-usage of LMSs has left academics and students not being fully acculturated to their use. Other challenges include students not having laptops and the significant costs associated with data internet connectivity issues (Chobita 2017). The anxiety and stress associated with calculating how the world and higher education will look after the threat of COVID-19 has dissipated, triggering us to wonder what will remain in the aftermath (Dennis 2020). As a result, the sudden need to switch to online teaching and learning has brought the academic community into a state of disarray, and has left leaders and stakeholders of HEIs in search of extenuating solutions to salvage the academic year. This is because traditional contact universities are not up to speed with online teaching and learning, and both staff and students are not well versed in how to conduct university business in the distance mode (Guardia 2016; Maringe 2020).

In this discussion, we seek not to portray blended or online teaching and learning as the best approaches. We are aware of some of the limitations these approaches may have. What we argue is, rather, that in this moment of urgency, where the current proposals are recommending online teaching and learning as a way to resume academic activities, it would have been less challenging to migrate to this approach had we cultivated and acquired the skills prior to this stage. We draw from the *currere* framework, a social reconstructive theory by William Pinar (1994; 2004), in framing this chapter,

using his four reflective stages; regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. Firstly, through the stages, we look at the past and re-examine massification in terms of how it unfolded, and its consequences. Secondly, we will look forward to an imagined future and explore how this might be shaped. Thirdly, we will interrogate different aspects that might have prevented the rolling out of the blended learning approach and from these extract lessons that we may use to respond to COVID-19. Lastly, we will look at what can be done as we face the current scourge of the pandemic.

2   Regressive: A Glance of the Past

The regressive stage entails taking a step back, re-visiting our histories and experiences (Pinar 2004). In doing so, we take a glance of the past by looking back at the first monumental historical turning point in higher education post-apartheid. We return to the early 1990s, at the beginning of South African mass higher education. Higher education student enrolment in 1994 was approximately 420 000; this has subsequently increased to 1.1 million in 2014 (Habib 2019). Unlike the United States of America, which was organisationally and structurally ready for mass higher education long before it started in their context (Trow 2000), the challenges relating to mass higher education were compounded in developing countries (Hornsby, Osman & De Matos-Ala 2013). South Africa, a developing country, inherited a highly unequal higher education system from the apartheid government. According to Mohamedbhai (2014), there was a need to increase access to higher education, specifically for the previously disadvantaged population. Although the higher education transformation in South Africa was founded on principles of social justice, Jansen (2003) cautioned the country that massification and the merging of certain institutions would increase the challenges with regards to access. He noted that closing or merging of institutions that were meant for those in rural areas would subsequently create competition for access and resources in the newly merged institutions, as there are few resources to fund higher education (Jansen 2003; Hornsby *et al.* 2013). For example, the number of academics was not concomitantly increased (Maringe & Sing 2014). According to the Council on Higher Education (2016), massification spawned changes in sizes, structure, and there was a need to invest in infrastructure that would respond to the increasing enrolment.

The Council on Higher Education (2016) states that mass higher edu-

cation required a change in curriculum delivery and alternatives, such as open or blended approaches, to accommodate the increased student enrolment. Within their budgetary constraints, universities made means to provide solutions to the rising enrolments that would hinder teaching and learning if left unattended. As a result, the call to integrate LMSs into teaching increased as other universities had begun finding ways to make use of them. A key issue is whether institutions have made full use of the capacity of LMSs for interaction. Evidence suggests that LMSs were used as a form of one-way communication; they were not interactive and suitable for student engagements (Snowball 2014). Similarly, Mpungose (2020) notes that students are reluctant to use LMSs like Moodle, because they feel constrained and limited by the platform as limited opportunities are made available for socialising and sharing information, and communication becomes limited to emails.

Our anecdotal evidence shows that institutions were mainly concerned with addressing the challenges of shortage of teaching venues, student funding, teaching materials and resources. The modes of curriculum delivery were not so much prioritised, illustrating Pinar's point that we regress, enter and live in the past (Pinar 1994).

Looking on the crisis faced by the academic community as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, we catapult to the future and seek to envisage what must be done to be able to achieve what we imagine it to be.

3 Progressive: Looking Forward into an Imagined Future

The progressive stage of *currere* indicates that we should imagine what is not yet present; we should imagine the future (Pinar 1994; 2004). In imagining the future, we assert that academics and the academy will constantly be confronted with triggering events that demand a change in approach. A triggering event is 'a state of dissonance or feeling of unease resulting from experience' (Garrison, Anderson & Archer 2001: 21). We qualify this claim by looking at what has already happened and what is currently happening. Massification was one such triggering event, and we believe it will continue. We now have COVID-19, which will also remain in both the present and the future. This is because despite the duration of the panic, its impact will have a long-lasting effect on higher education and the world at large (Martin & Furiv 2020). Considering these triggering events, the urgency for change is constant, and is likely to be present in our imagined future.

We ought to critically reflect on our past actions, their shortcomings, and from these, harness valuable lessons. We must ensure that we take advantage of the opportunities that online teaching and learning present for a changing and evolving world, and ensure that in both our present and future, we use them to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning more broadly (Marshall 2011). It is important to emphasise that the imagined future will be characterised by reforms across all elements of the academy. For now, we focus on online teaching and learning as one of those elements, because through it, a 'huge opportunity exists for all universities to expand access to more students in the medium to long term' (Maringe 2020: para. 10). Unlike before, we anticipate a future in which HEIs have a strategic plan for the implementation and constant improvement of online teaching and learning. According to Morrill (2007), a strategy is well-rounded if it outlines purposes and priorities, gets the buy-in of implementers by providing motivation, mobilises resources, and sets a clear direction, with measurable outcomes to drive change.

In this chapter ,we extend the discussion to examine academics and their future needs in the academy. Imperative to the strategy is their buy in and their capacitation. Christo-Baker (2004) cautions that institutions must ensure that there is technological and pedagogical support for academics, because, without that, any changes in instructional format are likely to fail. Additionally, Mishra and Koehler (2006) suggest that support must simultaneously address content, pedagogy and technology, because a content-neutral approach makes the incorrect assumption that knowledge of a particular technology means good teaching and learning when using the technology. To this, Graham and Robison (2007) remind us that such considerations are important, because the academics are at a crucial vantage point, since they are the primary pedagogical implementers and decision-makers in their classrooms. As such, a bottom-up approach that prepares academics is a critical component for the success of online programmes (Baran & Correia 2014).

The future also requires us as academics to remind ourselves of what we mean and understand by online practice. According to Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001), there are three dominant categories for online practice; namely, instructional design and organisation; facilitating discourse; and direct instruction. Institutions must work collaboratively with academics from various disciplines in order to create fit for purpose professional development opportunities that will facilitate and support the transition to online

teaching and learning (Schmidt, Tschida & Hodge 2016). This is to ensure that academics can develop the necessary pedagogical skills and practices that enable them to engage in online teaching and learning with visibility, intentionality, and active engagement (Jaggars, Edgecombe & Stacey 2013), which are fundamentals of effective online practice. Equally important is that we do not stop learning and adapting our practices and approaches in response to the constantly changing demands. We now know that technological evolution is rapid (Rønningsbakk, Huang, Sandnes & Wu 2019), and academics and the academy must always stay abreast of these changes.

While we look to the future and respond to the urgency, we must not forget that designing a module to be offered on an online platform takes time, with months of preparation and careful consideration of teaching and learning materials, activities, assessments tasks and pedagogical underpinnings that all are aligned to the module outcomes (Humbert 2007). The sudden overload and hastiness of rushing to move to the online platform under such short timelines and the current conditions leveraged by COVID-19 may cause technostress. This occurs when the amount of information provided goes beyond what individuals can actually absorb and respond to (Chiappeta 2017).

That being said, beyond COVID-19 we imagine a future where blended learning and online remote learning, at least for specific programmes, continues, and is sustained. Although there could be challenges years from now, we anticipate proactive and collaborative interdisciplinary work in HEIs, especially in South Africa. We now take a step back and reflect on why the various attempts made by HEIs in strengthening support for teaching and learning through LMSs are now failing.

4   Analytical: We were There, Now we are Here

The analytical stage in the method of *currere* focuses on the past and the present (Pinar 2004). To unpack this stage further, Pinar (1994: 26) uses the following question, 'how is the future present in the past, the past in the future and the present in both?' We are in a time where we experienced massification. That period of expansion of access to higher education presented an opportunity for institutional and curriculum reform and transformation (Fataar 2018). As Fataar continues, 'universities failed to develop traction for establishing an institutional orientation and platform for achieving inclusive student access' (2018: 2). We are now in a time where some of the changes that were favoured,

such as blended learning, would now make it easier to implement the changes demanded by the current circumstance, that is, online teaching and learning.

So, how did we miss the chance to adopt these changes earlier? It is a question as to whether the opportunity has been missed to soften the blow of an urgent transition. We submit that the introduction of online learning management systems (LMSs) was a positive advancement towards the adoption of blended learning. However, even though the timing of the introduction of LMSs was well aligned to the needs of academic activities related to massification, we submit that they were introduced prematurely, without timelines and sufficient technical support for users (Mitchell *et al.* 2007).

The function of LMSs as platforms for facilitating teaching and learning has been underutilised, and has not been efficiently or effectively adopted. As such, there has been an explicit divide between the intended use and the actual use of these LMSs. Madiba (2011) observes that in some HEIs, the acquisition of these systems has been symbolic, and nothing more than a mere technical project. As such, universities did not even have a policy framework for using LMSs. Similar findings are presented by Mpungose (2020), who observes that LMSs in certain teacher education institutions became a 'dumping platform' for notes and communication (see Mpungose 2020: 935). They have been reduced to nothing more than easy access storage facilities, rather than platforms where dynamic learning occurs (McKenna 2016).

The under-usage of the LMSs during massification also took away the opportunity to narrow the digital divide. The digital divide examines four barriers of access, with each barrier being attached to a specific type of access it restricts (Van Dijk & Hacker 2003). These are are motivational access, material or physical access, skills access, and usage access (Van Dijk 2005). Motivational access relates to the motivation to use digital technology (Van Dijk 2005). Here, we add Van Dijk and Hackers' (2003) earlier work, which also considers mental access caused by lack of interest, computer anxiety, and the lack of attractiveness of the new technology. Van Dijk (2005) avers that, while this has been ignored for the most part, it is the first phase of access and overcoming it creates the necessary foundation for full appropriation to the digital technologies, that is, the adoption of blended learning. The material or physical access is the barrier that has received most attention (Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt, Dawson & Wilson 2017). This barrier speaks to the restrictions of

access caused by the inability to secure the hardware, software, internet connectivity, and other material resources, such as the knowledge and information needed to access and participate in a digital space (Van Dijk 2005). Skills access is the barrier caused by the lack of digital skills (Van Dijk & Hacker 2003; Van Dijk 2005). The digital skills that are necessary are operational, informational, and strategic skills (Van Dijk & Hacker 2003). They can only be cultivated where there is motivational access, material and physical access, and adequate education and support (Van Dijk & Hacker 2003). Usage access is reliant on the access that lies beyond those barriers mentioned above. This is the ultimate goal of all the other forms of access because, at this level of access, users are able to utilise the technology for the purpose for which it is intended (Van Dijk 2005); which in this case would have been the use of LMSs to mediate blended teaching and learning (ibid.).

Specific factors led to failure to capitalise on the opportunities that were present during massification and the adoption of blended learning approach through LMSs. According to McKenna (2016), the adoption of blended learning was more often than not utilised in the absence of the necessary academic support or pedagogical expertise. Not surprising, then, are the findings that indicate that a lack of preparedness, inadequate technological skills, increased administration, and pedagogical concerns (Deaker, Stein & Spiller 2016; Mansbach & Austin 2018) have been barriers that have inhibited academics from fully adopting the blended approach. What we draw from this is that while HEIs were able to provide the material and physical access in terms of LMSs and hardware, they fell short in narrowing the digital divide in terms of motivational, skills and usage access. Had blended learning been fully adopted, with the necessary support in place, the motivational, skills and usage barriers of access would have been minimised, and as a result the present migration to online teaching and learning would have been less challenging from the outset.

As HEIs find themselves under pressure to salvage the academic year, the transition to online platforms should be approached with caution and should not neglect the pedagogical importance required for successful teaching and learning. Already mentioned is that academics have been unable to cultivate the pedagogical profile necessary to teach in online platforms. This is a major concern, especially for academics in teacher education institutions. There have been various studies (Moore & Kearsley 1996; Palloff & Pratt 1999; Collison, Elbaum, Haavind & Tinker 2000) that assert that the funda-

mental role for a teacher on an online platform is that of a facilitator. The facilitator role supersedes other roles and responsibilities. This implies that facilitating and understanding the navigation of the online platform is more important than the pedagogical and knowledge specialist roles that teachers take up in contact teaching (Wallace 2003). The difficulties with this argument become evident in the teacher training field, where not only content-specific knowledge is taught, but how it is taught is knowledge in itself. Therefore, it is impossible to teach pedagogical knowledge without using the opportunity to model and display pedagogics in action through a teacher's method of teaching (Cummings 2020). With that understanding, it is not only the facilitation and navigation of the online platform that is essential, however, in teacher training, it is also the content and pedagogical knowledge, as these all become subject matter for learning (Wallace 2003).

The position we take is that, in our current position, the past is present. By this, we mean that we have experienced a certain stagnation. Therefore, if our decisions in HEIs are not critically thought through, the present will become the future, and we will experience the same challenges should the world plunge into another crisis or pandemic of similar scale or consequence. At this stage our discussion shifts to the present.

5 Synthetical: At a Defining Moment

In the previous sections we analysed the past and the future in relation to the present. Herein we are concerned with the meaning of the present (Pinar 2004) and the different ways to seize the opportunities missed when mass higher education started. We call this a defining moment because, in the midst of the crisis, we are required to make new choices and abandon those that have proven to be unresponsive for 'productive living in complex times' and for the epistemic becoming of a diverse student population (Fataar 2018: 2). There are academic, professional and financial implications that compel HEIs to continue with academic activity under remote online learning. Cognisant of the gravity of the situation facing South African HEIs, institutions should by all means continue to offer quality teaching to the best of their abilities, while taking full consideration of the range of students whose different learning environments may or may not be conducive for learning.

Michael Fullan (2020, April 6) tweeted 'I don't know about you, but I am overwhelmed by the proliferation of ideas for remote learning. My best

advice is, don't run towards a solution [...] Think anew about education, focus on those that need help, while all of us take 2020 to create a better system'. We heed the advice of Fullan and intentionally choose not to provide prescriptive solutions, because perhaps even what we have imagined as our ideal future may still be influenced by our 'deeply entrenched cultures, rituals, and traditions' (Dhunpath & Vithal 2012: 2). Dennis (2020) also reminds us that 'disruptions and upheavals are not the usual companion of logic and reason' (para.3).

Hodges *et al.* (2020) highlight that universities ought to be honest in making a distinction in terms of the kind of education they are offering students during this time. They continue to explain that universities that were not fully using or reliant on LMS ought not to be claiming to offer online learning now, as that gives the impression that LMS was fully operational and optimally used before the COVID-19. They request universities to call it what it is 'emergency remote teaching' (p. 3). We support this call, because this is important, especially to universities who will be going back to the normative post-COVID-19. The true reality is that no institution 'making the transition to online teaching under these circumstances will truly be designing to take the full advantage of the affordances and possibilities of the online format' (Hodges *et al.* 2020: 2). This is the kind of reflexivity that is needed moving forward so we can make sound decisions. We must acknowledge that HEIs face a turning curve and a trajectory of learning under circumstances that are not favourable for such learning to occur.

6 Flexibility and Prioritisation for the Current Situation

This pandemic has also brought us to think about what is truly important about education, and that is learning – institutions should be duly concerned with offering platforms to learn. So how can HEIs carefully continue to provide their core service of teaching and learning during the era of COVID-19? We submit that flexibility is central in assisting and relieving both students and academics from the tensions of the present situation. As the fundamental stakeholders of teaching and learning, academics and students both carry multiple identities – being parents, children, wives and husbands etc. – and they have to attend to and manage all these various identities during this time. Therefore, flexibility is paramount to allow for balance and to prevent emotional and health complications that may arise during this time. In

conversation, teaching and learning management, students and academics need to be given time to adjust both to the circumstances of online learning and to changes in their learning environments, which may or may not be conducive during this time (Cummings 2020).

Stanger (2020) advocates for doing away with grades and implementing a pass or fail system without giving actual marks. This has already been implemented by institutions such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Smith College (ibid.). Stanger (2020) believes that this may eliminate some challenges of fairness, whilst still providing students learning material during this anxious time. In a pass/fail system, academics would conduct formative assessments and focus on the students' learning, instead of summative assessments, which are more rigid, and may be stressful to both academics and students. Here, instructors can find ways to engage students in their learning while assessing their engagement, understanding of the content discussed, shared or taught. For the affected academic year, HEIs can do away with stringent deadlines and penalties, allowing for extensions beyond submission dates where necessary. Being cognisant of the module quality that needs to be maintained, which has already been affected by this social distancing, academics may also reconsider the amount and the kind of assessment tasks they set for students.

In the time that HEIs are in ongoing conversation, trying to find the best solution, it is also important to include students in the conversation. As a collective, we can find creative and innovative ways to best respond to this pandemic. Various universities, when the reality of the need for online learning became clear, sent surveys to students, collecting mainly demographical data – in order to understand student needs. This was necessary in order to identify the concerns of the students and their ongoing challenges, which would need to be taken into consideration for learning and assessment purposes (Kelly 2020). This is particularly important in South Africa, because in all that we do, we must not reverse the gains made by massification by now excluding those who do not have certain types of access due to the digital divide.

In this chapter, we intentionally avoid making suggestions regarding what means exist to currently mediate remote teaching and learning. We believe that, now more than ever, we ought to be able to craft context-responsive solutions that will best serve academics and students alike. HEIs have an opportunity to pioneer a new future. As alluded to by Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond (2020) about the new normal, Hill (2020) believes we

cannot revert to the old normal post COVID-19. As challenging and uncomfortable as this pandemic has been for the academic community, it should also be understood as a teachable moment, where we can learn new ways of doing things that we can integrate into our new normal for when we go back to contact teaching. In the case of South Africa, we believe that part of the new normal would be concerted use of blended learning post-COVID-19.

7 Conclusion

In our discussion we have shown that responses to the COVID-19 pandemic globally require interventions such as remote teaching, learning and assessment. Pinar's four stages of *currere* provide a useful lens in reflecting on missed opportunities, such as the failure to introduce blended learning parallel with the massification of higher education. Reflecting on the past and anticipating the future suggest that, going forward, we ought to be inclusive in our approaches. The present context and possible post-COVID-context should not widen inequalities. We require flexibility and collaboration to seize those opportunities we might discover in the shift.

Acknowledgements

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

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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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COVID-19: 'Opportune' Moment for Epistemic Delinking from an Over-crowded Neoliberal Curriculum and Assessment Regime in South Africa

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Abstract

The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is having telling consequences globally. Developing nations like South Africa, with highly variegated education and health systems, are beginning to face particular challenges. The neoliberal contouring of South African society in the past three decades has rendered a 'new' class apartheid, a structural inequality, that has been generally 'accepted' as a 'natural consequence' in a post-conflict society. With regard to education, the application of market principles to the schooling system has rendered the State particularly inept at applying any 'universal' policy for teaching and learning in a neoliberal, class-stratified model during this time of ongoing contagion. The perversion of neoliberal principles and protocols in almost every aspect of school (and even university) education has been rampant and has insidiously strengthened its grip on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the South African school education context. It is thus the realisation that the debate as to what might constitute a response to the 'new' crisis (in education) is necessarily circumscribed within the contours of already well-demarcated parameters. Proximity limitations (social distancing) have illuminated the rigidity of the colonial model for schooling, rendering a paralysis to conventional teaching and assessment. This paper argues that COVID-19 has refocused attention on curriculum overload, and elaborate neoliberal assessment regimes that suffocate teaching and learning. Such a scenario presents an 'opportune' moment to reflect on much in education that has become normative over time. Epistemic delinking and border thinking present as useful theoretical heuristics for such critical reflection and action.

1 Introduction

In this paper I draw theoretical insights from the body of scholarship on decoloniality (Anzaldúa 1987; Grosfoguel 2013; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2002; 2011) to address the dilemma faced by the South African education system as it struggles to respond to the multiple and novel challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. I argue that the modern/colonial, neoliberal nation state's delusionary impulses as these relate to the purpose of education (both school and post-school) (Shore, 2010) and its pre-occupation with a neoliberal capitalist market ideology, have come home to roost. The colonial model, as it has been applied to almost every facet of human activity. is rapidly beginning to unravel. Note that this phenomenon is not peculiar to South Africa. It is indeed a brutally sobering realisation that the hegemonic coloniality-modernity-capitalist complex as this manifests across the world, is under siege (Bond 2014; Mignolo 2011).

I examine how the naturalness with which western-Eurocentric curriculum and assessment regimes have become embedded and reified in our collective psyches to the extent that we have accepted them as normative, sacrosanct ways in which the world of teaching and learning ought to be conducted. In every crisis, there exists opportunity to think anew, to recalibrate, for renewal with a vexed focus on addressing particular frailties in society (and education), that have been previously relegated to the backburner of the academic intellectual enterprise. Note that my intent is to offer an analysis of the paralysis the nation's education system currently faces, with a view to exposing why and how a sustained and embarrassing unevenness in South African education has perpetuated unchecked, and how this has become the Achilles heel that hopefully threatens the current neoliberal 'order' regulating school provisioning.

2 School Education and Neoliberal Contouring

A frequently cited description of neoliberalism is that of David Harvey's, namely, that it represents a 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills […] characterized [sic] by […] free

markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2007: 2). Neoliberalism subscribes to the notion of an active yet minimalist role for the State. In fact the role of the State is to create the conditions for markets to be conceived, including markets for social provisioning like education and health. The operation of such markets though should be free from State interference, as the market is deemed far more efficient and effective than the state at the allocation and use of society's resources through active competition. Individual freedom of choice is a central tenet that neoliberals extol and ought to be guarded, irrespective of the current (highly unequal) lay of the metaphorical economic land. Such transactional neoliberal market persuasions have moved with considerable pace and stealth into education systems of the world since its genesis in the West (the United Kingdom and the United States) in the 1970s. Reeves asserts that with regard to education, two somewhat contradictory strains are at play, namely, that of 'market-based free choice, in which individual consumers (parents, students) are empowered to choose their schools, and a master narrative on curriculum and teaching, in which knowledge and how it is to be delivered and measured is prescribed' (Reeves 2018: 98). This particular scenario is germane in the South African education context.

Arguably the more lucid and overt manifestation of individual freedom (of school choice) is the economic class hierarchisation of the schooling sector in South Africa and the marginalisation of especially poor Black children (Ndimande 2016). It is not uncommon to find embarrassing affluence in school education facilities co-existing with that of destitution and squalor within a radius of five kilometres. Freedom of choice, while at face value, appears to be a noble aspiration and value, simply meaning that post-apartheid South Africa's liberation of choice of *domicilium* (and school) has rendered a highly unequal schooling system based on the market principle of price formation through supply and demand for school education packages. The less overt and insidious manifestation is the master narrative at work regarding the centralised (State) engineering and over-specification of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices (the specifics of which are presented later in this chapter).

3 A Brief Analysis of the Genesis of Contemporary Education Systems

As a point of entry and as a point of first 'disruption' it is important to reflect on the genesis of what contemporary society has taken to be the normative

model for education across the world. That the blueprint for the education systems of nation states closely resemble each other is not by accident (Mignolo 2011). In fact, its pervasiveness can be attributed to the powerful role that colonisation and modernity have played in organising the world of teaching and learning. This epistemological and ontological canon have continued to vociferously shape the nature of knowing, knowledge, and the knower (Mignolo 2011). The spread of modernity's epistemological tenets to every corner of the world over centuries is ascribable to the wave of colonisation that commenced with Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas and Europe's rampant colonisation of various parts of the world. Modernity's stranglehold on ways of thinking, knowing and being has relentlessly endured. Note that the western Eurocentric canon did not establish itself in a vacuum (Grosfoguel 2013). In the colonies of the world, it fuelled a systemic epistemicide, (De Sousa Santos, 2016). Paradoxically though, modernity continues to thrive alongside Christianity and other belief systems. Of significance is that the modernity-coloniality-capitalist complex has produced two telling outcomes.

Firstly, it systematically fashioned a 'human resource' training system, namely, the contemporary school and university system. There are today taken-for-granted principles of modern schooling that translate unquestioningly into a gradation (K-12) system according to which children are ordered and separated by age in the first instance (5-6 years as entry level age to primary schooling) into age-based cohorts. Tuition is formal (usually whole class) and happens within confined physical structures (school and university classrooms). Progression from one grade to the next depends on the acquisition of a set of predetermine outcomes (usually stipulated in countries' qualification frameworks). Knowledge is 'carefully' selected, compartmentalised, and sequenced, and it is only upon demonstration of stipulated competence levels that children are permitted to proceed to the next grade – a necessarily accretive lock-step movement through the knowledge ranks. A tightly defined competence set also determines who might serve as dispenser and assessor (teacher) of selected knowledge packages for each grade. While this discussion might appear mundane and the issues presented are assumed to be axiomatic (generally accepted/acceptable), therein lies the problem; namely, the uncontested nature and structure of the modern schooling system. It has become clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has begun to pose a genuine threat to the education system's feasibility in its current form. Arguably the most

compelling mitigating impediment to the re-opening of schools and universities is the danger that close proximity presents for the spread of the contagion, an issue that is discussed below.

The *second*, is that the modernity-coloniality-capitalist complex in South Africa, has created a two-tier socio-economic system, a first and second economy that supports affluence in the former, and poverty in the latter. While schooling is 'free' and mandatory for all learners up to the age of sixteen (South African Schools Act of 1996), the neoliberal market model for schooling, in particular, has created stark differentiation in the curriculum 'packages' that the rich and poor are able to access (Ndimande 2016). Note that Tikly cautions about simply focusing on education alone, outside of substantive attention to how poverty is implicated in the paralysis that the South African poor often struggle in vain to break free of (Tikly 2013). Spaull confirms that South Africa has a dualistic system, a condition where formerly white schools have maintained a high level of functionality, while schools that historically serviced Black communities remain largely dysfunctional (Spaull 2013). Importantly, he notes that there is a distinct correlation between education and wealth in what he describes as a bifurcated education system. This adds credence to the argument that an essentialist fixation with an education-alone social justice intervention without due consideration of the material conditions within which poor children live in SA, is likely to be somewhat limiting. This particular realisation has come to the fore during the current pandemic.

4   About 'Intimate' Proximity in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Enterprise

The pandemic has shown that close proximity exposes subjects to risk of contamination and community spread (Mboera *et al.* 2020). As mentioned above, the physical classroom with 'intimately' seated learners in close physical contact and a teacher who is also in close physical propinquity in a confined (walled) room, is the typical architecture for classrooms across the world. This construction of the physical teaching and learning space is proving to be uninhabitable, and is likely to exacerbate the spread of the virus. Disciplined 'social distancing' (maintaining the minimum two-meter proximity rule) has proven to be challenging for many people. It is not unusual to expect that young (and older) school children may take some time to learn this new life-preserving discipline. COVID-19 contraction has proven to have

life-threatening consequences (Shammi, Bodrud-Doza, Towfiqul Islam, & Rahman 2020). The notion of 'life-threatening' has particular salience and warrants our most acute and concentrated focus and attention. In the crudest and most candid terms, it reminds us that a person (a learner or teacher in this instance) may die within a short 14-day period of contracting the virus (Clark *et al.* 2020). Conventional teaching in conventionally structured school classrooms even in affluent schools with small class sizes is thus likely to be no longer viable as historically conceived.

The notion of 'social distancing', generally understood to be that of maintaining a physical distance between oneself and another person in a social space (Oosterhoff, Palmer, Wilson & Shook 2020) might well take on literal connotations. and may have long-lasting psychosocial consequences (Fitzgerald, Nunn & Isaacs 2020). This, then, raises the question as to how school teachers help learners negotiate the distinction between the physical spatial separation and the crucial need for social interaction. That social distancing might have implications for the mental and social health of school learners is a real issue as young people are likely to have varying proclivities for tactility (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2020), an issue that even school teachers are likely to struggle with. Anxiety and depression among young adults is likely to intensify amongst young people (Liu, Zhang, Wong, Hyun & Hahm 2020). COVID-19 will thus place enormous responsibility on school teachers to literally 'teach' their learners how to improve their chances of not contracting the virus. Teacher education programmes generally include somewhat watered down versions of psychology in Psychology of Education courses. As such, they are not likely to have adequately prepared current incumbents with sophisticated skills for dealing with widespread anxiety, depression. and trauma that children may experience from the outcomes of COVID-19 including that of quarantined hospitalisation of kin and even death. While there are no quick-fixes for bringing the current cohort of teachers up to speed, it does present as an area of competence that teacher education providers (both in-service and pre-service) could well expend some intellectual deliberation.

5 Neoliberal Assessment Regimes Now in Sharp Purview

High-stakes testing, such as the South African Senior Certificate Examination (matriculation) has become an entrenched and 'valued' feature of the South African education system, yet little attention is paid to the ideological drivers

of such a testing regime. Measurement focused assessment, class tests and examinations are the distinct features of the South African assessment regime for school learners (Kanjee & Sayed 2013). Lingard asserts that accountability and surveillance functions of assessment are infused with neoliberal performativity imperatives (Lingard 2010). In fact, neoliberal economic imperatives continue to fashion education policy globally (Harvey 2007; 2010; Nussbaum 2010; 2011) with its genesis largely attributed to regimes of the Reagan (US) and Thatcher (UK) era. This era marked the infusion of neoliberal performativity discourses in educational discourses (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne 2002), that have become somewhat naturalised in education systems across the world. Performative knowledge, pedagogical and assessment protocols have also become a distinctive feature of South African education. The public (including the academic public) has come to view assessment as a societal necessity, but seldom question its core ideological foundations and its profound relation to what masquerades as the noble *purpose* of education (namely to serve the productive needs of a neoliberally structured the economy) (Nussbaum 2010). Education for economic growth (that is 'hoped' will trickle down to all) is the doctrine that the neoliberal political and educational bureaucratic elite proffer at the expense of an education that is not narrowly driven by the broader profit incentive (Nussbaum 2010). School and university curriculum construction and assessment has become performance based. The capitalist market predetermines educational policy in the form of policy that prescribes utility-tailored knowledge and the concomitant assessment regimes to measure its demonstration. In other words, the market sets the standard. Student test results begin a chain of events, or occurrences. For both schools and students, this could either mean rewards or punishment for under-performance. Mathison notes that '(t)he assumption is that the threat of failure will motivate students to learn more, teachers to teach better, educational institutions to be better…' (Mathison 2008: 533). It has become clear that nations have unwittingly fallen prey to the neoliberal master narrative (Harvey 2007; Nussbaum 2010; 2011).

There is much critique of assessment in its current form that South African education has largely ignored. Measurement of student and teacher performance through laborious testing regimes systematically dehumanises learners; reducing them from human being to number, and compromises deep relationship building between teachers and learners (Barret 2009). Teachers are compelled to assess what is overtly observable and objectively

'measurable'. This comes at the expense of developing substantive social connections between teachers and learners in a learning enterprise that is not preoccupied with constant measurement (Day, Flores & Viana 2007; Valli & Buese 2007) and between fellow teachers (Gu & Day 2007). There is evidence that competitaveness fueled by a neoliberal incentivised self-interest is likely to render relations among teachers rancid, thus discouraging healthy collaborative relations amongst teachers for the holistic advancement of learners (Jeffrey 2002). The need to perform and sustain performance is felt by both teachers and learners (LaBoskey 2006). Teachers become distinctly more strict and demanding, developing dispositions that are likely to compromise teaching and learning (Elstad 2009). While there is limited research on how this has changed teacher attitudes in the South African context, early studies elsewhere indicate that alarmingly, the notion of care has regressed to caring about learner performance instead of the human learner (Jeffrey 2002). As can be expected, learners begin to question the bona fides of teachers and are likely to become scornful of teachers motivations and real intentions of their efforts (Laskey 2005). There is also early evidence of reductive teaching that is focused on developing learner competences for test success, the development of a narrow competence set that might have limited application to broader everyday life issues (Grant 2000). Test reliability and validity principles are likely to be compromised, as measurement becomes premised on what is easier to measure rather than an authentic assessment of learning (Lingard, 2010). As can be expected, learners' individual development needs are substituted with skills for test success (Wong 2008). It also becomes clear that over-regulated assessment regimes and incessant testing demands that teachers allocate considerable working hours to the project of learner assessment, making teaching subservient to the assessment master (Valli & Buese 2007).

Note that test reliability, validity, authenticity, and test result credibility have become particularly salient in the current pandemic context. Summative assessment (of a predominant written nature), usually administered in confined spaces and within temporal limitations under strict surveillance, is proving to be a logistical and pragmatic nightmare for both schools and universities. There is much consternation about test-taker safety that might arise from prolonged multi-person presence even when prescribed/legislated proximity parameters are observed. The digital space also presents with formidable challenges, as experts grapple with strategies for authenticating bona fide, officially registered test-takers. Note that the need for test taker

surveillance is a profound indication of society's complete absence of faith in the human subject to have integrity and conduct herself honestly as she presents what she knows. This is indeed an indictment on our collective socialisation and warrants an analysis of what drives/motivates dishonest test-taking practices. It might well be related to neoliberalism's focus on individual self-interest in a punishing, competitive market environment. There is also the issue of the wide dispersion of university students in places of residence (homes) across the country. There is much trepidation and angst about access to digital platforms using the internet and mobile phones, both in terms of physical access, and the cost this might have especially for the indigent.

As stated above, these debates are not neither new nor peculiar to the South African education context. They should, however, re-alert us to what we have been socialised into, and how we have become so accepting of contemporary assessment regimes in South African schools. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a thinking anew.

6   In Search of Inspiration: Border Thinking and Epistemic Delinking

Gloria Anzaldúa's work entitled *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Anzaldúa 1987) is credited with inspiring the development of border thinking as theoretical and conceptual heuristic. Border think is intimately connected to decolonial scholarship, scholarship that critiques the hegemony that coloniality/modernity has on who, how, where and what knowledge is produced and valued (how modernity/coloniality has shaped the global education system was explained above). Despite the modernity-coloniality-neoliberal capitalist complex presenting as formidable 'foe', border thinking invites and affirms alternative perspectives on knowledge production. Border thinking is thus a considered response to modernity. The borderland is both the physical border and the metaphorical border. The physical border, the physical flashpoint in, for example, dual economies like South Africa, is where the second economy 'grates' against the first, haemorrhaging after each abrasive encounter (Anzaldúa 1987: 1). This was and is evidenced by weekly service delivery protests that saw citizens appealing for basic human necessities (safe homes, food, and water). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the appalling reality that, to date, over three thousand South African schools are not serviced with potable running water, and that an unspecified number of

schools still employ a pit latrine system. State inertia and lack of political will are not unreasonable arguments that might explain why this social atrocity persists. That the lack of running water will expose the poor to the vagaries of the pandemic is certainly not an argument that will draw contestation. It does beg the question, though, as to how such school communities (teachers and learners and other personnel) will experience the return to school programme that has recently commenced. What necessary intellectual conversations and social justice inspired educational research does the pandemic subpoena at this time of existential crisis? There is a compelling motivation for researchers and critical researchers in particular to leverage the 'publicity' that COVID-19 has provided as it relates to the education of the poor.

In embracing the metaphorical border as the nexus of praxis where experience, practice, and theory are mutually constitutive, thinking at this border would entail a plurality of stance; that is, a standing inside, outside and at the border to ascertain knowledge of and for an epistemic delinking from the modernity/coloniality canon. Epistemic delinking is about disruption and illumination, it 'is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing [sic] the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility…' (Maldanado-Torres 2007: 262). We thus have to make visible the socio-economic prejudice that the modernity-coloniality-complex has fabricated with a view to mounting a challenge to its hegemony. It becomes clear, then, that epistemic delinking from modernity and neoliberal capitalism will not be a paramount objective of the nation state (like South Africa). The political and bureaucratic elite sustain the shape and form that the education and health sector in South Africa has taken. The pandemic, however, has made overt the deep fissures that exist in the various spheres of South African society, bringing to the surface the misery of the disenfranchised. It also lubricates the machinery for border thinking activism. For educational researchers, practitioners and managers, this might mean summoning a critical meta-awareness of how curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices and systems of educational governance have become normative, with the view to disrupting and troubling as they search for situated knowledges (Mignolo 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an 'opportunity' to challenge the extent of the curriculum and deliberate on schools' abilities to effectively complete the curriculum in the amended academic year. Naidoo has cautioned, even prior to the national lockdown and closure of schools, that the extent of the existing curriculum has resulted in counter-productive curriculum pacing regimes in

South Africa in which teachers across the country are compelled to teach (cover curriculum content) at the prescribed rate irrespective of whether learners have acquired such 'taught' knowledge (Naidoo 2019).

With regard the deep subtext of the taught curriculum, the jury is out, though, as to whether teachers, school curriculum advisors and policy makers have the appetite for deeper epistemological questions as these relate to origins and ideological persuasions of contemporary South African school curriculum content. In essence, while border thinking and epistemic delinking in a time of enormous upheaval and trauma has much potential for helping to think anew, it does, however, also raise the question as to the education bureaucracy's political will and teachers' current state of emotional readiness to contemplate fundamental changes to current curriculum and assessment regimes.

7 Some Concluding Comments

In scripting this piece, I am acutely sensitive to the deafening silence in this analysis and discussion of how gender is implicated in the time of this pandemic and how it remains a key domain of the colonial matrix of power. The theoretical insights of Lugones (Lugones 2007) and Anzaldua (Anzaldúa 1987) would certainly add a further layer of analytical complexity; a project that is necessary, but beyond the scope of this current paper.

The lethality of the COVID-19 pandemic for the poor and disenfranchised has awakened our consciousness as to what South African society has taken to be normative as this relates to the pace at which socio-economic disparities ought to be confronted and addressed. That South Africa ought to have embraced a welfare state social and economic policy two decades ago instead of waiting for the current calamity is a moot point. The state's response might well be regarded as a conscience appeasing 'noblesse oblige' typified by acute sensitivity to socio-economic prejudices, but (unashamedly), only when morally 'cornered' to address such prejudice. Note that neoliberals would certainly argue that it would not have been sustainable and would have compromised economic growth and wealth accumulation. As discussed above, neoliberal economic policies have, in fact, exacerbated the plight of the poor. Neoliberal policies, as these relate to the neoliberal influence on the form and shape of curriculum, assessment and governance (both in South African schools and universities) have proceeded unchecked, as these systematically reduce education to serving the vagaries of the market. It has wilfully abetted

social exclusionary practices, with economic capital becoming the powerful arbiter of the quality of education and health care that human subjects might leverage. The pandemic alerts us to how the conditions of prejudice in all its manifestations have been allowed to persist.

The critical contemplative stance that I advocate for in this chapter is one that understands education as complex, as process with outcomes that may confound, astound, and even disappoint, that warrants looking at curriculum and assessment with fresh eyes. I contend that we should 'prepare' subjects for life in a society that is characterised by a state of perennial dissonance. This might refer to a condition that recognises that socio-economic prejudice in all its manifestations may continue to exist and even strengthen both locally and internationally; one that neoliberal capitalism as well as neoliberalism's influence and reach (Bond 2014) into the field of education in particular (Shore 2010) is likely to intensify. As such, it demands a particular kind of activism.

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Epistemic Delinking from an Over-crowded Neoliberal Curriculum

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The COVID-19 Pandemic, Online Teaching/ Learning, the Digital Divide, and Epistemological Access

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is a multifaceted crisis, imbuing all dimensions of human life and having implications for all disciplines/fields in higher education. The coronavirus outbreak and its spread witnessed higher education institutions across the world racing to introduce online learning offerings and assessments as well as support programmes for staff and students. Few would question the affordances of new technologies to expand learning into virtual spaces and that online learning management systems have ensured that all learning is not thwarted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all students might not be enjoying equitable benefits from the affordances of new technologies. For example, in a country like South Africa there is an acute digital divide, which the COVID-19 crisis has laid bare. Online teaching/learning poses a threat to both formal and epistemological access, as some students might also be disadvantaged by the sudden and rapid change to a different mode of provision. In particular, students who are used to the contact mode of provision might find it more challenging to adapt to a digital mode of provision; not because they are not digitally literate, but because they might not have sufficient access to digital platforms. Furthermore, having access to technology does not guarantee that one gains epistemological access. The latter depends on pedagogical/epistemological labour being performed by both lecturer and student. Our concern in this

chapter is with ways in which the digital divide deprives certain students of epistemological access.

Keywords: COVID-19, digital divide, epistemological access, online teaching/ learning

1 Introduction

The past few months have witnessed how the COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed the lives of many across the globe. At the time of writing, globally there are more than 3 million COVID-19 cases, which has resulted in more than 225 000 deaths. In order to practise the unprecedented scale of physical distancing this has demanded, many governments closed down social institutions, a phenomenon which bears the collective name 'lockdown'. Kaplan (2000) points out that 'lockdown' is not a technical term used by health officials, but refers to any form of mandatory geographic quarantines or non-mandatory recommendations such as stay at home, no social gatherings/ events, closure of certain businesses and closure of educational institutions. The purpose of lockdown measures is to slow down the spread of the virus – an effort which has ubiquitously become known as 'flattening the curve'. The lockdown measures will impact negatively on the global economy and we await what might be the deepest global recession since the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigating efforts introduced by countries are multiple. We have seen effects that affirm life: health professionals working tirelessly to save lives, peoples' solidarity and generosity across the globe, a rejuvenating planet, as we see turtles return to desolate beaches in India and Brazil, fish returning to rivers where they have not been seen in years, blue skies in Delhi as air pollution levels decline, and so forth. Moreover, we have come to value those often under-valued by society such as health care professionals, cashiers, police persons, teachers, etc. But, we have also witnessed deaths, inequality laid bare, poverty, unemployment, the negative psychological effects of forced isolation, and so forth.

South Africa was one of the countries that introduced the strictest lockdown measures. On 23 March 2020, its president Cyril Ramaphosa announced a national lockdown of 21 days, from 26 March to 16 April 2020.

The lockdown was subsequently extended to 30 April 2020. South Africa's lockdown involved drastic measures to contain the virus and to save lives: all citizens were to stay at home unless essential workers, citizens could only leave home to purchase essential goods and seek medical care, and could not travel across provincial borders, unless in an exceptional case such as attending of a funeral. Needless to say, the lockdown measures had a bearing on higher education institutions. Most students and staff at contact universities had to leave their university residences and return home. Face-to-face teaching/learning was discontinued and we saw some universities pivot to what is called online teaching/learning. It is online teaching and learning that we wish to specifically focus on in this chapter. We don't believe that full online learning is possible for any South African university, viewing it instead as but one dimension of emergency remote teaching/learning.

There are two concerns in relation to online teaching/learning that we wish to raise. The first is an issue of distributive justice – in an unequal country such as South Africa, there is unequal access to technologies used in online learning as well as unequal access to data and connectivity. The second concern is with epistemological access and we shall argue that access to technology, does not guarantee access to the goods distributed by the university (Morrow 2007). We discuss the two concerns sequentially in the two sections that follow to initiate an ongoing dialogue about these matters. In our parting thoughts, we suggest topics for future research that address matters of social justice, democratic teaching/learning and decolonial discourses.

2 Emergency Remote Learning and the Digital Divide

Online learning is a well-researched dimension of teaching/learning, especially in distance learning contexts. Blended learning and the supplementary use of online learning management platforms have also received attention beyond distance learning contexts. Pockets of excellence exist that demonstrate the viability of online learning in all its facets and different modes of provision. In addition, there are journals such as The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning and Distance Education that are solely devoted to research in this domain.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a situation where lecturers who are accustomed to on-campus, contact teaching had to precipitously migrate

to remote learning; referred to by Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond (2020) as 'emergence remote teaching'. These authors state that '[w]ell-planned online learning experiences are meaningfully different from courses offered online in response to a crisis or disaster', where instructors have 'to improvise quick solutions in less-than-ideal circumstances' (Hodges *et al.* 2020). They also state that the

> [t]ypical planning, preparation, and development time for a fully online university course is six to nine months before the course is delivered. Faculty are usually more comfortable teaching online by the second or third iteration of their online courses. It will be impossible for every faculty member to suddenly become an expert in online teaching and learning in this current situation … (Hodges *et al.* 2020).

Emergency remote teaching has been an arduous task for institutions to implement who predominantly cater for on-campus, contact teaching. Immediate short-term plans that cater for students with access to online resources and those without access had to be developed (Mbodila 2020). It should be noted that online learning is particularly challenging in Africa, 'where less than a third of the population has access to broadband connectivity' (Ngalomba 2020). A statistical analysis conducted by Clement (2020) 'found that South Africa had 36.54 million internet users, of which 34.93 million were mobile internet users' as of January 2020. Thus, 65% of South Africans have access at present, compared to the 59.3% who had access in 2016. According to StatsSA's last report in 2016, 53% of the 59.3% used mobile connections. In 2020, 62.7% used mobile connections (Clement 2020). The StatsSA report indicated that:

(i)   only 9.5% of the population have internet access at home;
(ii) Gauteng and Cape Town are the provinces with the highest percentage of people with online access; and
(iii) in Limpopo only 42.4% of people have some sort of link to the internet, with only 1.6% of the people having internet at home, and a meagre 2% of rural homesteads being connected (2016).

It is projected that in 2023, 80.8% of people in the country ought to have

access to the internet (StatsSA 2016). However, despite the increased access to information and communication technologies, South Africa still lags behind the other BRICS countries. China, for example, has the most internet users amongst these countries. These statistics provide evidence that South Africa has a long way to go to provide access for the majority of the population and to ensure digital inclusion. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these statistics will be ever-more pertinent, as laid bare by the digital divide in the country.

In response to the pandemic, Stellenbosch University, for example, pledged 'to rapidly generate pragmatic solutions for the complex challenges faced by our diverse student body' (Schoonwinkel, Van der Merwe & De Klerk 2020). In cases where short-term, pragmatic solutions are implemented, learning management systems are often merely used as a platform for students to retrieve information. The question to be asked is as to whether mere retrieval or exchange of information constitutes learning (Le Grange, 2004). Self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration often fall short in situations where the sophisticated nature of interactive platforms and applications are not acknowledged and used holistically. Hodges *et al.* (2020) warn that a rapid turn to online learning might potentially diminish the quality of courses offered. Also, improvising quick solutions could potentially lead to an instrumentalist understanding of online learning.

Du Toit and Verhoef (2018) argue that an instrumentalist approach to the use of digital technologies in higher education denies the embodied and socially embedded nature of the individual (which could also curb transformation in the higher education sector). Furthermore, they state that such an approach is derived from dominant paradigms, such as pragmatism, and social constructivism (see Du Toit [2018] for a detailed critique of these approaches from a Philosophy of Technology perspective). These approaches have a tendency to neglect the complex and intra-relatedness of the embodied person as they artificially divide technology (culture) and the person (nature) (Du Toit 2018). Du Toit and Verhoef (2018:7) postulate that an embodied understanding of technology recognises the personhood of the student: 'His or her language, culture, perceptual faith and imagination …'. Le Grange (2004) too emphasises the importance of embodied interactions to make progress in areas of race relations and cultural inclusion. Cultural access has been seen as one of the obstacles to bridging the digital divide (Pew Research Center 2013). Harambam, Aupers and Houtman (2013:1093) 'theorize [sic]

that appropriating the internet (or not) is less related to socio-economic position or usage and skills, and is more culturally informed than theories about a digital divide allow for'. This might be the case for developed countries, but in developing countries the socio-economic position of people remain the largest reason for not appropriating the internet because of the digital divide.

The notion 'digital divide', which refers to a gap in terms of access to and usage of information and communication technology between people from different geo-political, demographic and socio-economic groups, and was first coined by Larry Irving (Asmelash 2019). Steele (2019) argues that,

> [d]igital inequality is evident between communities living in urban areas and those living in rural settlements; between socioeconomic groups; between less economically developed countries and more economically developed countries; between the educated and uneducated population. Individuals with access to a broadband connection can be digitally split. How? Low-performance computers, limited broadband speeds and limited access to subscription-based content widen the gap.

A distinction is made between three types of digital divide, i.e.: the gender divide, social divide and the universal access divide (Steele 2019). Age (Friemel 2016) and race (Floburg 2018) constitute two further types of digital divide. The digital divide has an impact on the economy, on various social spheres, society at large, and education (Steele, 2019). Digital inequality in education is magnified when there is a lack of internet access, data devices, technological know-how, and reliance on varying teaching styles and levels of engagement (Steele 2019).

Traditionally, a narrow perspective of the digital divide was held that referred to those having access and those without access (Van Dijk 2006). This perspective has been followed by a broader perspective denoting inequality between those with more, and those with less bandwidth, as well as those with more skills and those with fewer skills (Blau 2002; Hargittai 2003). More recently reference has been made to 'second-level digital divide' (Correa 2008). This discourse highlights the gap between knowledge consumers and knowledge producers. This gap is also caused by socio-economic inequality insofar as those with access and the necessary skills are more likely to

contribute to knowledge production than those with limited access, skills and training. On the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading's (VPUU) website, it is stated that South Africa, as one of the most unequal societies in the world, experiences an overwhelming lack of access to basic services, skills training, and employment opportunities. A digital divide also exists between those with the necessary technological skills, the ability to contribute to knowledge production and financial resources to optimally use the internet. Furthermore, the VPUU (n.d.) state that,

> [a]ccess to digital skills as well as affordable and quality internet coverage remains unevenly distributed in South Africa. Higher-income young people are able to get a good education and increase their skills for the digital future. However, each year thousands of lower-income young South Africans leave schools without even basic digital literacy. If predictions of decreasing demand for low-skilled labour are anything to go by, this is a valid cause of concern.

The extended lockdown compelled universities to turn to emerging remote learning in an attempt to salvage the academic year. However, not all students have physical access to the digital devices and data. Many of these students rely on limited state funding to finance their studies and therefore also lack the finances to maintain connectivity. On the positive side, universities launched initiatives to provide pre-paid data and rental computers to students (and staff) who normally made use of institutional infrastructures to gain access. Provision of affordable pre-paid data packages were negotiated by the Department of Higher Education with the main service providers in the country. Service providers also offered zero rate access to universities' primary websites, library websites and learning management systems. However, even though these efforts may narrow the gap, a digital divide still remains if one bears in mind the nuanced understanding of digital divide discussed earlier.

Student leaders, amongst other matters such as the funding structure and the date of commencement of online learning, voiced their concerns pertaining to the introduction of emergency online teaching, stating that 'the majority [of students] lived in communities with poor network coverage and others in areas without electricity' (Ngqakamba 2020:n.p.), which results in an unequal, undemocratic digital citizenry. Online learning has been described

by some of them as 'unaffordable, impractical and elitist' (Mukeredzi, Kokutse & Dell 2020:n.p.). In response to the socio-demographic inequalities raised by students (and staff) together with the commitment that no student should be left behind, some universities like the University of Cape Town, undertook 'to distribute printed learning materials and USB drives for students who cannot access the internet in any form' (Petersen 2020:n.p.).

Physical access to information and communication technologies are not the only challenge facing universities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities attract students from various demographic areas, including rural and township areas, where students might lack digital fluency as they might not have prior exposure to information and communication technologies in education (Mbodila 2020). Although students might be perceived as 'digital natives' (Mbodila 2020), one cannot assume that they are fluent or literate in how to navigate themselves on learning management systems. This could be because of a lack of access to digital literacy training and/or insufficient knowledge on how to use different online platforms and applications. Graham (2011) has labelled the lack of access to digital literacy, the 'knowledge divide'.

In addition, cognitive access requires a level of information literacy that can succour users to find and use reliable, valid information in the context of mass amounts of information. Information literacy calls for a heuristics 'to select and organise information and define criteria for distinguishing what is significant and relevant' (Le Grange 2004:91). 'Librarians play a central role in the development of students' information literacy' (Aqili & Moghaddam 2008).

When physical access (in this instance access to device and connectivity) is denied to certain strata of the population, when financial access is curbed, and when opportunities to improve digital fluency are limited, a digital gap emerges that fortifies the unequal distribution of information and communication technologies in disadvantaged communities. In a country like South Africa, communities are often disadvantaged along lines of race and revenue, which makes access a highly politicised issue. Current media reports attest to this politicised nature of access by overstating physical and financial access. Little is, however, being said about epistemological access, which could further widen the inequality gap amongst students. We acknowledge that the question of access amidst the current pandemic ought to be politicised, as physical access is indeed racialised, but

attention should also be given to epistemological access. More will be said about epistemological access in the next section.

3   Epistemological Access

Epistemological access was coined by the late Wally Morrow in a presentation made to the University of Limpopo in 1992. This was followed by a presentation at the annual conference of the Kenton Education Association in the same year (Morrow 2007). The context of the term's coinage was the challenge presented to him when teaching large classes of B.Ed[1]. students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a consequence of the university's policy of widening access. Muller (2014) points out that there was not much attention given to the notion of epistemological access until the early 2000s, when it was taken up by scholars of higher education studies, presumably because of widened access given to previously disadvantaged students at former white universities. Morrow's idea of epistemological access has, since, also been applied to school education (see Pendlebury 2010; Du Plooy & Zindilile 2014).

Although Morrow's notion of epistemological access has been valorised by most, there have been some critiques of the idea. One criticism is that Morrow did not provide sufficient insights as to what epistemological access affords us to do (see Shalem 2010; Muller 2014). As Muller (2014: 265) puts it, 'Morrow left us with tantalisingly few clues as to how we might 'structure' the curriculum to make it more accessible to such students'. Another criticism is that Morrow's notion of epistemological access is too narrow because it neglects the political and social dimensions of epistemo-logical access (Du Plooy & Zindilile 2014) and does not include knowledge outside/beyond the Western canon (Le Grange 2011). We shall not elaborate on these debates in this chapter but wish to focus on the implications of Morrow's notion of epistemological for both teacher (lecturer in this context) and student in the context of the recent pivot to emerging remote teaching/learning by certain universities.

Morrow (1994) invoked the notion of epistemological access to distinguish it from the notion of formal access (physical access). He argued

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[1] The B.Ed. referred to here was an advanced qualification in education at the time and is now named a B.Ed. (Hons) degree.

that granting a student admission (formal access) to the university does not mean that he/she gains access to the knowledge that the university distributes (epistemological access). For, Morrow widened access or the right to education ought to mean epistemological access not just formal access. How does this relate to the current migration by universities to online teaching/learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? We mentioned earlier that in an unequal society such as South Africa, where there is a digital divide, the migration to online teaching/learning during the COVID-19 pandemic might further exacerbate educational inequalities, due to uneven access to information technology (IT), devices, and connectivity. However, even for those who have adequate access to IT and connectivity (formal access of a different kind), this does not guarantee epistemological access.

For Morrow (1992; 2007) epistemological access depends on systematic teaching that makes possible organised systematic learning. Systematic teaching requires labour on the part of teacher/lecturer that involves selecting and sequencing information to ensure continuity and progression in learning, which gives rise to knowledge acquisition. Moreover, Slonimsky and Shalem (2006) argue that epistemological access is dependent on curriculum responsiveness that is not only restricted to disciplinary responsiveness (a limitation in Morrow's conception) but also to economic, cultural/ institutional, and learning responsiveness. According to Moll (2004:4) curriculum responsiveness 'entails accommodating diversity of socio-cultural realities of students, by developing a wider variety of instructional strategies and learning pathways'. Designing curricula that are responsive is an arduous and time-consuming task, and is more challenging when it comes to online teaching/ learning. Doing so for online teaching/learning assumes that academic and support staff have sophisticated levels of both technical and pedagogical competence (Le Grange 2004), and that such competence cannot be developed overnight.

As most students have returned home during the lockdown and certain risk-adjusted levels that follow it, some would be enjoying the comfort of a middle class home, with few occupants, uncapped data, access to amenities and a range of resources, whilst others will be in crowded homes in townships, with limited access to the affordances of online learning, limited access to amenities, and so forth. We mention this because context impacts on epistemological access, as Pendlebury (2010:74) so neatly captures in the following:

> [W]ithout teachers' temporal attunement to the cognitive, emotional and contextual conditions for systematic learning, the possibilities for learners' epistemological access to 'big knowledge' are severely curtailed and the much-vaunted right to education remains, at best, only thinly realised.

Ensuring epistemological access in the context of remote teaching/learning demands a great deal of labour from lecturers. In addition to the technical and pedagogical competence required, lecturers would need to be understand the range of contexts in which students are learning. Therefore, if any degree of epistemological access is to be ensured during the COVID-19 pandemic, then it cannot simply be via online teaching/learning, but ought to be through an expanded notion of emergency remote teaching/learning. This will involve for some, complementing online teaching/learning with other forms of e-learning, interactive print materials and expository texts. And for others, online learning might only be a small part of their emergency remote learning and a greater reliance on other modes of learning mentioned. Importantly, students should be actively involved in designing learning programmes through providing regular feedback on their experiences. Face-to-face teaching/learning does not guarantee epistemological access, and does not efface historical (dis)advantages, but does level some things such as students having the same access to the resources that the residential university affords. This levelling of the playing field is harder to achieve through online teaching/learning.

4 Some Parting Thoughts

In this chapter, we have raised some of the challenges related to efforts in the migration from face-to-face contact teaching to alternative forms of teaching/learning as South African society is confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic. As many tout online teaching as a panacea to the current crisis because face-to-face teaching/learning is no longer possible, we sound a cautionary note that authentic online teaching/learning in South Africa might be beyond the reach of many students unless interventions happen at several fronts. This is not only because of the digital divide, but because it presents challenges to epistemological access. Post-COVID-19, online teaching/learning is likely to form a greater component of learning programmes at

South African universities, and lessons can be learned from the current experience. Firstly, universities in partnership with government and the private sector can build on current efforts to provide free devices, data, and connectivity to all students. Secondly, feedback from academics and support staff on their experiences could be systematically captured so as to inform ongoing professional development programmes for university staff aimed at enhancing their technical and pedagogical competencies. Thirdly, feedback from students on their experiences of online teaching/learning could inform the development of future learning programmes and feed into professional development programmes offered to staff.

Currently, we can at best implement emergency remote teaching/learning in an expanded form that involves a range of different ways of mediating learning of which online learning management systems is but one medium. Furthermore, that a combination of online learning, other forms of e-learning, interactive print materials and expository texts ought to be combined in tailored ways to suit the differing needs and capacities of students.

All this being said, it is worth exploring the extent to which the pandemic has forced us to examine discourses of social justice afresh, as pertinent to the possibilities that online learning can proffer to achieve the goals of democratic teaching/learning contexts in future research endeavours. For one thing, the pivot towards online teaching/learning during COVID-19 has forcibly reminded us of the inequalities that exist in South African society generally, and in higher education in particular, and consequently why the decolonial project is an imperative as urgent as ever. The link between digital access, epistemological access and the decolonial project requires further investigation as it might (amongst other things) enable the creation of collective digital knowledge production platforms that can fundamentally challenge the complex relations between teaching/ learning by challenging the hegemony of teaching in the teaching/learning equation.

We have raised some critical issues about the affordances of online teaching/ learning in South Africa in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is inevitable that advanced technology will increasingly play a role in higher education, but underscore that it should be used to advance rather than encumber social and cognitive justice.

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A Deep Dive into
Curriculum Complexities in the
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Abstract

As the steering committee of a national higher education collaborative project called the New Academics' Transitions into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), we have been challenged to re-conceptualise an alternative theorisation and implementation of our residential professional development programme for online migration, given the challenges of COVID-19. Using *Ubuntu* as a theoretical infrastructure, we pause at this juncture to reflect on and re-assess how to achieve NATHEP's goals and aims through the planned curriculum, now in online mode. Drawing on a critical framework developed by the project to guide its curriculum, pedagogy and methodology, we

undertook a critical autoethnography in the form of 'deep dive' reflexive explorations to engage in an in-depth analysis of curriculum complexities in times of change. We assert that while the emergence and interplay of Positionality, Relationality and Reflexivity are important constructs and mechanisms shaping our work, they are significantly more critical now that the project is moving to a different mode of delivery. As academic staff developers, we foresee that more effort and vigilance will be needed now in holding the space and facilitating engagements so that no one is marginalised, alienated, socially excluded, or left behind. Through our deep dive, we offer important insights through the project's critical curriculum, pedagogical and methodological framework that might be beneficial for other academic programmes and projects pivoting to an online mode.

Keywords: professional academic staff development; critical curriculum framework; positionality, relationality, reflexivity, deep dive

Introduction

The world is currently grappling with COVID-19, an unprecedented pandemic that has disrupted life as we know it, challenging us to prepare for an uncertain present and future. In Higher Education (HE), COVID-19 is forcing a radical re-imagination of traditional approaches to learning and teaching to enable remote emergency teaching and online facilitation of curricula. An emergent tension at universities nationally is that while the academy is being challenged to salvage the academic year through whatever means possible, academics' and students' inequities in relation to relevant facilities and capacity for online and remote engagements, persist.

COVID-19 amplifies the already present contestations and systemic challenges in the sector related but not limited to improving student access and success; positioning university education as serving the public good (Singh 2001); responding to the calls for decolonised curricula (CCWG 2018; Wa Bofela 2017); and developing contextually responsive curricula that promote transformative values, attitudes and actions in higher education (CHE 2016). Parallel to a national agenda for transformation, universities are urged to commit to alleviating the scourge of poverty, unemployment and inequality by enabling social mobility, social cohesion and student access and success (DHET 2018) through relevant curriculum offerings.

As academics who serve on the steering committee (SC) of a national HE collaborative project, we have been challenged by COVID-19 in many ways. The social distancing protocols and lockdown mean that we cannot continue with the planned NATHEP curriculum, goals and deliverables; all of which were premised on face-to-face pedagogical and social interactions between facilitators and participants.

The COVID-19 moment has forced us to pause, in order to reflect upon and re-assess the project's goals and aims in light of the national drive to migrate the academic project to an online platform. We are cognisant that our participants, who are academic staff developers across 10 universities, are differently able to respond to their respective institutions' and projects' move to remote teaching. Making a decision to take the project online compounds participants' already challenged workloads. This, in turn, makes the current demands from NATHEP, additional and onerous.

About the NATHEP Project

This study reports on a national collaborative project called New Academics' Transitions into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), funded by the University Capacity Development Plan (DHET 2017). It emerged from recognition that staff development capacity needs to be enhanced in relation to new academic induction programmes. NATHEP was designed as a collaborative project to focus on academic staff developers or practitioners in the field who are responsible for induction at their universities and who could be in a position to influence how new academics transition into HE (Clegg 2008). New academics, often appointed for their disciplinary expertise and research capacity, are not always equipped to teach in HE (Brew 2002). They resort to a 'common sense' or a 'teach-like-I-was-taught' approach (Oleson & Hora 2014). Professional development for new academics has thus become an established feature of HE, nationally and internationally, over the past decade (Gosling 2014; Fanghanel & Trowler 2007). The successful completion of such programmes has become an accepted standard and is often a requirement of probation (Sales 2014; Stefani 2004). The rationale is that new academics, if properly inducted and armed with appropriate pedagogical knowledge about teaching, learning, assessment, quality frameworks, student experiences, research integration, scholarship, and professional activities (Fanghanel & Trowler 2007; Ramsden 2003), will be able to contribute to transformation of

the system by enabling student success.

New academics are expected to create innovative and student-centred spaces so as to address a diverse range of student backgrounds, histories, and needs using a social justice approach. For new academics, transforming the curriculum and their pedagogy is a tall order. They desperately seek out professional guidance and support to face the challenges in their disciplinary and curriculum contexts with confidence. However, academic staff developers have not necessarily had the commensurate experience in these areas either. To transform HE, academics need to adopt a scholarly, critical, contextualised, and professional approach to teaching (Behari-Leak 2017). For new academics, such an approach has to be embedded in a well-theorised and conceptualised approach to how they are inducted into HE teaching. For academic staff developers, they need to re-learn and co-learn how to embed these lenses in their professional development learning and offerings.

NATHEP engages with ten national universities, identified on the basis of where formal induction practices are non-existent or self-identified as needing enhancement. Two academic staff development representatives from each university had to attend all project engagements, share the workload for their university-based project tasks and co-create and implement their customised induction programmes. While the target audience over the period (2018-2020) is the 20 academic staff development practitioners, the next intended beneficiaries of NATHEP are new academics, with the ultimate beneficiary being the student and student success.

NATHEP has a SC made up of five academic staff developers from a diverse range of institutions. These academics were invited because they have considerable experience in convening successful induction programmes for new academics at their own universities. The SC is tasked with the implementation of NATHEP's Project Plan, but are also instrumental in facilitating aspects of the curriculum that engage with epistemic, ontological, pedagogical, and methodological domains.

Theoretical Framing and Research Design

The theoretical framing, guiding both NATHEP's methodology and research outputs, draws on critical realism (Bhaskar 1998) and social realism (Archer 2000). The overarching research goal is to explore how and why structures, culture, and agency shape current induction practices, and whether these serve

to include or exclude new academics and students in HE. The research design is further concerned with agential framing within a social justice context and agenda in South African HE.

To inform and guide the project work, NATHEP uses Bhaskar's (2010) Seven Scalar Being (laminar) as a heuristic. The laminar allows for significant depth of analysis, as well as conceptualisation of social interaction and agency at different levels of context and relationality. The concept of relational agency is crucial to how academic staff developers work with new academics to mediate their contextual conditions. Relational agency is also a form of collective agency that professional development programmes need to embrace, given the interrelated nature of the university, and HE as a structural and cultural social system. The Seven Scalar Being (Bhaskar 2010) guided the design of each of the facilitated engagements with participants in the NATHEP workshops. Through this heuristic, NATHEP was able to explore and analyse the contextual levels that shape our work.

The central question guiding NATHEP is: does the critical professional development (Kohli *et al.* 2017) approach embraced by the project, create the necessary and sufficient conditions for the positive exercise of responsive agency required by academic staff developers from differentiated institutions in the current moment? In the COVID-19 crisis, we add an additional analytical level, namely: how will NATHEP address its own research focus in the mode of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)? The complexity of the HE context currently makes an immediate answer difficult, but we will attempt to answer this by first looking at what NATHEP understands by critical professional development through its own critical framework for curriculum change.

A CRiTicAL Framework for Curriculum Change

To create well-theorised and customised induction programmes for each university that respond well to institutional, regional and national challenges, the SC members adopted a grounded approach and methodology to curriculum design. This took into account what was already in place at each university, and their historical and social context. Emerging from the tenor and texture of the work completed by 2019, NATHEP created a critical framework to guide its curriculum decisions, pedagogy, and methodology. We use the acrostic 'CRiTicAL' to focus on key concepts, discussed below, to ensure that

criticality is uppermost in our project deliberations. We seek to create our own understanding of a curriculum model relevant to a global South context that speaks to the integrity of who we are and our work.

The CRiTicAL framework is used in conjunction with the Seven Scalar Being (Bhaskar 2010) to complement and locate the work in specific domains of practice. The aim is to cumulatively and incrementally build a relevant and legitimate foundation of critical principles and praxis for induction that are embedded in a national vision for a transformed HE in RSA. Each component of the CRiTicAL framework is integral to the curriculum goal, aims and deliverables and is unpacked in relation to NATHEP's curriculum and its epistemic-onto-pedagogical encounters. We comprehend a professional development curriculum to be one that engages critically and reflexively with the 'when, where, why, how, who, and what' of HE. Using these lenses, NATHEP engages the HE field and encourages participants to conceptualise 'curriculum' beyond technical and instrumental definitions (Roxå & Mårtensson 2016). We are guided by the realist question: what works for who, in what context and why?

A CRiTicAL Framework for the NATHEP Curriculum

The 'C' in CRiTicAL stands for the *conceptual,* involving the considered, creative, and thoughtful ideation of concepts. Conceptual frames require significant consideration given the systemic conditions across an inequitable sector such as ours, in South Africa. The much-needed critical agency and social justice lenses are often not readily included in current induction practices or in the repertoire of academic staff development as a field. Critical agency in both disciplinary and departmental programmes is crucial, as structural and cultural contexts can serve as triggers that advance or dampen efforts, in this case, to create robust new academics' induction programmes. The *contextual* aspects relate to time, place, space, people, historicity, and socio-cultural dimensions of lived experiences. Context is understood as time and space that goes beyond geographical boundaries. We have underscored the maxim, 'context matters' in all our engagements thus far. The *critical* aspects consider issues of power, race, class, gender and other systemic underlying mechanisms. Both contexts and concepts are embedded in a critical orientation to practice and knowledge generation. This is informed by critical theory and critical pedagogy associated with social justice, equality, and change.

The 'R' in CRiTicAL stands for *responsive,* which refers to thinking and action that is decisive, swift, and integrative in relation to present challenges. The 'cascading' model of staff development used in NATHEP encourages an approach to curriculum praxis that is responsive. It involves academic staff developers who have identified a need to come together in a bi-directional professional development engagement. Academic staff development is thus a unit of analysis and a sociological practice in NATHEP that has been designed to strengthen and support professional staff development through an inclusive, socially just and transformative curriculum.

The 'R' is also about being *reflexive* in using reflection for forward action. The NATHEP curriculum works reflexively by exploring what it means to engage with enabling and constraining conditions at national, institutional, faculty, departmental, teaching, and learning levels. This is in relation to designing well-considered, theorised, and contextualised models of induction relevant to new academics at differentiated universities. The 'R' is also relational in the sense that academic staff developers have to facilitate sessions and engage with their new academics through induction programmes. The project aims to enable new academics to understand contextual constraints and influences on their teaching in their university settings. They are encouraged to see their own potential as change agents who can adopt effective curricula, pedagogic, and assessment practices so as to respond to challenges across a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and institutional contexts. New academics in turn, influence the quality of teaching and learning conditions for their students. The intended and ultimate beneficiaries of NATHEP are students.

We also have *re-centred* induction programmes to respond to the call for a decolonial pedagogy (Mignolo 2013; Walsh 2003) by foregrounding Africa as our locus of enunciation. This is important in order to address the experiences of mainly black students, who still feel alienated, marginalised, and invisible within the university. It is hoped that through effective induction programmes, new academics who are better equipped will be in an informed position to engage effectively with their students who will then be better able to complete their studies and succeed.

Curriculum content needs to be *relevant* to the needs of all and to the context. We acknowledge that the HE context can be a complex space for new academics and staff developers alike and one-size-fits-all, generic models and approaches may be inadequate.

Professional development practitioners need ongoing development too, as they are equally challenged by the complexity and contested nature of the changing HE landscape.

Many find themselves between a rock and a hard place, having to occupy a third space between university management and academics in the various faculties (Behari-Leak & Le Roux 2018). In 'commissioning' this project, the DHET has understood and appreciated the need to develop and support professional staff providing professional support for teaching (DHET 2018). NATHEP was therefore conceptualised as a 'cascading model' of staff development with the various beneficiaries in mind.

The 'T' in CRiTicAL stands for theorised praxis, which refers to using theory as a functional mechanism to explain, trouble, problematise, confirm, affirm, and position thoughts and ideas that relate directly to praxis. Studies show that the way in which academics teach proves extremely important because teaching is neither a neutral endeavour nor a common-sense or craft activity. Disciplinary knowledge alone or holding a PhD in a disciplinary area is not a licence to teach or the basis for experience in pedagogical engagement. In fact, 'disciplined' knowledges have historically constrained pedagogical approaches, and have failed to engage with how students' backgrounds, history, and context affect the teaching and learning process.

The 'A' in CRiTicAL stands for authentic, and is concerned with genuine commitment and original thinking towards enhanced practices and deep change. Since 2015, universities have been trying to respond to calls for decolonisation of the curriculum by student activists insisting that *who teaches* matters (Kessi 2015). They claim that the lack of diversity in teaching staff, amongst other things, results in a dearth of a representative teaching body and role models to attend to the needs of diverse student groups who struggle with issues of identity, cultural displacement, and language. Academics who are not reflexive about how their positionality, background, and cultural values shape students in particular ways for success or failure, unwittingly reproduce socially unjust pedagogies, perpetuate high attrition and low participation and success rates. Induction programmes have to focus on the positionality of new academics, their orientations within their curricula, and their response to possible tensions.

The 'L' in CRiTicAL stands for legitimate, and refers to practice that is done with authority and gravitas, founded on authentic purpose and goals. Practice is based on context and towards the realisation of goals of all

concerned. The who (teachers) and the how (teaching methods) are important markers of change in NATHEP and play an important role in mediating the *what (content)* of teaching through knowledge production and the design of learning experiences. Historically, we have taught in an alienating and marginalising curriculum environment, where content represents examples that South African students struggle to identify with. Being a university teacher in Africa must mean something, least of all that the content used to teach concepts and frameworks draws richly on what it means to be an African in relation to the world. Situating Africa as the centre of epistemic diversity is an important positioning, one which teachers need to understand, and deploy in their teaching practices.

Can NATHEP Cascade in the Time of COVID-19?

NATHEP now faces a crossroads in the form of COVID-19. The current HE instability now has also presented us with a reflexive opportunity to be flexible and agile with the NATHEP curriculum for our part as the steering committee, but also for participants and their preparedness to fully participate in NATHEP going forward. We believe that this re-focus is needed to make the existing curriculum responsive and relevant to the challenges of our time.

In this chapter, we re-conceptualise and re-imagine an alternative theorisation and creation of induction programmes that are contextualised, legitimate, relevant, and responsive, in the time of COVID-19 and beyond. To do this, we engaged in rigorous discussion and debate about the central tenets of NATHEP; its aims and deliverables; and its espoused theory in reaction to the change forced upon us now and what this means for a desired ideal for the future. We agree that the current NATHEP model might need to change in order to cater to the future induction of new academics, online. The consequences of the COVID-19 moment therefore has far-reaching consequences for how we work with the project, curriculum, pedagogy, deliverables, and participants, but also for how participants will work with their new academics in induction programmes, emerging in online or remote mode.

Methodology

The methodological framing for this study is informed by critical autoethno-

graphy (CAE), which is 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural' (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 739). It locates social life within larger systems of power, privilege, and social justice to enable one to deconstruct the impact of the dominant social order (Boylorn & Orbe 2016) on experience. It is the relational methodology of telling stories of experience (Jones *et al.* 2013), which suited our research well as we, the Steering Committee (SC) of the project chose to collaboratively explore our personal AD journeys into HE and the project.

Institutional Ethnography (IE), which is equally relevant to our study, is a method focusing on the social organisation of knowledge manifested through texts and discourses in a 'textually-mediated social organisation' (Smith, 1984, p. 59). IE uses particular experiences (and associated work processes) to analyse how social relations exist (Smith 2005) and how people align their activities with relevance produced elsewhere. Both AE and IE are critical theories in the sense that they explore taken for granted assumptions such as how minority groups, such as women, are rendered invisible. While IE is important, we selected CAE as a methodology to explore the 'politics of positionality' (Madison 2012 as cited in Boylorn & Orbe 2016), which each SC member did in the form of a 'deep dive'[1] reflexive exploration to engage in an in-depth analysis of the project's existing curriculum complexities in times of change and crisis.

Each SC member used the concepts offered by NATHEP's CRiTicAL framework to reflect on who we are, our journeys into the AD field, and our role in NATHEP in light of COVID-19. A reading and discussion of the five deep dives led to the use of a layered analysis. This resulted in the identification of three layers, namely Positionality, Relationality, and Reflexivity, which we used to code the deep dive, and conduct further analysis. A meta-analysis across each layer was conducted so as to offer multiple perspectives for re-envisioning curricula during disruptive times of structural, cultural, and social change in COVID-19.

Analysis/ Discussion

Positionality, relationality and reflexivity emerged as key conceptual and

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[1] Deep dive – this approach emerged through our brainstorming of methods for data generation.

discursive frames from our deep dive reflections into the project. Positionality plays a critical role in how we see ourselves as raced, classed, gendered, language-wielding, sentient beings. This frame has deep implications for how we do our work and how we locate ourselves in the work. The overarching aim is to reflect on how positionality can be accessed as a mechanism for social justice practices. Linked to positionality, we see relationality as the glue that binds us, and as a way of enacting the principles of *Ubuntu*. This reminds us of the need to live and work in awareness of both others and Others, and how each of us is influenced to engender a communitarian and humanitarian mode in this collaborative project. Reflexivity is a frame to ensure that we can critically reflect on who we are, where we are located, and how this relates to broader structures of power and influence. By being reflexive, we are able to be grounded in NATHEP and challenge ourselves to engage in theorised praxis.

Positionality

As encouraged by the theories of NATHEP, namely, Bhaskar's 7 Scalar Being (2010) and Archer's morphogenetic framework (2000), we should aim to understand and appreciate our positionality, which speaks to the nature of our being in the world in relation to others and the socio-cultural, historical, and structural conditions in which we find ourselves. We are thrown into a world which is not of our own making, which conditions our life chances, while also shaping our choices, orientations, and decision making.

> *As a woman of colour, who grew up on the 'wrong side' of the tracks, but now in a more privileged location, I know that, as we face this crisis, some will be worse hit than others and the lockdown measures will affect us differently, depending on who we are, where we are located and the extent to which we can exercise agency in our lives (SC4).*

Positionality speaks to the reality that who we are is inextricably linked to how we think, what we do and how we see the world. This message was echoed through all 5 deep dives.

In the next quotation, we have someone speaking as Black African male.

> *I am a Black[2] african[3] male, working as a curriculum developer based at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), in the Centre for Higher Education and Development (CHED). While I studied at various racial historical differentiated South African universities, my curriculum gaze has been influenced mostly by the sociology of education, in particular the Anglo-Saxon tradition[4]* (SC1).

What became very clear through the deep dive was that introspection of the self is a complex process that requires brave, rigorous, dialogic engagement with the inner being to shift beyond the description of the position we occupy in society and its affordances or limitations. Difficulty with this process can initially result in a focus on position rather than positionality.

> *I am an educational developer and HE lecturer in the Centre for Learning Teaching and Development (CLTD) at Wits, a research-intensive university, where I develop, coordinate and facilitate academic professional learning programmes* (SC5).

Our positionality can be traced to imposed life structures of race, class, gender, as well as the constructs of power which place us in situations of privilege and/or struggle. Acknowledging, knowing and understanding the nature of these privileges or struggles, despite our social, structural, cultural, and historical impositions, creates the potential to connect with those beings who are similar in nature. This solidarity could result in corporate agentic action that strives collectively towards emancipation, freedom and upliftment while building a transformed and a just society for all.

> *Many of our participants on NATHEP will be affected adversely in this regard. As we face the biggest crisis yet, how do we as the SC on*

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[2] Black here not used in accordance with the colonial-apartheid essentialised race categories but in reference to the structured nature of race as a social reality which continues to condition our lives even after the formal demise of the colonial-apartheid juridical framework in 1994.

[3] I am writing african in small letters as a symbol of protest against notion of racial groups which continue to be used in the post-apartheid South Africa.

[4] This is a Bernsteinian tradition also known as social realism.

> *NATHEP reach out and hold our participants through this crisis; but do so in ways that make NATHEP responsive and able to continue but without leaving anyone behind. This moment is one of reckoning: do we pause and wait and see; or do we move ahead and support as best we can?* (SC4).

Many of us, who came into the field of AD as a colonial project, have noted that our educational systems value an immersion in best practice, with an emphasis on job descriptions and titles to define who we are.

> *I experienced challenges in this new AD field as this clashed with my Science identity. Through immersion in the field and engagement with other AD 'disciplinary migrants', I began developing the AD identity and gaze. This was enhanced when I joined a Master's programme, an experience that dramatically and permanently altered my knowing, acting, being and becoming in AD* (SC2).

As such, we have become conditioned to reflect on who we are and how we think at a surface level of comfort. This often describes our positioning within society without the relevant guidance and time to reflexively ponder on our positionality and its influence on our continuous being and becoming.

> *The decolonial turn exposed how complicit I have been with neo-colonialism and revealed 'whiteness' of curriculum studies in South Africa. It exposed blind spots in dominant ways of thinking, seeing and being (my white colonial curriculum gaze) and affected my wellbeing dearly. I experienced cognitive dissonance first-hand with discomfort, tension, shame, and anxiety as I was realising that there was a lot to unlearn in order re-learn* (SC1).

Having the confidence and comfort to delve into the embodiment of who we are and how we come to know, do, and be has the potential to build critical thinking practitioners who are consciously aware of their emerging being and becoming in varied situations so that they are able to authentically respond with contextually relevant practices. It is our positionality with its powerful influence on our philosophical, theoretical and conceptual views of the world that shapes us as authentic practitioners and inherently drives our practices.

> *I realised that my knowing, doing, being and becoming was steeped in being a good follower of AD best practices designed by a particular being for a particular context* (SC5).

There is a danger, however, that practitioners especially newcomers to a field (as in NATHEP's beneficiaries) could be seduced into conflating their positionality with the positioning of the field, in terms of the so-called giants of the field, along with the field's historically valued and celebrated ways of knowing, doing, and being.

> *After initially lapping up the literature, theory and AD best practices from the 'AD giants', a sense of questioning discomfort began through my own growth in critical reflexivity* (SC5).

Curriculum practitioners then, who lack the scrutiny of their positionality and its implications could resort to compliance and mimicry of what is determined as best practice, rather than taking into consideration who they, their institutions, disciplines, curricula, and learners really are. During the COVID-19 flurry of teaching and learning delivery decisions, suggestions and hype, the positioning and positionality of knowledges and pedagogical interactions should not be silenced, but foregrounded in relation to the positionality of knowers within a curriculum.

> *We need to guard against being uncritical about what this means for the maxim 'leave no one behind'! Social inequalities have become more visible now as we witness who has access, who can exercise their agency and who still has control of their own lives. The fact that access to education is still contingent on who has the ability (financial and otherwise) to make gains of a university education, in whatever mode and both locally and globally, is telling* (SC4).

NATHEP's collaborative, communal and collegial environment serves as a fertile ground to nurture the principles of *Ubuntu* and understand who we are while being within a collective.

> *I had to allow myself to learn from and with my fellow SC members and participants* (SC3).

Deliberative engagements and explicit communication among all stakeholders are important elements of finding alternative ways of thinking about the philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual influences behind the design and pedagogic approaches of institutionally responsive induction programmes. The process opens up the opportunity for the NATHEP community to engage critically and use the influences they value to construct meaning that is contextually relevant for their institutional programmes while co-creating collective meaning for induction programmes within the HE sector. NATHEP's critical framework can enable an explicit and valued positioning of a curriculum's espoused philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual worldviews with the potential to influence equitable and fair pedagogical decision-making and teaching and learning interactions based on the positionality of all involved.

> *In attempting to apply aspects of responsiveness, reflexivity, relational, re-centredness and relevance, I see all of us as leaders… it allows everyone to think of creative ways of bringing our visions to fruition… this process is informed by considerations of equity of opportunity without allowing ourselves to be paralysed by the status quo but avoid potential blind spots* (SC3).

Relationality

Relationality is the very essence of being human. Influenced by *Ubuntu*, an African philosophy, our approach as NATHEP SC members is relational, warm, caring, and always with empathy. This is evident in ways in which we relate to each as SC members, with NATHEP participants and also in acknowledging the changing context and curricula with which we are faced. The principles of social justice and placing value on humanity inform our engagements. Acknowledging the different contexts in terms of histories and types of institutions can serve as foundations of fairness and conditions for equity. Who we are (self) and our views of reality (positionality) inform our engagements with others and the nature of our engagements with the curricula. The deliberate collaborative approaches and sense of community that prevails in NATHEP are key to advancing our collective vision in light of the current struggles that are presented by COVID-19.

Being part of the NATHEP community of practice (CoP) regardless of

positions and ranks outside the CoP allows members to learn from and with others.

> *Our collective leadership has thus far allowed us to slow down to reflect on what NATHEP has achieved, revise the delivery approach and ultimately reconstruct a continuation plan that will still benefit everyone* (SC3).

These encounters are dialogical spaces for co-learning and fosters co-creation of knowledge (Bovill 2019) rather than the traditional master-apprenticeship model.

> *My participation revitalised my scholarship through robust theoretical debates and it continues to sharpen my decolonial gaze. Decolonial pedagogies are very central to NATHEP, because we work towards realising a set of conditions enabling the dialectic processes of personal and social transformation with academics across ten participating universities* (SC1).

Within this dialogic safe space, mutual vulnerabilities allow for growth, thus propelling our agency to act. If we believe that knowledge of the world is socially constructed, it is important at all times to be sensitive to our own blind spots, which are conditioned by our positioning in the world.

> *My thinking about Transformative Education was further disrupted and extended when I joined in 2018, and my many turns in the Spiral of Learning and Becoming. Discussions and debates on the sociocultural and historical aspects of RSA were integral and influenced my practices. Engaging in critical reflexivity has revealed that while I've espoused a social justice orientation, I have acknowledged my limitation that much of my practice was empty (a term used by my fellow NATHEP SC) devoid of a deeper contextualisation for our RSA context* (SC2).

An examination of relationality within the curriculum and stakeholders of any project requires not only a deep, but honest, dialogic interaction that delves into a context of self within time, place, others, and existing historical, socio-

cultural, and structural conditions. A relational exploration of what is and what is not enables decisive choices around what can be possible given the contextual realities of limitations and possibilities.

> *The theoretical exploration related to agency made me realise that despite our being and becoming intentions, we are constrained or enabled by the historical, cultural and structural conditions we find ourselves in* (SC5).

Drawing on Maxwell's theory of astute leadership, NATHEP provided opportunities for engagements that go beyond sharing of ideas, but also visionary thinking that affirms the self and others with commitment to continue in light of the struggles with conviction, confidence and compassion (Maxwell 2016).

> *As someone who tries hard to enact leadership-as-practice, I know that we have to work together as the SC to bring ourselves to the task of resurrecting NATHEP in COVID-19, but to take it over the threshold into something that is collaborative and responsive. We have to be aware that shutting down for some people has meant shutting out. It has opened up a space for us to consider what it means to show up and stand up together, when the odds are against us* (SC4).

Relationality is evident in the interplay between Identity (who we are), Belonging (our sense of community) and Becoming-with (our co-existence). Through these entangled (Barad 2007) encounters SC members and participants 'become with' (Haraway 2008) and through their intra-action (Barad 2010). According to Barad (2010: ix) 'to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence'. The notion of intra-action, a key concept of Barad's entanglement theory is, a 'mutual constitution of entangled entities' (Barad 2007: 33), rather than inter-action, which assumes separateness and individuality. This aligns with the African philosophical approach of *Ubuntu*, which we have adopted as the underpinning philosophy for NATHEP. African ontological being, or *Ubuntu*, presupposes that being of oneself is always dependent on one's doing in relation to the other and as such becomes foundation for the establishment of humane relationships (Ramose 1999).

Reflexivity

Mafeje (1994) builds on Fanon's work in order to explain what can be expected of an engaged African intellectual. It became clear for him that material conditions (oppression) dictate that African scholars are to come up with alternative discourse. Mafeje viewed the role of an engaged African scholar to be that of a revolutionary scholar, what he called transcendent intellectual. Transcendent intellectuals are not only critical of, but also are opposed to the status quo. They are transcendent because they are revolutionary. This means that they do not take their existence for granted. Nor do they isolate themselves from the broader struggles of the society they wish to transform (Mafeje 1994: 10).

The process of reflexivity goes beyond the normal reflection process to disrupt the status quo for a socially just society. This entails purposive reflection or reflecting with the intention to take action through challenging existing norms, values, thoughts, and assumptions about reality for a transformed future.

> *The current moment offers an opportunity to think anew about my role and identity at the traditional university. To respond to the current demands, can we re-conceptualise and re-purpose traditions, conventions, canonical features and its place in our knowledge society in light of crises and to serve the greater public good?* (SC4).

COVID-19 provides NATHEP with opportunities to slow down, listen, and be responsive instead of taking a crisis management approach and rushing to adopt convenient approaches in the quest to mitigate the current dilemma and delays that could jeopardise gains made. This is a moment to challenge predetermined approaches and reconstruct fair and equitable ways and terms of engagement that are inclusive. This approach entails reviewing, taken for granted privileges, available resources, and alternative methodologies.

> *As we move from face-to-face to online mode, I have to urge others to pause to engage in critical reflexive practice on what this means for our students, ourselves, university community, and the HE sector to see how we can infuse the online approach with the necessary levels of criticality in online teaching in socially just ways* (SC4).

Engaging in critical reflexivity ought to enable the interrogation of planned curricula with clear goals and deliverables for a targeted audience, while acknowledging uncertainty, unpredictability and that which we have taken for granted.

> *Our framework was developed when we had understood the world as it was, although the future remained uncertain. What assumptions did we have about ourselves as facilitators, our participants, our contexts and the curricula, goals and plans, purposes of HE in general?* (SC2).

Reflexivity provides the opportunity to design well-considered, theorised and contextualised curricula through an exploration of enabling and constraining conditions at the global, national, institutional, faculty, departmental, and classroom levels.

> *The project in turn got me to challenge my AD induction, assimilation and following while strengthening my curriculum practices* (SC5).

The sustainability of an evolving field should not be dependent on best practice that time could render obsolete. There is a need for the agentic confidence and creativity of a collaboration of practitioners who are able to draw on their own and the collective's inner dispositions of criticality, resilience and change to tackle the complex and unknown from a multitude of perspectives.

> *Theorisation and analysis of our scholarly practices led me to believe that sustainability of the changing AD field will depend on growing best practitioners and not best AD practices. Best practitioners have the ability to question and create contextually relevant and responsive practices* (SC5).

Drawing on the critical framework, the current COVID-19-moment and future unknown moments require resilient, dynamic, critically reflexive and reflective, conceptually and contextually responsive practitioners, who are able to disrupt their taken for granted assumptions in their continuous moments of being and becoming. Relational, authentic and legitimate practitioners who are adept as agents of change and critical thinkers, are required in order to navigate contextual realities with ease and confidence in who they and their curricula

currently are, while being open to the possibilities of who they and their curriculum can become.

Online Migration in the Time of COVID-19

As we prepare for migration of the project in its next phase, COVID-19 has prompted us to rethink our modalities for implementation and also to imagine anew our curricula for NATHEP. This requires disrupting our assumptions regarding facilitation, participation, curricula, and praxis, among other aspects, that will influence the design of the NATHEP going forward. We are aware now, for example, that who we are, as facilitators and participants in the contact mode, will be different in an online mode. As facilitators, we will need to spend time re-establishing relationships with the awareness that people do feel 'strange' on camera, where this mode might hyper-visibilise aspects that are less important in contact mode, such as appearance, voice, accents, and so on. In the same way, the online mode has the ability to mask and silence people as it is difficult to engage everyone, all the time, especially when cameras are off, and people are distant. Facilitation of workshops and engagements in the online mode will require a different facilitation style, and an emotional vigilance regarding how people feel about engaging and whether they feel comfortable enough to participate fully.

Who our participants are, their knowledge, dispositions, lived experiences (and their expertise), how these are being legitimated or not, and the extent to which they are able to engage relationally with their stakeholders during this current global crisis, will have to be considered and integrated meaningfully.

The knowledge, curriculum and conceptual frames of NATHEP will have to be tempered in the new phase to keep them relevant and responsive and to foster reflexivity through robust theoretical tools to deal with the crises facing HE within a re-centred (South) African focus. Our next workshop therefore has to be carefully conceptualised and implemented so that positionality, relationality and reflexivity, and their interplay, which are key tenets of the project, are amplified rather than muted, as we engage on the topic of the induction of new academics into the university.

We will need to keep contact before and after the workshop to ensure that participants feel 'held' and know that the workshop is not a once-off, ad hoc event but part of a larger narrative of the project. This will have to be

recapped more frequently. Another way of ensuring that these three constructs are upheld is by investing time in a 'check-in' session, where each participant and as a university pair, can share their challenges and insights with the whole group. This will go a long way to maintaining the community that was built in the face-to-face mode. It will also ensure that relationality is uppermost in our interactions. We will also invest time in exploring strategies for online teaching and facilitation so as not to assume that everyone is equally prepared for this new mode of engagement in their own contexts. Case studies, which each university will be compiling on their contextually relevant induction programmes, will also include the pivot to online teaching in order to reflect on the gains and losses of the different modes, both in their own practices, but also for new academics who have to be inducted to HE in an online mode. All of these aspects are crucial for criticality and authentic HE practices that embody and value deep change and the sustainability of ourselves, others, and our social and environmental systems.

Conclusion

Given the disruption caused by COVID-19, this chapter explored how academic staff/professional developers on the steering committee of NATHEP re-conceptualised and re-imagined an alternative theorisation and purpose of induction programmes for a possible online migration in the time of COVID-19. We found that our national and collaborative project has had to be robust, flexible and agile in this crisis, and in possible moments of change. We note that it is important to consider how a project's theory of change prepares its participants to be reflexive in terms of methodology, outcomes, and the planned curriculum, when the 'business-as-usual' mode is disrupted.

Using a CRiTicAL framework developed by NATHEP to guide its curriculum, pedagogy, and methodology, the authors undertook 'deep dive' reflections to create a renewed understanding of who they are, their roles on the project, and how they could reshape the project to be reflective of a curriculum model relevant and responsive to a Global South context, and one that speaks to the integrity of who they are and their work. Through these collective reflections, we assert that the emergence and interplay of Positionality, Relationality, Reflexivity are important constructs that shape our work and these need to be re-imagined and refocused in times of crisis, so that no one is left behind or socially excluded. These new understandings have

serious implications, not only for how NATHEP works with its own participants, but also for how participants will work with their new academics in induction programmes emerging in online or remote mode in the future. The consequences of COVID-19 now will therefore have far-reaching consequences for how we work with NATHEP, its curriculum, pedagogy and deliverables in the post-COVID-19 phase in the future.

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The Emergence of the Lockdown University: Pitfalls, Challenges, Opportunities

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally disrupted our way of life and has resulted in international panic over the closure of borders, universities, businesses, organisations and the transport system, in an effort containing what is seen as the ever-increasing community spread of the virus. Universities in particular, have not been immune from this crisis, with most of them grappling to finish the academic year, ensure quality in the curricula itself, and move towards online methods of teaching and learning as a substitute for contact classes. In this chapter, I theorise what I term the 'lockdown university', a quarantined university that pretends that it is still operating as 'business-as-usual', and which still attempts to reinforce its traditional practices and institutional behaviour during the COVID-19 crisis. I argue that the traditional 'business as usual' approach cannot account for our current realities and challenges, and that we need to rethink: 1) the purposes of the (lockdown) university; and 2) the potential implications that the lockdown university may have for teaching and learning, going forward. I draw on the late Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci's notion of the organic crisis to not only theorise the current inherent and structural challenges facing the public university, but also to propose some philosophical and empirical solutions regarding reconceptualising the purposes of the lockdown university, enacting decolonial curricula, and strengthening teaching and learning in this new reality.

Keywords: lockdown university, higher education, COVID-19, curricula, teaching and learning, decolonisation

Introduction

COVID-19 has fundamentally disrupted our way of life and has resulted in many countries battling to respond to the pandemic through shutting down the transport system, schools, universities, companies and the economy in general. Globally, it has resulted in millions of people getting infected, with thousands unfortunately succumbing to the disease (see World Health Organisation 2020). This has forced us to come up with an interdisciplinary approach in response to the growing community spread (see Bai *et al.* 2020; World Health Organization 2020; Xu *et al.* 2020). Universities, like all sectors of the economy, have also been fundamentally disrupted by this pandemic, with academics under great strain and pressure to finish the academic programme through various online learning platforms in an effort at completing the academic year. Prevalent in this operational logic is the implicit and often taken-for-granted assumption that it can still be 'business as usual' at the university, and that resorting to the virtual teaching and learning pedagogies is a potential substitute for contact classes, and, in some instances, a *better* pedagogical option. More troubling is another emergent assumption that students (and academic staff) will be able to cope and adjust to this new reality without due consideration as to whether they have access to a safe shelter, working computer/laptop, data, internet access, food, and other factors that greatly influence and shape learning.

In this chapter, I theoretically reflect on the emergence of what I term the 'lockdown university' as a result of the COVID-19. I reflect on the lifeworld in the time of COVID-19, foregrounding the purposes of the lockdown university, the need for (decolonial) curriculum imagination during this disruptive period, and implications for teaching and learning in the lockdown university. I rely on the late Italian philosopher Gramsci's notion of the organic crisis to think through the internal structural and crippling challenges facing the academy during this disruptive period, and the potential solutions to the crisis (Adamson 1983; Cox 1983; Simon 2015). I end the chapter with some philosophical and empirical recommendations on the need for a social justice understanding, particularly in the university triad, namely: academics, students, and the (lockdown) university. This is in order to make sense of the new reality and interrogate the required solutions. I now turn to exploring the disruptions in the university.

The Public University: Purposes, Contestations, Challenges

Dutch philosopher Biesta (2009) argues that there are three dialectical purposes of education in society. Firstly, we have the qualifications aspects, which deals mainly with the provision and transmission of education to the young; in this context, the students in the university. This is where we see the inculcation of skills, competencies, and attributes to the young in an effort to enable them to negotiate social reality and obtain employment. The second purpose of education is 'socialisation', where education also concerns the hidden and implicit induction of students into the norms, values, and beliefs of a particular society. This alignment of education with the social, economic and political orders reflects Bourdieu's (2011) notion of cultural capital, where students gain access to the official and recognised habitus that they will need to negotiate beyond the family and religious community (Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam; 2019a; 2019b). The third purpose of education for Biesta (2009) is what she refers to as 'subjectification', which largely concerns students becoming independent in their thinking, being, and acting. While 'socialization' is about being 'groomed', 'raised', 'inducted' and 'taught' how to behave and adapt to society, 'subjectification' is inherently about critical reflection on, and challenging the things that we take for granted in society, troubling our assumptions and conceptions of what is 'normal' and 'acceptable'. In this lockdown university context, how do we design curricula in such a way that it stimulates students and fosters criticality and critical engagements while trying to navigate and balance the disruptive nature of COVID-19 in our planning?

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged while many universities in the global South[1] are currently trapped in protracted struggles to 'reform', 'transform' and 'decolonis' the public university (Badat 2017b; Dey 2019; Hlatshwayo & Shawa 2020). The emergent student protests have often shone a spotlight on the alienating and colonising nature of curricula in the Global South, and the need to de-commodify the public university away from the

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[1] The global South refers to the epistemic alliances and relations shared by those who have the common experience of colonisation and apartheid (Gordon, 1983, 2005, 2011). It should be noted that these alliances are not necessarily physical, and are largely epistemic and intellectual, in an effort to re-centre Othered knowledge systems (see Comaroff & Comaroff 2012).

neoliberal logic that sees students as fee paying 'clients' accessing the 'curriculum goods' of the university (Klein & Jenkins 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017; Ruddock 2018). Calls for transformation in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, India, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, Latin America and others, have sought to challenge the continuing epistemic inequality between Eurocentric thought and indigenous knowledge systems, and the emerging neoliberal regimes of academic productivity, performance management, and the presupposed efficiency (see De Sousa Santos *et al.* 2016; Sanchez 2018; Thaman 2003). In the South African context, the 2015-2016 student movements highlighted the Eurocentric and colonial nature of the South African higher education landscape, with the need to re-centre African epistemic traditions in curricula and de-centre and provincialise Euro-American thought (Maxwele 2016; Ngcobozi 2015; Ramaru 2017). Thus, even before the COVID-19 period, Hlatshwayo and Shawa (2020) and others had already called for the need to reflect on the purposes of higher education in light of the academic disruption and ethical call for transformation currently occurring in the global South (Badat 1994; Council on Higher Education 2008).

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many universities closing their campuses, sending students back home, and resorting to online teaching and learning methods in an attempt to cope with the new normal. Driven by the national and international calls to self-isolate, the stay at home orders, and public lockdowns to reduce the community spread of the disease, universities were forced[2] to close down their campuses to at least guarantee the public safety of students and staff. Life in the lockdown university has resulted in academics being under pressure to move their teaching and learning material online aimed at ensuring that curriculum offerings continue at various universities. Online teaching is largely seen in emergent discourses on 'remote teaching', the 'rush to the finish line', 'staff wellbeing' and 'cognitive dissonance' in describing teaching during the COVID-19 period. For Maringe (2020), there is a vast amount of scholarship on distance education and teaching and learning that contact universities still need to be acquainted with before they 'jump' into online pedagogies:

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[2] I am using the word 'forced' loosely, as many universities largely agreed with the World Health Organization and their national government's guidelines on reducing the spread of the COVID 19.

> First is the fact that both staff and students do not quite know how to conduct university business in the distance mode. There is a vast and complex scholarship of distance learning, which traditional universities are not quite up to speed with (Guardia 2016). Mere posting of teaching and learning materials on platforms such as SAKAI without the underpinning Pedagogies is likely to negatively affect both quality and effectiveness of students learning. Secondly, the transition to online learning is often thought of as a cheaper option. There is a significant amount of human resource and technological support needed to sustain a meaningful online learning (Bates 2016). The initial costs of setting up effective online education are quite substantial and many universities will not have budgeted for this in the current academic year. The tendency will be to turn to cheaper online options which may negatively influence both quality and effectiveness (Maringe 2020).

In this chapter, I trouble the emergent challenges facing the lockdown universities in the ongoing efforts with the 'business as usual' approach through online teaching. I suggest possible epistemic solutions that might help alleviate some of the challenges to help the academy, academics, and students. I now turn to the theoretical framing of the study, namely, Gramsci's notion of the organic crisis.

Theoretical Insights: Gramsci and the Organic Crisis

Writing about the challenges that were confronting Benito Mussolini's fascist government in Italy, Gramsci (1975) suggested what he terms the 'totality bloc', that is, the crisis that is faced by the ruling class in being unable to claim their legitimacy and control in society (Adamson 1983; Cox 1983). He argued that an organic crisis emerges when the ruling party ceases to have monopoly over the major political decisions in society, and people begin to subvert, think or respond counter-hegemonically (see Gramsci 1975). The organic crisis occurs when people themselves cease to believe in and accept the word of the national government and begin to move to abandon their political party affiliations. For Gramsci, this is a historical, political, ideological and internal structural crisis that emerges in a country when people, not only cease to believe in the *official* structures of government, but also begin to socially

construct alternatives sources of belonging, acceptance and recognition for themselves outside of the formal and legal authority and its political structures. This crisis of legitimacy occurs when the State no longer enjoys the public confidence of the people. This has been seen globally with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in Iran, the Mugabe dispensation in Zimbabwe, the Maduro administration in Venezuela, the Geun-hye dispensation in South Korea, and increasingly the Donald Trump administration in the United States. There is emerging mistrust between what is seen as the 'deep state' and the citizens it governs, which is designed to build suspicion, distrust, and antagonism against democratic state institutions. This results in people generally believing they are better off without the intervention of the State or its governing institutions (see Parmar 2017).

Gramsci scholars such as Rancière (1995), and Laclau and Mouffe (see Mouffe 1993; Laclau & Mouffe 2000) argue that central to Gramsci's philosophical contributions is the idea that democracy should be underpinned by conflict and the potential emergence of what Rancière (1995) refers to as the 'political'. That is, the way of being together that enables and legitimates irrevocable difference, without physical conflict. Put differently, democracy is that which creates the conditions of possibility for the emergence of (political) difference without forcing assimilation, co-option or agreement.

More recently, Badat (2017b) and Hlatshwayo (2019) have advanced Gramsci's work on the organic crisis as a theoretical lens by means of which to examine the challenges facing South African universities. In this chapter, I contribute to this emerging body of work that looks at the South African academy as not only structurally differentiated and fragmented, but also as an existential organic crisis in responding to the 2015-2016 ethical demands for transformation and decolonisation. I argue, the emergent COVID-19 has added to these challenges. I now turn to this discussion more closely.

The Lockdown University: Its Potential (Inclusive) Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity to critically reflect on the purposes of the contemporary public university, and the higher education landscape to fashion in the Global South. The purpose of higher education remains deeply contested and challenged, with some scholars advancing the *idea* of the public university as an institution underpinned by the values of epistemic diversity (or plurality), critical engagement, and democratic

tolerance (see Badat 2017a; Heleta 2016; Hlatshwayo & Shawa 2020). One should note that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the public university in South Africa had already been facing the epistemic, cultural, and economic crisis that it still has not resolved. The crisis was critically highlighted by the student movements and progressive Black[3] academics post 2015 (Naicker 2015; 2016; Ngcobozi 2015).

The public university continues to marginalise, colonise, oppress, and depress particularly those who occupy Black ontological subjectivities (Hlatshwayo 2019; Khunou 2019; Mbembe 2016). I argue that the purpose of the public university during this pandemic is to respond to three fundamental crises, namely the epistemic crisis, the cultural crisis, and the economic crisis. The epistemic crisis refers to the continuing crisis of epistemic injustice that occurs when knowledge and intellectual traditions from the Global South continue to be pushed to the periphery of the academy, with Euro-American thought remaining dominant and central to its curriculum design (Arday & Mirza 2018; Fay 2018; Grech 2015). We need to incorporate the rich and diverse indigenous knowledge systems, Subaltern Studies, African American Studies, Africana Philosophy, the Caribbean philosophical traditions and other intellectual formations and traditions from the global South, in an attempt to re-centre, in our curriculum imaginations, these othered knowledge systems. By calling for the re-centring of 'Othered' epistemic traditions in curriculum design during this COVID-19 crisis, I am not calling for the epistemic erasure of simply rejecting all European and American knowledge. Rather, I am calling for the re-centring of African and Global South epistemic traditions, so that they can reclaim their place in curricula and can be valued, recognised, and legitimated in the broader ecosystem of knowledge. Heleta (2016), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Mbembe (2016) argue that the current curricula in the public university still reflects the colonial and apartheid roots of white supremacy and Black ontological oppression, and as such, the curricula neither help nor develop students. One of the major challenges experienced with the current drive to move teaching and learning material online is that curricula is

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[3] Although I acknowledge the emergent literature that suggest that race does not exist biologically, I have purposively chosen to capitalized to highlight the sociological, real and material effects of race and racism in society, particularly as phenomenologically experienced by those who occupy Black ontological identities (see Bamshad & Olson 2003; Gravlee 2009; Kennedy 1995).

often assumed in such conversations. In other words, curricular reform is silenced. The conversation largely focuses on the transmission of knowledge and according students' pedagogic access, and not necessarily on the kinds of knowledges and epistemic traditions that are recognised, valued and legitimated in our curricula. Simply put, is there space for critical conversations and engagements on curriculum reform and the importance of decolonising knowledge during the pandemic, or is this secondary to the current struggles of ensuring that the teaching and learning agenda continues as usual without compromising the health and wellbeing of staff and students? I argue that this disruption offers us the opportunity to continue to reflect, engage, theorise and be self-reflexive on the importance of prioritising global South and African epistemic traditions in our curricula.

Related to the epistemic crisis, the cultural crisis refers to the social-political and social dislocation that Black students and Black academics continue to feel as they are isolated, marginalised, mentally abused and socially dislocated from the institutional culture. This is particularly true for those who are in historically white universities (see Kamanzi 2019; Khunou, Phaswana, Khoza-Shangase & Canham 2019; Kumalo 2018). Black students often feel that the institutional culture(s) and spatiality of the historically white university serves as an existential reminder of their structural discrimination and the social and academic challenges they constantly experience due to their non-being and non-belonging in the academy (Tabensky & Matthews 2015). Kumalo (2018) reminds us that, in historically white universities, there are struggles of legitimacy, recognition and belonging, with Black students ontologically imposing themselves on the academy in an effort to negotiate their access. For Kumalo (2018), this constructs the 'natives of nowhere' in the university, who culturally represent and signify this whiteness in the academy and in society. Universities in general, and historically white universities in particular, are involved in this social reproduction of these natives of nowhere, through various academic development programmes such as the 'grow your timber' and the national New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) initiatives designed to recruit, train, target, mentor, and develop early career Black academics, who are then employed because they fit 'neatly' and 'cleanly' into the dominant institutional culture of a department and university. For Hlengwa (2019) and Booi, Vincent, and Liccardo (2017), these academics constitutes the 'safe bets', who are employed to fit in with the broader employment equity demands of the institution, without interrupting, disrupting

or challenging the hegemonic institutional culture. Khoza-Shangase (2019) reflects on her painful experiences of navigating a depressing institutional culture and the emergent intellectual and emotional toxicity as a result:

> I have diagnosed myself as suffering from intellectual and emotional toxicity induced by racism, harassment, discrimination, and white privilege within the academy. Toxicity is defined as the degree to which a substance can damage an organism or the degree to which it can be poisonous (Campbell 2007). In audiology, my field of practice and research, there is a phenomenon referred to as ototoxicity. Ototoxicity is the property of being topic to the ear. This form of toxicity is commonly medication-induced, can be predictable but not always preventable, but can be identified, monitored and managed to varying degrees of success. Imagine I, as a black female academic with its culture, systems and policies – this substance. My journey through higher education, through a black female student to associate professor in a historically white university, resonates and mirrors this phenomenon of toxicity exceptionally well (Khoza-Shangase 2019: 42).

The existential and emotional crisis presented here by Khoza-Shangase (2019) is not a new phenomenon in historically white universities. Scholars such as Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson and Strauss (2003), Hlatshwayo (2015), and Tabensky and Matthews (2015), have highlighted various challenges that Black students and progressive Black academics often have to navigate in historically white universities. These include the 'adjustment' challenges, alternative forms of social capital to those that they have formed, as well as Black students and staff continuing to not feel at home in the academy. Thus, I argue that this disruptive period in the public university offers an epistemic and cultural opportunity to reflect on the continuing challenges, and structures of oppression that manifest themselves in historically white universities, and the need to socially produce a humanist university as we make sense of the new normal. Reflecting on how academics can cope with the anxiety, depression, and the pressures of teaching and learning during a pandemic, Knowles (2020) suggests that academics need to:

1) Take one moment at a time. You can't do everything, so pick one

thing and do it. Try to live in the present, focusing energy on this half hour, this task, this conversation. You are not the messiah, so calm down and live this one moment as well as you can. 2) Limit social media. Yes, we want to keep up with what is happening, and keep in touch with family and friends. But for the anxious, social media becomes a black hole that feeds our anxieties. Pick the times you will check social media; turn the TV and radio off until their designated times. 3) Do one creative thing every day. Creativity (painting a stone; knitting a square; drawing a picture, or a diagram [sic] of what you are working on; working on a puzzle…). 4) Reach out. Speak to at least one person everyday outside of your home – connecting with others is vital when anxiety and depression make us want curl up in foetal position. Send that voice note or message or make that call to ask someone how they are doing. 5) Be kind – to yourself, and to others. We are living in very troubling times, so be gentle even when you want to scream. Recognise that we all feel helpless and scared, so keep on imagining a better world. This will keep us sane during crazy times (Knowles 2020).

The epistemic and cultural crises in South African higher education do not sufficiently account for the crises facing the South African academy even before the COVID-19 pandemic. There is the need to make sense of the economic crisis that underpins these challenges, and to question how to respond to them during and after this lockdown in the academy. We should recognise that South African higher education is profoundly and structurally shaped by the racialised logic of apartheid (Badat 1994; 2017a; 2017b). This has resulted in a fragmented and disparate higher education system, separated across the system between the historically white universities, historically Black universities, universities of technology, and the technical and vocational education and training colleges (hereafter TVET colleges).

The state funding of higher education has increased from about R20.9 billion in 2012 to about R26.2 billion in 2016 (Universities South Africa 2020). There has been an increase of about R5,3 billion in the Treasury's contribution to the higher education sector between 2012-2016, in an effort to fund the universities and ensure they are financially solvent. This is especially the case in light of the Fallist movement that sought to make higher education free for every student whose family or guardian earns less than R350 000 per year

(Universities South Africa, 2020). Another important funding mechanism for students to access university education has been the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which currently funds 604 114 students (National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2020). Despite all these funding mechanisms, we still see hunger and accommodation challenges with students sleeping in university lecture halls and computer labs as they attempt to attend classes. Wegerif and Adeniyi (2019) report on the painful challenges of food insecurity in South African universities, with 64.5% of students at the University of the Free State and 55% at the University of KwaZulu-Natal indicating that they were struggling to access food. Thus, in our push for online learning, we need to be critical about who our students are, the structural challenges that they are facing, and to what extent the online teaching and learning could still continue in our present context. I turn now to this idea more closely.

Teaching, Learning and the Pandemic

With all the current challenges facing the public university during this lockdown period, teaching and learning is arguably central. Universities have begun to conceptualise teaching and learning as the 'dumping' of curriculum material online in an attempt to salvage what is increasingly becoming a lost academic year. The operating logic of this discourse of salvaging the academic year, is largely driven by the need to ensure that it is 'business as usual' at the university, and that the university calendar, its ceremonial traditions and norms cannot be disturbed, and should continue as normal, albeit online. This insistence on the reestablishment of 'normalcy' and its social order presents a couple of challenges. Firstly, it reduces the pedagogical shift to entail the mere *uploading* of material online. Secondly, it forfeits the social justice and critical engagement agenda that is often required when teaching and learning is concerned. Academics are now under pressure to upload as much material as they can online to claim that they had made curricula 'accessible', without firstly asking accessible to who? Whose agenda is being served by online teaching and learning? This online teaching and learning regime align with the state sanctioned, World Economic Forum developed, discourse of President Cyril Ramaphosa[4] regarding South Africa needing to embrace the 'fourth

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[4] Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa is the current state President of South Africa. He has been active in promoting this vision of South Africa as having the potential

industrial revolution' and its online pedagogies. This includes acknowledging the plight of the Black working class students located in the township and rural areas who would struggle with access to data, requisite electronic devices, shelter, food, a conducive environment, and training to handle the pressures and demands of online teaching and learning (Heffernan, Nieftagodien, Ndlovu & Peterson 2016; Hlalele 2012; Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam 2019a). Failure to respond to the above, will result in the reinforcement of inequality of the educational experience between middle to upper class students (who will be able to successfully participate in online pedagogies), and those who are still structurally trapped in the township and rural areas (who will continue to struggle to navigate online teaching and learning). In Hlatshwayo's (2015) study on first-generation Black working class students' experiences in a historically white university, one of the participants, Ntuthuko, commented that:

> The culture of the university systematically excludes those that are different to it. For your humanity to be respected you have to assimilate to the institutional culture of the university. A Black student from a township or rural parts of South Africa particularly from the Eastern Cape is constantly told that you are backward because you have a bad fashion taste, you are computer illiterate and you cannot speak English properly, in a nutshell you are not good enough [...] The student than embraces the inferiority complex, 'I am not good enough for [Rhodes University]'… (cited in Hlatshwayo 2015: 77).

Thus, if we are not careful, our pace and speed to get everything online could potentially lead to the unintended consequences of reinforcing technological and virtual inequality, marginality, and exclusion in society. This can result in millions of Black working class students being socially construed as the *natives of nowhere*, locked out of the online curricula and forced to stay longer in the academy as a result of failing to meet the demands of assessment and risking academic exclusion. We need to rethink teaching and learning during the time

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to have 'smart cities', '5G' and massive technological advancement and innovation in an effort at creating a utopia of a liberal hyper-capitalist western society in South Africa (see for example Harvey 2019; Shoki 2019; Sutherland 2020).

of a pandemic. We need to ensure that all financially deserving students have access to technological devices, Wi-Fi, a conducive environment, food security, and shelter.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The novel COVID-19 pandemic continues to rupture our lives and has resulted in millions of people getting infected and thousands losing their lives (WHO, 2020). In an attempt to contain both the potential community spread of the virus and the resultant deaths, many countries have instituted a broad lockdown initiative. Public universities in the Global South in general, and in South Africa in particular, have also been placed under lockdown, with academics and students under intense pressure to cope with emergent demands. In this chapter, I have interrogated what I refer to as the lockdown university, an institution under quarantine as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. I argue that the pressures to move teaching and learning online have often ignored the curriculum design, the purposes of the university, as well as the importance of inclusive teaching and learning strategies in the university. I suggest that is important for us to consider three crises facing higher education at the moment, that is: the epistemic, cultural and economic crises, before any successful teaching and learning takes place. Furthermore, I argue that it is important that Black working class students have access to technological devices, WIFI, food, shelter and a conducive environment so that the new online pedagogies are rooted in social justice and equality. Failure to resolve the outlined crises and the structural issues as a prerequisite for any (virtual) teaching and learning will result in the creation of natives of nowhere, who will struggle academically, socially, and psychologically. Thus, based on the above conclusions, I make the following recommendations. Some historically white universities such as the University of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town have already started to help Black working class students with laptop devices and data (Staff Reporter 2020). While this is of great value, there are already emergent tensions within the South African higher education sector with those in historically Black universities and TVET colleges feeling marginalised and forgotten as their universities do not have similar resources and reserves to assist. It ought to be considered how the government, civil society, the business community, and others could possibly step in to assist these institutions.

Scholars such as Jansen (2020) and Mnguni (2020) have critiqued the drive to online teaching and learning and have argued that the pedagogy will not be underpinned by the ethics and values of inclusive education and social justice. They have suggested that the government should be open to extending the academic semester and push the academic year beyond 2020 to cater for the disruptions and eventual reduction in the COVID-19 related infection and death rates. Further research and policy is required to explore what this extension could look like in practice regarding matriculating students, government funding, university fees, curricula, teaching and learning, degree accreditations, professional bodies, and general university operations.

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The Rise of the University without Classrooms after COVID-19

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Abstract

In this chapter we argue that university face-to-face teaching will gradually be replaced in the future with online teaching. In particular, we argue, this will happen in the light of the Fallist movement that has affected the university sector for the last five years and the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, we begin by providing a succinct overview of the history of the South African university sector and the changes implemented in post-apartheid South Africa. We specifically outline the neoliberal agenda, which became the main force driving the university. Secondly, we discuss how South Africa's new vision for higher education with its neoliberal policy agenda is nudging the university in the direction of online tuition. Thirdly, we examine the infrastructural readiness of universities for online teaching. We conclude by arguing that the financial constraints and global pressures imposed on the tertiary education sector have forced the university to implement cost-cutting measures by looking for cheaper modes of programme delivery to survive in an already financially challenging space.

Keywords: South Africa; universities; COVID-19; neoliberalism; online learning

Oscar Koopman & Karen J. Koopman

1 Introduction

All universities in South Africa, over the last five years, have been plagued by enormous student protests, which at times descended into violence. What started with an intervention against colonial symbolism at the University of Cape Town in 2015, was strategically leveraged into a countrywide demand for no fee increases (Murris 2016). At the beginning of 2016, Le Grange (2016) reports, these student protests continued with the following triangulated demands:

- (i)   free higher education;
- (ii) a decolonised university curriculum; and
- (iii) insourcing of workers [cleaners and security] at universities (for full details of the Fallist movement see Le Grange 2016; Postma 2016; Koopman 2019).

These protests over the last five years under the Fallist movement have brought uncertainty, unrest, and at times unprecedented chaos to most universities. This is because these protests forced many universities to shut down, impeding the academic project of teaching and learning. In reflecting on these protests, it is clear that many lessons were learned in how to avoid or mitigate the stopping or slowing down of teaching and learning in the future. One of the biggest lessons learned by universities was the need to invest heavily in technological tools (laptops and mobile devices), internet-based software programmes, and online learning management systems that would support online teaching where campuses were made inaccessible during the protests. In addition to the online infrastructure developments, academics have received training in how to facilitate online instruction to equip and empower them with the necessary technological skills for effective tuition. For example, at the institutions where we work, training was rolled out to all staff on the effective use of online management systems, learning management systems, and the use of open educational resources. These investments were made so as to ensure that the academic project continues in the event of further student protests that could even result in a forced shutdown of universities.

Just as the unrest, chaos, and tensions precipitated by the Fallist movement between students and management appear to have subsided at most universities at the time of the writing of this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly struck the whole world, including universities, like a tsunami.

The impact of COVID-19 is so dire that most world leaders announced some form of national lockdown. In South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa went as far as declaring a national state of disaster on the 16 March 2020 on the national broadcaster (SABC) in response to COVID-19. This was done as a mechanism to impede the further spread of the novel SARS CoV-2 virus. Some of the strategies imposed in terms of the Disaster Management Act, 57 of 2020, include a full lockdown of borders, a temporary ban on all international flights, and the closure of most government departments, schools, universities, and businesses across the country. Only essential services, such as hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, laboratories and some grocery stores, were allowed to operate. The closure of all universities meant that all face-to-face contacts, including lectures, laboratory work, conference attendance and graduation ceremonies, had to be cancelled as faculties were mandated to practise social distancing, or physical distancing, during the lockdown period.

While we are fully aware that any predictions as to what the full extent of the impact of COVID-19 will be on the country and the university would be premature, it is against the disruptive background of the Fallist movement, COVID-19 pandemic and the neoliberal agenda of government for the university such as the fourth industrial revolution, that we proffer ideas for the future of the South African university sector. These are significant phenomena and therefore generate a sense of urgency to explore with 'possibilities' and 'imaginations' with an open mind what a South African university in the near future might look like. Such imaginative speculation or reflection allow one to travel into the future, to invent new ideas and new realities and at times, new ways of doing things. According to Guatarri (2001), new possibilities are created by returning to the past or at times replacing existing models with new ones but rather in seeing current events (in this case dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic) as a new constellation of actions and behavioural changes that could take us on a new path. This new post-COVID-19 path could lead to the creation of a university without classrooms where academics and students could meet and connect online.

We begin by providing a brief summary of the changes that took effect in post-apartheid South Africa, and of the way that the neoliberal agenda of the new democratically elected government became the main driver of tertiary education. We specifically outline the impact of the neoliberal agenda on the university. Secondly, we discuss how South Africa's new vision for education

and policy initiatives built on neoliberal values has nudged the university towards online tuition. Thirdly, we investigate the infrastructural readiness of universities to implement online teaching. We conclude by arguing that the financial constraints and global pressures imposed on the university sector have forced universities to implement cost-cutting measures through cheaper modes of programme delivery in order to survive in an already financially challenging space.

2   A Brief Overview of the Rise of the Neoliberal University in South Africa

Seeing that a good historical understanding of events is critical for theoretical rigour and clarity, we commence by providing a succinct overview of changes that took place in the higher education sector, in the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa. Under apartheid, South Africa had 15 public universities and 21 public technikons, all situated within a gigantic bimodal distribution. The term bimodal refer to a higher education system designed for the minority white student population and a separate system designed for the black masses in the country. Consequently, these 36 public institutions were strictly divided along racial lines as they were classified as 'whites only' and 'blacks only' institutions. Among the 15 public universities, the 'whites only' institutions were labelled as the prestigious universities, while the 'black universities' were labelled as insignificant. This is because, under apartheid, the role of 'black universities' in the national project of socio-economic development was minimised. Consequently, these 'black' institutions experienced many economic challenges and failures, coupled with stagnation and regression (Assie-Lumumba 2006). Furthermore, significant instability plagued these universities as a result of dangerous and at times, violent 'confrontations between students, faculties, administration and government' (Waghid 2012: 71). The students who attended these universities came predominantly from impoverished backgrounds as well as broken homes and poorly resourced schools, where they were taught by mostly under-qualified and unqualified staff. The communities in which they resided were plagued with innumerable social ills, such as gangsterism, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, high drop-out rates amongst school children, and uneducated parents, most of whom had never seen the inside of a university lecture theatre.

The prestigious universities, on the other hand, were strong and stable institutions, because:

(i)   they were well resourced;
(ii) their alumni ran major industries; and
(iii) their graduates were appointed to influential positions in government.

Furthermore, they attracted the best academics, who were grounded in a strong research culture and who had well-established national and international partnerships and networks. These universities attracted affluent students, whose parents were educated or belonged to a particular social class and so could provide the resources needed to support their children. According to Waghid (2012), these universities could produce advanced-level knowledge, quality scientific knowledge, as well as technology, and were able to train highly skilled graduates for the labour market.

In the shift to post-apartheid South Africa, the new democratically elected government wanted to use education as an instrument for a more global undertaking of social transformation. One of the reasons for this shift, Peters (2004) explains, is because global politics are driven by a set of policies based upon neoliberal principles. This meant that universities had to extend their role from mainly promoting national development to advancing global development. Furthermore, it also meant that curricula had to reflect the needs of a global community that required high-level knowledge and skills to meet the increasingly growing demand for highly trained skilled labour. To drive this new neoliberal agenda of universities required new forms of corporate managerialism and the adoption of private management styles. Subsequently, South African universities were no longer viewed as mechanisms for addressing the conspicuous social inequalities plaguing communities and for facilitating the knowledge required to address these inequalities. A direct consequence of the shift from a national development agenda to the advancement of a global neoliberal agenda, Vally (2020: 3) reports:

> is the struggle for a fair, just and humane society, substituting for these unaccountable and avaricious global autocracies based on the power of money. If there is to be any hope of achieving the goal of a democratic and humane society, then abandoning the public mandate of the state is not an option.

These neoliberal ideals over the years were gradually phased into university culture through policy development and formulation. This neoliberal economic and global agenda is evident in various policy initiatives, such as the Transformation for Education and Training White Paper Act of 1997, the 1996 White Paper on Science and Technology, and The National Development Plan in 2001. These policies meant the rise of the neoliberal South African university. To drive this neoliberal agenda, the National Development Plan was drafted proposing mergers between the 15 universities and the 21 technikons created under apartheid. This merger resulted in the formation of 23 universities in post-apartheid South Africa. Other outcomes proposed by the NDP were to provide blacks from historically impoverished communities greater access to the university, so as to enhance their cognitive abilities vis-à-vis the technical and professional competencies, and to allow greater competitiveness in the labour market. According to Koopman (2019), these roles proposed in the National Development Plan for Higher Education (2001) indicate the main roles of the university as being:

(i)   human resource development;
(ii) high-level skills training; and
(iii) production, acquisition and application of new knowledge.

The aims of the NDP are aligned with *White Paper 1* on the Transformation of Higher Education (DHET 1997), which proposes the restructuring of higher education (HE) whose main aim should be to 'meet the needs of an increasingly technological economy with the capacity to participate in a rapidly changing *global context*' (Koopman 2019: 60). Koopman argues that this restructuring which took place created a new so-called 'global context' in which graduates needed to be equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills, and capabilities to use and implement in a super-complex world that is constantly changing. This means universities moved certain 'skills and capabilities' to the foreground, while other foundational 'skills' – such as critical thinking and self-directed learning – became increasingly marginalised. He points out that sixteen years later, this policy objective became substantiated by the Post-School White Paper (2013) and the National Development Plan (2013), which state that the two main objectives of the South African university are to provide students with high-level skills for the labour market, and to be dominant producers of new

knowledge. In other words, South African universities now frame their performative educational discourse in terms of 'training for basic workplace skills' and 'student performance and competitiveness'. These policy objectives are the manifestation of an entire politics of higher education based on neoliberal principles, and consequently views the training of students in terms of 'efficiency protocols'.

2.1 The University as the Primary Driver of Neoliberalism: The Future is Already Here

The South African university as a driver of government's neoliberal agenda will unquestionably continue to make knowledge expansion and technological development its primary goal. To further extend the global agenda of South African universities, which aims to gradually move towards more online and web-based teaching and learning, the President of the Republic of South Africa announced his new vision for education in 2019, which is to prepare students for the fourth industrial revolution, more commonly known as 4IR (Businesstech 2019). This new vision (4IR) for universities has been enthusiastically supported by the Department of Basic Education, the Department of Higher Education, and university administrators, despite the current economic challenges, massive digital inequalities, and unprecedented unemployment rates in South Africa (2020). Our aim is not to discuss in detail what the 4IR is about, and the potential consequences for developing countries (for full details see Schwab 2016). In short 4IR, or as Schwab (2016) reports the machine age, refers to a new raft of disruptive technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence, digital computing, 3D printing amongst various other technologies and innovations that will soon hit all mainstream industries across the globe. According to Brynjolfson and McAfee (2011), this highly advanced technological revolution, envisaged in the 4IR, will be profoundly beneficial for industry, as everything in manufacturing will be digitised to bring about more economic production, rather than environmental disruption. For this revolution to materialise, a highly skilled, technologically adept and innovative workforce is required. The production of this workforce, to operate in what Peters (2018) refers to as a cybernetic capitalistic system, must be produced by universities. This means that universities can be seen as enslaved to corporate capitalism, because to become active players on the global stage means they must produce the workforce of the future.

According to Dreyfus (2008), the shift to neoliberalism is commensurate with a shift from the knowledge economy to the digital economy. In the 4IR, this shift to digitisation involves replacing *poiesis* – the making of things – with a world of online and digital control. The shift to digitisation, as noted by Dreyfus (2008), already forms part of the outcomes for the higher education sector globally. In South Africa, these outcomes are stipulated in the White Paper for Science, Technology and Innovation (2019). The policy states:

> The lines between physical, digital and biological systems are becoming blurred, and governments around the world are planning for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In particular, *it is necessary to prepare for* how artificial intelligence (AI) and advances in ICT will change the way society and the economy function (p. 4, e.a.).

We have italicised the phrase *'it is necessary to prepare for*' so as to underscore the need for an awareness of the significance of artificial intelligence (AI) and how this will affect both culture and the economy in the future South Africa. This expression also speaks directly to all educational institutions that will need to brace themselves for massive changes with respect to the type of knowledge, as well as the mode of delivery of that knowledge to prepare students for 4IR. To put this into perspective, in the previous revolution, the focus of the university sector in developing students for the knowledge economy was on the interrelatedness of 'thought content' and 'thought process', an approach which construes the world as 'an object of thought'. In the 4IR 'thought content' and 'thought process' are replaced with code theories and functionality (Koopman 2019). Because 4IR has its roots in the notion of 'German 4.0 *industrie*', which refers to 'smart cities', 'smart industries', 'smart factories', 'smart manufacturing' and so forth (TIPS 2018). Thus, the ontogenesis of AI, which drives these smart sectors, ought at the same time to form the ontogenesis of learning, so that the student can connect with the abstract worlds of robotics and programming. This means a shift is needed in universities from common sense knowledge and theories in familiar contexts to technical knowledge and supra-commonsense knowledge. Thus, the future of the university as a digital world operating in a virtual world is already here. This world of digitisation driven by government's hidden neoliberal agenda, are gradually turning the university into a service engine,

to drive what Peters (2018: 239) terms 'an innovation hot-house of global capitalism'. Thus, neoliberal policies driving universities in South Africa will increasingly envelope the university as a digital hub of technological knowledge production. Thus, it is fair to argue that the current COVID-19 pandemic indirectly assists governments across the globe to accelerate the shift to internet-based online teaching using various learning management systems in universities.

3   The Infrastructural Readiness of South African Universities for Online Learning

Over the last two decades, the South African government, through its Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education, has invested heavily in the development of the government's ICT infrastructure. This investment was made to ensure a more equitable inclusion of the majority of the population into the modern digital world. According to the World Economic Forum Global Information Technology Report (2007), South Africa has a very modern and vibrant ICT infrastructure, with an annual investment of US$9.6 billion. Although this infrastructure is unevenly spread across the country, it was ranked by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as 37th out of 115 economies, and is considered ready to benefit from further ICT developments. Over the last three years, we have witnessed a countrywide roll-out of broadband and fibre-optic cables. This was done under the auspices of the WEF with public funding, private investment and philanthropic support under the banner of the *Internet for All* project. The main objective of this collaborative initiative, which was officially launched during the 2017 WEF meeting in Durban, was to make internet access available to all South Africans by the year 2020, at an average cost of US$65 per person.

The White Paper for Science, Technology, and Innovation (2019) states explicitly that all universities in South Africa must now start producing the much-needed graduates with the required technological skills for the future. All of these developments position the university at the centre of producing the 'creative and innovative' skills needed for the shift to a digital labour force. For example, faculties of education across the country are now expected to produce a new cohort of teachers who are trained and skilled in applying advanced technological abilities and capacities in order to prepare learners for the fourth industrial revolution, which requires specialised

technological skills. Thus, to be part of the hyper-modern world driving and driven by the technological economy of the fourth industrial revolution means that universities must produce graduates who can function optimally in an ever-changing, highly demanding technological era. To meet the demands of this digital world, most South African universities are well-prepared both in term of their technological infrastructure and institutional policies guiding teaching and learning.

For example, at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the institutional e-teaching-and-learning policy clearly states how the university 'strives to establish an online electronic presence for all offerings, being either a complete subject or modules within all academic programmes… Lecturers will be requested to enhance the online experience by adding additional electronic Learning and Teaching applications as appropriate' (CPUT 2020: 2). To meet this objective, over the last four years, the university has rolled out large-scale online-teaching training and established the Centre for Innovative Educational Training (CIET) so as to assist academics with technological support. The focus of the training was on blended learning and the flipped classroom, in order to introduce academics to various online platforms and Web 2.0 applications. Furthermore, the Vice-Chancellor promoted the idea that he and his management team is committed to the idea of one smart university. His new vision is to produce graduates that will be at the forefront of the technological age. Furthermore, he benchmarked the university's technological progress with reference to MIT, one of the most technologically advanced institutions in the world. On several occasions, he pointed to the vision of making the university the MIT of Africa. The University of the Western Cape experienced similar trends in the move towards digitisation, as their staff are already developing full online programmes for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes. If things go according to plan, these online programmes will be rolled out in 2021. All resources and online learning management systems are already in place to drive online teaching. Other examples of universities positioning themselves to go fully online are the constant migration to digitisation, such as e-libraries, open-access sites, open educational resources, and various other online databases and portals.

The COVID-19 pandemic is gradually pushing the South African uni-versity of the future into a new world of online technologies, as academics are expected to offer their courses online by using various Web 2.0 applications

and effective learning management systems. This shift to online learning together with the government's new vision of the 4IR are misaligned with the demands by students across the country for a decolonised university. A decolonised university entails exorcising all aspects of the university, including its vision and curricula, and detaching them from Western frameworks of thinking and ideas, and the inclusion of an African philosophy of thinking which places greater emphasis on the experiences, practices, beliefs, values and modes of African ways of life that are representative and distinctive of the black populations of Sub-Saharan Africa. The shift from the face-to-face classroom setting to online teaching and learning denotes a fundamental shift towards neoliberal core ideals that mainly benefits national and international corporations, shows little regard for the social consciousness and issues of its citizenry. In the process, with the shift to online learning, universities are gradually playing into the hands of neoliberal corporate villains.

4 The University Post COVID-19: The Rise of the University without Walls

At the time of the writing of this chapter more than a third of the world is in some form of lockdown to curb the further spread of the SARS CoV-2 virus. The closure of major industries such as airlines, import-export companies, retailers, live sports, restaurants, and many others have crippled the global economy. In financial terms, the United Nations has predicted that the global economy might experience a 9 trillion US dollar shortfall in global income. Developing countries could experience a 220 billion US dollar shortfall. In South Africa, the Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni, said on the national broadcaster that 'COVID-19 had placed the economy in deep recession' (SABC News, 24 June 2020). Should this happen, economists explained that our already ailing economy could shrink by a further -6.1%, while unemployment might reach unprecedented figures of more than 50 percent. A question worth asking is: How COVID-19 will impact on the university of the future?

As universities confronting the Fallist movement were already searching for cheaper ways of undertake programme delivery because of serious financial challenges, the search for some form of financial relief will now become even more significant. This search will force universities towards

adopting less expensive ways of lesson delivery. The financial strain that the Fallist movement placed on the university is unsustainable. This is because the Fallist movement forced universities into:

(i)   debt cancellation where billions of rand of student debt was cancelled;
(ii) implementing no fee increases;
(iii) offering free high education for the poor, causing universities to rely heavily on state subsidies; and
(iv) insourcing workers, amongst many other actions.

This chain of events had an adverse effect on the everyday running of the academic project, as many universities found themselves in an unsustainable economic situation. Suddenly, classrooms are found to be ill-equipped with outdated lecture theatres, inadequately resourced science laboratories, and outdated computer laboratories. Furthermore, academics find themselves in oversubscribed classrooms, with overloaded timetables, pressured into ensuring high pass rates in their classes to generate student subsidies, having to appoint part-time staff, and facing increased pressure to publish and to generate funds through research projects. Over the last few years in our universities, the issues of cost-cutting and fundraising formed part of most of our departmental and faculty staff meetings that we attended. The question that always arises is: how can we as a faculty reduce costs? This is indirectly a question about whether there are cost-effective ways or less expensive ways of delivering our programmes?

What will exacerbate the financial challenges facing many universities across the country is the financial impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Although we do not know precisely what the financial impact of the pandemic will be, we do know that state funding will be severely affected, as South Africa's economy before COVID-19 was already ailing. Given the immense impact of the Fallist movement aggravated by the immense economic impact of COVID-19, we predict that universities will gradually move towards cheaper modes of programme delivery. Rothblatt (2012) avers that one of the most cost-effective ways to ensure programme delivery and to generate more funds is to shift to online teaching and learning. By shifting to online teaching, universities can reach thousands of students pushing for maximum profits (Rothblatt 2012), which according to McCluskey and Winter (2011), require less permanent staff.

5 COVID-19 a Practice for Online Teaching and Learning

Apart from the banking sector, and various other businesses that are already operating online, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed that most services not operating online were forced to go online during the lockdown period across the globe. This shift was done in an effort to continue running their businesses. These include online grocery delivery services, online fitness classes, online telecommunications apps, online media coverage, online birthday celebrations, online funerals, as well as online teaching. Many companies had to adapt to allow their workers to work from home as a part of the new normal. Tony Frost, an economist from Ivey University, claims that the shift to online services will become one of the long-time legacies of the COVID-19 pandemic. He points out that the pandemic motivated people to move towards digitisation. In other words, if the labour market of the future will require a workforce with digital capabilities to work remotely, one of the universities' objectives through their programmes will be to produce students with the required skills.

Rothblatt (2012) points out that universities moving online is long overdue, because modern students: (i) suffer from a short concentration span and have low lecture attendance levels. Although many academics and students might deplore efforts to denigrate the traditional face-to-face classroom, universities will strategically coerce academics and students to move online in their attempts to survive as institutions. This shift to online teaching is already on the cards. Various institutions are informing their staff of this eventuality during this period so as to prepare them for online teaching. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic can be interpreted as a practice run for universities to evaluate the possibility and practicality of online teaching for the future. Drawing from Deleuze and Gautarri (2001), the conditions of our existence shape and drive our being and becoming, which in the process territorialises us. The current COVID-19 pandemic creates the possibility that we can be deterritorialised from our old ways of acting and behaving. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential deterritorialise us from life as we know it, or as we are used to it. The problem is that if derritorialisation takes place too rapidly, it can do more harm than good. So, instead of rushing the shift to an online world, we suggest a more gradual flow of life to guide and direct both students and academics to a world of online teaching in order to penetrate the porous boundaries of deterritorialisation.

6   Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the future university in South Africa as a 'university without walls' is inevitable. A university without walls means that universities in the future will shift from traditional face-to-face instruction for curriculum delivery to an online approach. This is inevitable, we believe, given the immense impact of the Fallist movement that has plagued the university landscape, that has imposed an unsustainable financial burden on the university sector. To exacerbate the current bleak financial state in which universities find themselves, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed even more pressure on the financial position of most universities. Although we are not yet in a position to accurately describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university landscape, given the fact that in South Africa we are already experiencing a recession, the impact might be more severe than from the Fallist movement. In other words, new ways of curriculum delivery will have to take effect in order to relieve the financial pressure. This means that the online university without walls is already on the cards. Life after COVID-19, although far too early to predict how it will affect us, will definitely not be the same. What we do know with a high degree of certainty is that traditions of human behaviour such as handshaking, and face-to-face teaching will definitely not be the same. Thus, this shift from face-to-face teaching to an online university is nothing but inevitable, given the South African government's entrenched neoliberal agenda for universities.

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When the Machine Stops: A COVID-19 Con-fusion of Ideas and Numbers

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Abstract

Factories, schools, places of worship, sports and travel emptied out. Governments, following *the* science, locked down. The world literally and figuratively turned outside-in. Using E.M. Forster's turn of the twentieth century short story 'The Machine Stops' as a foil, this chapter looks at the myriad responses to the spectre of lockdown, the infodemic that accompanied COVID-19, while providing a critical assessment of the special aura that has been given to Modelling. It is a chapter written in the midst of a virus impact that as soon as its obituary is written, returns, while all scientists and governments engage in the seeming Sisyphean task of flattening the curve. The discerning reader will quickly realise that the chapter is guilty of what it sets out to expose; a con-fusion of ideas. How else could it be, at a time when the only certainty is uncertainty, raising the spectre of what Lorraine Daston (2020) has called 'ground-level empiricism'.

Keywords: Modelling, infodemic, lockdown, myths

Introduction

> *People never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machine* (Forster 1979: 120).

E. M. Forster, the master craftsman of novels that exposed the hypocrisy of the English class system, took a detour in 1909 with his short story, *The Machine*

Stops. It tells of the relationship between a mother and son – Vashti and Kuno – who reside in a post-apocalyptic world, where people live alone underground and their essentials are delivered by the omnipotent Machine.

In the world of the Machine that Forster envisaged over a century ago, people only communicate via video screens. Travel is rare. Only one remaining physical book exists, *The Book of the Machine,* published by the Central Committee of this world society. People living in their isolated pods underground cannot touch or smell others, nor do they have any sense of space. In forms reminiscent of Facebook and Zoom, people only connect via the threads of the Machine. The 'clumsy system of public gatherings' had long since been abandoned.

Life is the Machine

Vashti, like most people, is sickened by the surface of the earth and cannot contemplate life beyond the Machine. Her room consists of a maze of buttons, which, when pressed, deliver water, heat, music, clothing, food, and especially communication with others. She is 'in touch with all that she cared for in the world' (1979: 113). She never leaves her tiny room, never goes out into the fresh air, never does any exercise; 'a swaddled lump of flesh … with a face as white as a fungus'.

Vashti is Happy with her Lot

Eerily, Forster seems to have already envisaged life as we know it, a prism through which we see and inhabit the world, a kind of internet which dominates intellectual life. Research involves swallowing and regurgitating what people already know from the vast archives of the Machine. Field-work on earth's surface is prohibited. One lecturer forcefully warns against 'first-hand ideas' and insists that knowledge is accumulated through ideas that must be constantly re-cycled.

One day, Kuno contacts Vashti and demands she speak to him 'not through the wearisome Machine', but personally. With debilitating angst, Vashti travels on an airship to the other side of the earth to talk with her son. It is a singular and exceptional act.

While Vashti has adjusted to and even enjoys the Machine, Kuno rails against it:

> Cannot you see, cannot all you lecturers see, that it is we that are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine? [...] It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralysed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it (1979: 131).

Vashti leaves in disgust, determined to have nothing more to do with her son.

But then the unthinkable happens. The Machine fails. The Mending Committee, Eskom-like, keeps promising to fix it. But the system finally breaks down. Mayhem ensues, with people 'crawling about … gasping for breath … yelling for … respirators, or blaspheming the Machine …' (1979: 143 - 144).

It is as if Foster had dealings with Marty McFly. With COVID-19, the machine has broken down. As the virus spreads and kills and lockdowns are imposed, a mayhem of social consequences has been let loose. How is the Machine to be started again? Ought it be?

The Thinness of Models

> *'Have you guessed the riddle yet?'* the Hatter said, turning to Alice again. *'No, I give up',* Alice replied. *'What's the answer?'* (Carroll 1898: 91).

Nothing exemplifies a world battling to respond to the virus than the way in which Big capital, philosophers and sections of the Left have responded to the lockdown, made all the more bewildering as positions have swung as widely as the approaches used. Jacob Wallenberg, Swedish heir to one of the world capital's most formidable empires, railed against the lockdowns:

> There will be no recovery. There will be social unrest. There will be violence. There will be socio-economic consequences: dramatic unemployment. Citizens will suffer dramatically: some will die, others will feel awful .… I am dead scared of the consequences to society

[…] We have to weigh the risks of the medicine affecting the patient drastically (cited in D'Eramo 2020: 23).

Philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who made his reputation with his explication of the concepts of 'bare life' and 'states of exception', argues in terms reminiscent of Forster's 'provisional dictatorship' (Forster 1979: 142), that '"The invention of an epidemic' is being used to severely restrict freedom, justifying the state of exception"' (cited in D'Eramo 2020: 23 - 24).

Boris Johnson, the United Kingdom Prime Minister initially railed against a hard lockdown. On 3 February, critiquing Wuhan-style lockdown, he thundered: 'We are starting to hear some bizarre autarkic rhetoric, when barriers are going up, and when there is a risk that new diseases such as coronavirus will trigger a desire for market segregation. Humanity needs some government somewhere that is willing at least to make the case powerfully for freedom of exchange' (Johnson 2020). As history will note, Johnson would change his position a few times as the viral crisis unfolded.

The Left, on the other hand, in the United Kingdom for example, demanded the need to enforce the lockdown. Lindsey Graham, writing in *Counterfire* (20 April 2020) argues:

> The truth is that Johnson and the Tories didn't want the lockdown… They are now frightened to lift because they are worried about what the public will say … they thought there would be a backlash against the lockdown, and they are constantly surprised that many people are dealing with it and are in support of it as a means of combatting the virus … Labour's new leader Kier Starmer's … major question has been, 'where is the exit strategy for the lockdown?' But this can only come when there is proper tracing and testing .… Business as usual will be the demand of the employers and their friends among politicians. It should not be our demand. There are many problems with the lockdown .… But the answer is to provide resources to deal with these demands .…

In parallel to Agamben's position, those who question the very veracity of the pandemic argue that flu kills more people and raising the question as to the power of pharmaceutical companies. Ian Davis, for example, argues that,

The State's and the MSM's [Mass Media] insistence that anyone who question any vaccines is some sort of whacked out, new age, science Luddite is total nonsense. No one will be permitted to question vaccines, and that fact alone should be sufficient to raise anyone's suspicion. From … the WHO and … to Imperial College the response to the C19 pandemic has been driven by foundations and pharmaceutical corporations with considerable investments in vaccine development. Of course, they would like to see global mandatory vaccination (Davis 2020a).

Meanwhile, as positions were being staked out, the travelling virus has prevented accurate estimates of key parameters such as reproduction rate, size of infected population and number of benign infections. The result has been a chaos of numbers. Second, like annual influenzas, the virus is mutating as it courses through populations with different age compositions and health conditions… Third, even if the virus remains stable and little mutated, its impact on younger age cohorts could differ radically in poor countries and amongst high-poverty groups (Davis 2020b: 7-8).

Mike Davis went on to point out that in poorer countries, during the Spanish Flu of 1918, there was a relationship 'between the flu and malnutrition, which suppressed their immune response to infection and produced rampant bacterial, as well as viral, pneumonia' (Davis 2020b: 8 - 9). He goes on to warn that,

This history – especially the unknown consequences of interactions with malnutrition and existing infections – should warn us that COVID-19 might take a different and more deadly path in the dense, sickly slums of Africa and South Asia. With cases now appearing in Lagos, Kigali, Addis Ababa and Kinshasa, no one knows (and won't know for a long time because of the absence of testing) how it may synergize [sic] with local health conditions and diseases. Some have claimed that because the urban population of Africa is the world's youngest, with over-65s comprising only 3 per cent of the population – as opposed to 23 per cent in Italy – the pandemic will only have a mild impact. In light of the 1918 experience, this is a foolish extrapolation. As is the assumption that the pandemic, like seasonal

flu, will recede with warmer weather (2020: 9).

Despite Davis' caution, the narrative of the 'truth' of numbers has come to the fore during the debates around COVID-19. Central to this is modelling, a system which has greatly influenced government strategy across the globe. This appears to be the only handbook from which governments read. Yet, the whole notion of modelling needs to be critically assessed rather than just accepted without consideration, as Martin Enserink and Kai Kupferschmidt point out in an article in *Science* (27 March 2020), entitled *With COVID-19, modelling takes on life and death importance*. They quote Devi Sridhar, a global health expert at the University of Edinburgh, who argues that policymakers have depended too heavily on COVID-19 models, without considering how 'the theoretical models will play out in real life' (2020: 1415). An early example of this is the modelling of Neil Ferguson at Imperial College, London, whose work the UK government, and consequently, many others, have heavily relied upon:

> Not only did this document warn that, unchecked, the virus could kill 510,000 people, it counselled that even with the government's then preferred strategy of 'mitigation', more than 250,000 would die, with the National Health Service rapidly becoming wholly overwhelmed. The stark conclusion did not come from Imperial redrawing its model. It was the result of inputting data emerging from the progress of the pandemic in Italy, which showed among other things that far more patients than previously estimated required scarce intensive care beds .… The impression that a mathematical model prompted a government *volte face* led to a torrent of critical attention on Prof Ferguson and his team .… Some scientists point out that the model was originally built for a different disease – influenza… Meanwhile, a rival group of academics at Oxford university released a paper seemingly contradicting the conclusions on likely fatalities drawn by Imperial (Ford 2020).

As Martin Cohen (2020) points out, the

> [the] history of science shows, in Thomas Kuhn's phrase, that scientific progress is not and has never been solely and calmly about

facts – far less, Platonic truths – at all, but is instead, a brutal fight in which the dominant view (or paradigm) invariably seeks to suppress its rivals.

Yet, time and again, we hear governments commenting that they are led by 'the' science. But *the* science is not the entity that is entrusted to make political decisions, and by using *the* science as a fig-leaf for every decision, broader considerations are crowded out. As sociologist Jane Bacevic points out:

> To begin with, there is no such thing as the 'best science available'. Scientists regularly disagree about different issues, from theoretical approaches to methodological findings, and decisions about what *kind* of scientific advice is taken into account are highly political. The individuals, disciplines and institutions that are invited to the table reflect the distribution of research funds, prestige and influence, as well as values and objectives of politicians and policymakers (2020).

The dominant modelling narrative, with its neat mathematical statistics and graphs, does not and cannot anticipate the consequences of lockdown, like the impact of a deteriorating economic situation on public health itself. It leads to 'a three-way tussle, between protecting health, protecting the economy, and protecting people's well-being and emotional health' (cited in Enserinck & Kupferschmidt 2020: 1415).

One of the hazards faced by those trying to impact on policy is to make summary judgements, without the benefit of understanding the ways in which the virus will mutate. With COVID-19, once the WHO had defined it as a pandemic, governments quickly followed each other in implementing lockdowns and wide-ranging punitive measures to control such a move. In South Africa, there were calls, for example, to isolate old people in townships and squatter settlements, raising the spectre of leper colonies from biblical times, the argument being that old people are more susceptible to the virus (Broadbent & Smart 2020). But, as Davis (2020b) points out, this does not take into consideration local health conditions in which malnutrition could also cause children to become prone to the virus. In South Africa, one also needs to take account of who are the 'bread-winners' in many families. In the vast

majority, old people are the ones who collect social grants, thus providing a limited, but necessary income for the wider family. Isolating them, and in many ways hastening their deaths, might not make economic sense, but rather, may make the cure worse than the disease.

In response to a question of why we are so far behind in research on pandemics, Professor Caitlin Rivers hauntingly points out that 'there is not as much thinking specifically on these emerging infectious disease threats, like the one we're facing now – again, because it's hard to make a career out of something that doesn't come around very often' (cited in Resnick 2020). As David Harvey (2020) points out:

> Corporatist Big Pharma has little or no interest in non-remunerative research on infectious diseases (such as the whole class of coronaviruses that have been well-known since the 1960s). Big Pharma rarely invests in prevention. It has little interest in investing in preparedness for a public health crisis. It loves to design cures. The sicker we are, the more they earn. Prevention does not contribute to shareholder value.

In a country such as South Africa, with its painful and ongoing history of HIV/AIDS, we are forced to take co-morbidities into account. At present, 2.5 million people in South Africa are HIV positive and not currently on anti-retroviral medicines. This is entangled with a multitude of other diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and tuberculosis. Researchers project 94,835 to 239,610 deaths per year due to COVID-19 (Geffen 2020). In this context, what has been highlighted in South Africa, is the fact that the country has the additional problem of 'colliding epidemics', a factor which could raise the mortality rate significantly above that of other countries. And, while Government has promised mass testing during the period of lockdown,[1] what has been lost, it is argued, because of the immediacy of COVID-19 and rapid reaction, is an opportunity to test patients for underlying conditions, deepening our understanding of community health issues and how to deal with them. While beyond the scope of this chapter, it must be noted that questions have been raised globally as to how many deaths are related to underlying health

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[1] As of 28 April 2020, only 185 497 people had been tested in South Africa (www.gov.za).

conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, and whether these mortalities have summarily been recorded as COVID-19 cases.

There is also a disjuncture in terms of testing and indicators, as many countries have pointed out. It is difficult to give accurate and exact data when there are high levels of differentiation between testing, modelling, and degrees of lockdown. For example, countries such as Germany have a far higher testing rate, where even those showing flu-like symptoms are tested. As a result, there are more positive COVID-19 cases and fewer deaths, whereas in the UK, only patients who are sick enough to be admitted to hospital are tested, and these differing scenarios are played out from South Korea to South Africa. In the fashion of the times, the headlong rush towards a one-size-fits-all policy has led to a concomitant con-fusion of ideas and statistics. As Research Professor of Epidemiology, Alex Welte, has pointed out:

> Those of us trying to model the COVID-19 pandemic should try to be humble; there is more we don't know than we do. Anyone who claims to know what the infection or mortality rates are for this disease is either deluded or dishonest… But, with time-tested scientific analysis, some things are predictable: on 17 April, after three weeks of lockdown, the sun will rise in Cape Town at 7:10am, and we will still be at the start of a COVID-19 outbreak (Welte 2020).

In South Africa, the much-celebrated response to COVID-19 looked suspiciously to have been based on the Imperial College report (Forster's second-hand ideas). With advice limited to scientists, little consideration was given to the economic and social consequences of the lockdown. For example, the whole notion of physical distancing in cramped, living conditions, with often six to 10 people living in one house, was seemingly ignored and no guidance given to people faced with this circumstance. There seemed to be a complete ignorance of food supply chains, access to food, and the dangers of extreme hunger. There are other Kafkaesque rules that grind people down, as the lines between essential and non-essential work are arbitrarily drawn. When prepared food was banned, Richard Poplak pointed out: 'And yet hot prepared meals remain a lifeline for many families who don't have the means to cook at home (AKA many people in informal settlements) or who work in essential services, *and are too busy saving lives to roast a fucking chicken'* [sic] (Poplak 2020).

Forster writes,

> ... the Machine did not transmit *nuances* of expression. It only gave a general idea of people – an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes, Vashti thought. The imponderable bloom, declared by a discredited philosophy to be the actual essence of intercourse, was rightly ignored by the Machine, just as the imponderable bloom of the grape was ignored by the manufacturers of artificial fruit (1979: 111-12).

The lockdown was imposed with the assumption that the society was uniform, and the effects would take a standard form as the ideology of 'we are all in this together' became the governing manta. Only after the policy was announced was there a desperate scramble to mitigate the worst effects. And only into week four of the lockdown did President Ramaphosa make some provision to deal with the spiralling negative impact on the poorest in society as the 'togetherness mantra' was exposed as a mere variant of apartheid's euphemism 'separate but equal', which in practical terms had meant 'you stay in your group area and I will stay in mine'. This came after concerted pressure from those working in areas of poverty, inequality, and food security, particularly amongst the young, the elderly, and the pregnant (Jonah, May & Sambu 2020). The rampant inequalities were exacerbated by the lockdown as food supply chains dried up and hunger began stalking. A haunting indication of this has been the protests that arose over undelivered food parcels, with police having to fire rubber bullets in the area of Mitchells Plain to disperse crowds (Steenkamp 2020), or in Buffalo City in the Eastern Cape where food vouchers were supposed to be given out. This lead to huge crowds and no physical distancing, causing the army to fire on those gathered. It is one thing to model how the disease unfolds, but it is just as crucial to monitor the social consequences. As Martin Cohen points out in an article entitled *Thinking Errors and the Coronavirus* (2020):

> We should be suspicious of experts recycling old advice. After all, they may be guilty of two more cognitive biases: the phenomenon known as 'one model thinking' whereupon only evidence that fits the model is visible. And there is Confirmation Bias, which is the idea that people seek out information and data that confirms their pre-

existing ideas while ignoring contrary information however potentially significant for the decision. The almost non-existent political and media examination of the range of views and strategies for the coronavirus shows that this is one of the most dangerous biases of them all.

South Africa was no different in this regard, with the government relying exclusively on scientists who were found wanting on analytical aspects of social consequence and context. The selected scientists became the power, and nuance was in short supply. In this context, Andy Stirling tells us that 'the crucial distinction between 'uncertainty' and 'risk'. A risk is what results from a structured calculation that must necessarily reflect a particular view. An 'uncertainty' is what these risk calculations might leave out' (cited in De Waal 2020). How we respond to COVID-19 is one crucial aspect that is left out of the calculations.

Once physical distancing was adopted as policy, it was rigorously taken up by the police and army. As lines on pension and grant day at supermarkets snaked down streets and round corners, physical distancing meant that one could literally be in another township at the end of the queue. To ask people, many of them having to use walking sticks and needing to sit down to rest old limbs to keep the required distance was impossible. It did not stop police from beating and teargassing people. It led the United Nations Human Rights Office to report that South Africa has created a 'toxic lockdown culture .… Rubber bullets, tear gas … whips have been used to enforce social distancing in shopping lines' (Karrim 2020).

That is the danger with a policy that cannot be implemented; conditions are created for the police and army to use violence, instead of convincing people to change their behaviour. All this was made even more complicated as *the* scientists began to fall out with some labelling aspects of the policies irrational. In this context, De-Waal makes the important but oft forgotten point as we become seduced by top-down diktats:

> We shouldn't assume a too simple trade-off between security and liberty, but rather subject the response to vigorous democratic scrutiny and oversight—not just because we believe in justice, transparency and accountability, but also because that demonstrably works for public health (De Waal 2020).

Ashwin Desai

The Present is the Disease

> *... a gigantic phantom, bearing on its brow the sign of pestilence. The growing shadow rose and rose, filling, and then seeming to endeavour to burst beyond, the adamantine vault that bent over, sustaining and enclosing the world* (Shelley 1826: 204).

Mary Shelley's words from her novel, *The Last Man,* written in 1826, are chillingly familiar, the plague of old reaching its tendrils into the present moment. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has and will fundamentally change our lives, spreading as any virus does, rapidly and with a deadliness reminiscent of 1820, the Spanish Flu (1918), and more recently, HIV/AIDS. However, on this occasion, the virus arrived taking advantage of new forms of travel, a global communication network which with every second relayed, spread and informed the world of the latest news. As countries scrambled to lock down, placing their citizens under effective house arrest, the internet and social media platforms suddenly became the conduit for information in the majority of households. Like no other virus before it, COVID-19 has been documented, observed, tweeted, debated, and diarised through a media machine which in itself has morphed into every single cell of our beings; every news channel, web page, Instagram feed, Facebook post, Twitter comment, relaying the latest figures, deaths, analysis, predictions, and new ways of being. Alongside this is a rise in 'fake news', misinformation, WhatsApp messages quickly disseminating to all corners of the globe, using the virus to highlight societal problems, using a concoction of religion, myth and politics to fuel its path. Blame has been quickly laid upon various suspects: 5G, China, trade in animals; and cures from all corners of the globe have been heralded. This is not just a pandemic, in digitising our lives in search of safety, it becomes a burgeoning 'infodemic'.

The COVID-19 virus came relatively quickly on the heels of another outbreak back in 2003, when SARS began to spread from the Far East across the world. As Wald points out in her book, *Contagious Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (2008: 4):

> SARS coverage dramatized [sic] the danger of human contact in an interconnected world. Photographs featured the fearful image of

human interdependence in the masks sported by shoppers, store owners, flight attendants, and pilots, even by small children as they walked to school or pirouetted in ballet class. The masks depicted what SARS threw into relief: human beings' futile efforts to defend themselves against the threat of illness in the daily interactions made global by contemporary transportation and commerce. Human networks became the conduits of viral destruction.

Whereas the mosquito of old flew from one human to another, now the mosquito has morphed into the aeroplane, sneezing its way through customs controls across the globe, as the 'vast cities of America, the fertile plains of Hindostan, the crowded abodes of the Chinese, are menaced with utter ruin…The air is empoisoned, and each human being inhales death' (Shelley 1826: 184).

One of the ironies of the heightened infodemic is how societies suddenly placed under lockdown to mitigate the spread of the virus, have turned to social media and the internet for news, in an effort to keep themselves safe, concomitantly fuelling digital misinformation. While some may be unintentionally forwarding information that they have not verified, the sheer volume of material is hard to keep up with, and fact checking sites cannot cope.

For example, at the onset of the outbreak in South Africa, one particular story highlighted the way in which fake news is spread.

An article on News24 on 9 April 2020 reported that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had suggested that a vaccine would be initially tested on Africans. The article was retracted after the editor decided to investigate the story further, and found it to be information taken out of context. The stories are given veracity because they have historical and contemporary resonance. In the midst of the pandemic, for example, two prominent French doctors discussed the fact that virus vaccines 'should be tested on poor Africans' (Ure 2020).

As news spreads at the click of a button, so the conspiracy theorists and purveyors of fake news were able to tap into the fear and social panic that the virus has thrown up into the ether. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have scrambled to try to control the spread of false information that cascades as if a waterfall of information in the height of monsoon. In an environment which is constantly searching for a remedy, cure, solution, the propensity to believe is strong. Health Law Professor,

Timothy Caulfield from the University of Alberta reiterated this point: 'Social media is a polarisation machine where the loudest voices win. In an outbreak, where you want accurate, measured, discourse, that's kind of a worst-case scenario' (De Vynck, Griffin & Sebenius 2020).

And in South Africa, a nation scarred by the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the coronavirus has brought to the fore, stigma, fear, and panic. From the late 1990s, then President Thabo Mbeki categorically denied the information given by scientists regarding the epidemic and its impact on South Africa, leading to a period of hesitation and bogus dietary cures, which subsequently resulted in thousands of people dying.

As history informs us, when anxiety levels increase, the notions of myth and prejudice and the threat of moral panics 'hum with the exquisitely tenacious fragility of an ever-present threat' (Wald 2008: 17). In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, foreign ships bring plague from the East and a collapse of morality,

> such assumptions prefigure modern racist fear of AIDS as a disease brought to Europe and North America by Africans and Haitians. Stories of foreign sailors and ships bearing alien infection do not belong to folklore and fiction alone; restrictive immigration policies and an emphasis on moral judgment and social exclusion result from believing them. Dangerous infection can be understood as moral and ideological, not only as biological (McWhir 1996: 29).

Myth here can be described as a '"small case of stories that possess both credibility and authority", which they derive from their expression "of paradigmatic truth", and through which they "evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed"' (Wilson cited in Wald 2008: 10). Historically, blame, particularly in times of crisis, is often laid at the door of certain groups in a society. As the novelist of dystopias, Margaret Attwood remarks:

> … during the Black Death the following people got blamed pretty much in this order: lepers, as they went from town to town; Gypsies, because they travelled around; Jews, for all of the usual reasons. And witches, you know about those witches? Just causing plagues all over the place. So, if you could if you could destroy all those people then

maybe you wouldn't have the plague. I guess the impulse is always to burn something (cited in Flood 2020).

In 2020, some placed blame at the heart of the communication and global networking system, an ironic twist during a period when we are more reliant than ever on the machine; protestors started burning masts and threatening workers involved in the roll-out of a 5G internet network – an alleged cause of the virus. With scientists and spokespersons liberally handing out advice with media at their disposal, everyone becomes both expert and *counter*-expert for good measure. The latter is a growing phenomenon of those who strike at the heart of what is seen as establishment opinion. Sometimes, they revel in conspiracy theories, but at other times, they point out the vested interests that accompany opinions dressed up as objectivity.

The most significant and potentially damaging case of quick-fire, unverified research arose when a number of scientists began to question the findings in a number of papers published in high level medical journals, including the Lancet and the New England Journal of Medicine, by a small US analytics company called Surgisphere, with just 11 employees. After more probing, it was discovered that the research was based on an analysis of health records from patients on six continents, including Africa, where there were hardly any patients at the time, and where it was unlikely that records would be linked to an international health database. The authors, Desai and Mehra (both doctors),

> published a hydroxychloroquine study involving 96,000 patients around the world which found the drug was associated with a higher risk of heart problems and death in those with COVID-19… Surgisphere's Quartz Clinical global database was used, this time to obtain the data from 1,200 hospitals. The study involved so many hospitals and people that its findings, to many, seemed definitive (Davey 2020).

Their findings started to raise alarm bells amongst scientists. Dr. Chaccour, one of those leading doubts about Desai and Mehra's findings, said 'Here we are in the middle of a pandemic with hundreds of thousands of deaths, and the two most prestigious medical journals have failed us' (Kelly & Enserink 2020: 1041). Peter Pomerantsev tells us 'we live in a world in which

the means of manipulation have gone forth and multiplied, a world of dark ads, psy-ops, hacks, bots, soft facts, deep fakes, fake news, ISIS, Putin, trolls, Trump' (2019). He could have added fake science that can pass muster, get published in top journals, and impact millions of lives.

In South Africa, the National Research Foundation's A-rated Professor, Tim Noakes, was called to task after giving an interview about COVID-19 on a local radio station. He made claims that the virus is a DNA (double stranded molecule) virus rather than an RNA (single molecule), as well as the fact that Hydroxychloroquine may be a cure for the virus.

> Despite admitting that he has no expertise in virology, there's no caution and no caveats. This is not the way an ethical scientist should talk to the general public. He also talks in a semi-conspiratorial tone, with the implication that he and a few others have it right while the vast majority of doctors and scientists are too stubborn to see it their way (Geffen 2020).

GroundUp reported that the interview was dangerous, misleading, and contained substantial errors; not the first time that Noakes has been in hot water, as back in 2017 he was also brought to book about his infamous propositions on the human diet. In this instance, Noakes retaliated:

> What I find particularly interesting is that Geffen is a recently graduated computer scientist with zero training in medicine, physiology, pharmacology, or pathology. Yet he believes that it's quite appropriate to teach me medicine and physiology, despite the fact that I taught physiology to medical and sports science students for more than 30 years (Fokazi 2020).

Noakes raised the paradox that 'medicine is about hypothesis' and 'the beauty of science is that hypotheses drive thinking' (Fokazi 2020). Despite his defence of opening up such discussion, he was later to retract his conjectures on the virus, apologising for any misleading information.

Throughout the world, there have been numerous cases of misinformation, home remedies, cures, and fake research. In India, with one of the world's largest and most mobile societies, where fact-checking sites struggle to keep up with the spread of misinformation, home remedies and

religious fervour circulate as fast as any virus, while cures can be found in a plethora of remedies, including cow dung and cow urine. Similarly, in Nigeria, drinking urine has been touted as protection, and in Indonesia, Rohanna Kuddus reported that the Council of Ulama was convinced that COVID-19 was 'a rebuke from Allah' on those who indulge in *haram* food, while the country's Minister of Health was certain that the country was 'immune' to the virus due to its commitment to prayer (2020: 35). And, after an 'Indonesian professor of medicine claimed that her research had demonstrated the efficacy of ginger, turmeric and lemongrass in building immunity, the demand for *jamu* and its *empon-empon* ingredients soared, making them even less affordable to the poor' (Kuddus 2020: 36).

In Brazil, President Jair Bolsanaro displayed echoes of Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism:

> After initially dismissing COVID-19 as 'just a sniffle', he would later issue an icy dictum: 'Some people are going to die. I'm sorry. That's life'. For it would only be oldsters who succumbed' (Conti 2020: 45).

Other widely disseminated myths are that the virus cannot spread in hot and humid weather, gargling with salt-water can kill the virus, and in Madagascar, the President launched COVID-Organics, a herbal tea which he claimed could kill the virus, and which was liberally given to children (Shaban 2020).

But perhaps the most damaging and controversial claim came from the US leader Donald Trump, supposedly the most ardent opponent of fake news, who in his daily White House press briefing suggested that in order to combat the virus, the injection of disinfectants may prove efficacious (Hyde 2020).

All the time, there are those demanding that The Machine cranks up once more. Suddenly, the worries about who are most vulnerable to the virus and the conditions that exacerbate loss of life are drowned out, as the language of science transmutes into the debilitating effects of a failing economy, and the need to get people working again. Within a mere few days, one sees scientists who called for a lockdown until the curve flattens then without a backward glance and in the face of increasing infections, support an easing of the lockdown. Where once the politicians said they were following *the* science, the scientists were now seen to be following the politicians. As Harvard University epidemiologist William Hanage points out, for politicians to rely on models to

prevent the virus spreading in a context where the virus is hardly analysed is risky: 'It's like, you've decided you've got to ride a tiger', he says, 'except you don't know where the tiger is, how big it is, or how many tigers there actually are' (in Enserinck & Kupferschmidt 2020: 1414 - 1415). He should have added that to rely on the scientists who manufacture the models, given the trespass of power and politics into their work, is even more scary.

Every day, we come to hear of the dramatic increase in cases, as statistics and information bombard us. Counting is complicated, and begs questions of comparison, as countries label who dies of COVID-19 in different ways. But still, the media persist, with headlines that tell us Brazil has just passed England in the number of COVID-deaths, with Italy, after leading for a few weeks, fading into fourth place. One could easily think one was watching results of World Cup soccer rankings, where the field is flat, and the rules of engagement codified. The basic rules of social science in which numbers ought to be critically assessed were suspended. And all through this, as *the* science was touted by the National Command Council (NCC), the basic protocols were jettisoned, as forecasts changed daily, and many glowed in the media spotlight as their modelling gave them incredible power to influence the lives of tens of millions. In this context, Lorraine Daston's comments are apposite:

> At moments of extreme scientific uncertainty, observation, usually treated as the poor relation of experiment and statistics in science, comes into its own. Suggestive single cases, striking anomalies, partial patterns, correlations as yet too faint to withstand statistical scrutiny, what works and what doesn't: every clinical sense, not just sight, sharpens in the search for clues. Eventually, some of those clues will guide experiment and statistics: what to test, what to count. The numbers will converge; causes will be revealed; uncertainty will sink to tolerable levels. But for now, we are back in the seventeenth century, the age of ground-zero empiricism, and observing as if our lives depended on it (2020).

There is a haunting moment when Vashti is on an airship and slips:

> she behaved barbarically-she put her hand out to steady her. 'How dare you!' exclaimed the passenger. 'You forget yourself!' The woman was confused and apologised for not letting her fall. People

never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machine (Forster 1979: 120).

Not too long ago, we would have laughed at these lines, but as physical distancing, quarantines were put into place and touching was banned, we began to live in the times of Forster's Machine. Žižek, who published a book within a couple of months of our first awareness of the global reach of the virus, acutely captures this moment in history:

> The coronavirus epidemic confronts us with something previously thought to be the impossible: the world as we knew it has stopped turning, whole countries are in a lockdown, many of us are confined to our homes facing an uncertain future in which, even if most of us survive, economic mega-crisis is likely... The impossible happened, our world has stopped, AND impossible is what we have to do to avoid the worst, which is – what? (2020: 107).

While nobody can come up with the answer, what we do know is that this cannot be a matter of *the* science. Of core concern, though, now more than ever, is to ask questions about what it is to be human.

The virus, while rushing across the globe, has also highlighted outdated boundaries in the academy as scientists dominate the NCC and social scientists knock on the door, desperate to be allowed in. In this regard, it might be worthwhile to learn the lessons of Ebola, as De Waal points out:

> In his book *Ebola: How a People's Science Helped End an Epidemic* (2016), the social anthropologist Paul Richards argues that the deficiency in the modelling is best explained by changes in intimate social behaviour that could neither be captured by models nor even fully explained by people who were themselves altering the critical risk behaviours. Anthropologists themselves didn't connect the dots at the early stage of the outbreak. They had researched funerals and funeral rituals, but not the real danger point for contagion, which was the preparation of the body for burial. Family care for the sick was the other main context of transmission. Community health workers, social anthropologists, and epidemiologists had to speak to one another, understand each other's knowledge, and find ways of communicating it (De Waal 2020).

Ashwin Desai

Why should the human sciences be reduced like the United Nations to mop up after the bombs have exploded. Is it not a time for the humanities to reach out to the scientists, to show that the worlds of the human and non-human are inextricably linked, that epidemics are more than a medical issue and to renew the path to a people's science? (Baldwin 2005).

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Acknowledgement of Reviewers

We wish to acknowledge the participation of the following reviewers in the production of AASBS volume #01.