

# The Dark Side of Online Teaching and Learning in South African Universities

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## Abstract

This chapter philosophically explores the dark side of online teaching and learning in universities in South Africa. Unlike the myriad of studies conducted that look into technologically-driven pedagogical innovative supporting strategies in a face-to-face classroom setting, this chapter looks at technology from the following two angles: (i) how technology might efface and obscure effective teaching and learning, leading to what we refer to as dark teaching and learning, and (ii) how the shift to online learning is not only the forging of a new world for teaching and learning but also nurturing in students a new cultural imprint of being and acting in accordance with considerations that favour global capitalist demands of being and acting. To this end, the chapter draws on Heidegger's work on technology and reviews the literature of teaching and learning in a fully online teaching space, to illustrate this darker side of online teaching and learning. This chapter does not argue for the termination of a fully online mode of teaching and learning, but offers some positive recommendations that could lead to more effective teaching and learning in a completely virtual space.

**Keywords:** university, enframing, learning, technology, behaviourism, constructivism

## **1 Introduction**

In an attempt to guide universities in South Africa through unchartered territory during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister heading the Department of Higher Education and Training, Science and Technology (DHET), Blade Nzimande, elucidated the DHET position that no student should be left behind. This position implies that every institution of higher education must use all means necessary to ensure that all students are reached. The Minister pointed out that to achieve this, all institutions need to adopt a ‘multimodal remote system’ to teaching and learning. This means that in areas where students can access the internet, online teaching and learning through various internet-based learning management systems and social media platforms should take place. Universities responded to the Minister’s call by putting measures in place to provide laptops, zero-rated data for the use of institutional learning management systems (online learning platforms), and free data to all state-funded students, while those falling outside of this group (bursary recipients and self-funded students) are to provide their own devices and data. Furthermore, the small percentage of students who reside in areas with no access to the internet, and therefore cannot connect to the internet, must be provided with hand-delivered learning materials in various forms, such as USBs, surface mail or email to third parties who can reach these students. To assist students with no or poor internet connectivity, in line with the Minister’s suggestion, churches, community halls and libraries should be set up as new learning spaces for students to connect online for classes. This frenzied activity behind the scenes is intended, for the moment, to ensure social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic – but also that all universities will ultimately go online entirely, offering no face-to-face teaching and learning opportunities.

We can surmise that this shift from a physical space to a completely virtual or online world entails a shift to a whole new world of teaching and learning for many lecturers and students. This new online world of virtual reality, or cyberspace, impelled by COVID-19, has been forcibly implemented despite fierce resistance from students throughout the country due to the huge economic inequalities that produced the immense digital divide.

Over the last two decades, there have been a myriad of conceptual and empirical studies both locally and abroad on the usefulness, effectiveness, challenges and implementation of ICTs (Webb 2011), various social media platforms such as Facebook (Meintjies & Van Wyk 2020), Blogs (Waghid 2019), and WhatsApp (Froment, Garcia-Gonzalez & Bohorquez 2017). The afore-

mentioned studies investigated the use of technological tools from a blended classroom environment and not from a fully online approach. Although these studies are valuable and add to the rich repository of knowledge, this conceptual chapter looks beyond the use of online internet-based technological tools and social media, as a pedagogical strategy to support learning: its main focus is to explore the philosophy behind the shift to technologically-driven innovations in pedagogy and the impact thereof on teaching and learning.

To this end, this chapter has a five-fold purpose. In what follows, we first explain what we mean by ‘dark teaching and learning’ in universities. Secondly, we draw on Heidegger’s views on technology to explain the philosophy behind technology and how it (technology) can be used to forge a new world with new mindsets, behaviours and actions. Thirdly, we provide a brief description of how a new virtual world created by technology can forge new spaces for teaching and learning. This is done to show how the online or virtual world can be used to promote specific kinds of actions and thinking. Fourthly, we provide a brief description of what happens inside a learning management system and its impact on student learning and thinking. Fifthly, drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of biopower, we state our views on how the digital university with its technological capabilities is more interested in promoting specific actions and behaviours as a form of cognitive capitalism expressed as biopower, to gain more control over the human body. Hence, the vision of universities is to become engine rooms and innovative hothouses of global capitalism, instead of guiding students to develop a better understanding of the self in the world. Finally, we offer some recommendations that could lead to more effective teaching and learning in a fully online space.

### ***1.1 The Dark Side of South African Universities***

More than two decades into its democracy, it has become a widely accepted practice to still describe South Africa as one of the most unequal societies in the world. Webster (2017) reports that the top 10% of the population earn about 60% of all the income. In addition, they also own 95% of all the countries assets. Compared to more advanced economies where the top 10% earn 20-35% of all the income, this is much higher. In 2015, the Gini coefficient for income stood at 0.66. Comparing this level of inequality to the Gini coefficient in 1994 before the shift to post-apartheid South Africa, nothing has changed, as the Gini-coefficient also stood at 0.66 then. The Gini coefficient reflects the

levels of inequality on a scale of 0 to 1, where 0 represents absolute equality and 1 absolute inequality. According to a living conditions survey (Statistics South Africa 2014/15) 49,2% (35.1 million) of adults 18 years and older, continue to live below the upper-bound poverty line. Furthermore, although most of these households have access to electricity, many of them still do not have running water, sanitation and refuse removal services.

Koopman and Koopman (2020) report that under apartheid, the 15 public universities and 21 public technikons, were all situated within a gigantic bimodal distribution. They (2020: 156) write:

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.

Furthermore, they argue that 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 prestigious universities as they were well resourced, 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).

Today, twenty-six years into democracy, despite these historically disadvantaged universities: (i) receiving massive monetary support from government and international organisations; (ii) undergoing infrastructural upgrading and becoming well resourced; (iii) appointing well-qualified staff; (iv) offering internationally benchmarked qualifications; and (v) producing quality research and researchers, not much has changed, as the majority of the students we teach still reside in the poverty-stricken historically disadvantaged areas. These areas are plagued with insurmountable social ills caused by high unemployment rates which are the leading cause of severe financial hardships, poverty, erosion of the family and crime, amongst many other factors. To substantiate this point, one day, one of my (second author) quiet, hardworking male students entered my lecture room 20 minutes late. After the lecture, I asked him, showing no empathy: ‘Why were you so late?’ After a long pause, he responded: ‘I had to wait for my mom for taxifare, but she took so long I

decided to walk to campus because I did not want to miss my classes'. 'How far from campus do you stay?' I asked, to which he responded, 'About 10 kilometres'. Although such events and stories constantly echo in our minds, compelling us to analyse them as we search for solutions to such problems to the benefit of the student, they slowly dissipate as we become overwhelmed by our own challenges. Despite the lion's share of departmental budgets going towards student support for teaching and learning, it becomes insufficient as soon as it falls inside the grey zone. This story illustrates how many students could fall off the radar as their personal issues interfere with their studies and how that weighs them down.

## ***1.2 The Darker Side of Teaching and Learning***

As academics, we are acutely aware of the social ills plaguing our students, but most of the time, when we plan and deliver our lectures, we do not take these social challenges into account. This is because we often have to rush through our content, leaving little space for student discussions and critical reflections on the content due to a tightly packed curriculum with limited timelines. From many conversations with our colleagues, it does seem that they struggle with similar issues most of the time where little deep academic engagement takes place in their classes. One colleague, when asked how much time he allocates for discussions in his lectures, laughingly said, 'You are joking, right, I simply do not have the time for discussions... not even sure I'll finish my work'. In other words, instead of placing the student at the centre of the planning, design and delivery of lectures, the focus is mainly on curriculum delivery with little regard for the lived realities of the students. This happens, Waghid reminds us, because academics are constantly reminded that 'the university cannot survive if throughput rates are not met' (2012: 74). The focus on throughput rates has a direct bearing on how academics approach their lectures. When academics focus on throughput rates, Koopman (2017) notes, the classroom becomes a space for technical compliance that aims to promote the essentialisation of commodified knowledge without the freedom for critique. Hopmann refers to this kind of pedagogical approach as 'restraint teaching' (2007: 112). With the focus on success and throughput rates, academics lose their autonomy to teach freely whatever they wish without conferring with anyone and allowing themselves to be guided by truth and student needs. This is the kind of darkness that dominates not only our classrooms but also those of our colleagues,

especially those that have large classes of 300+ students, that place a heavy administrative burden on lecturers. According to Hoppman (2007), a pedagogy of restraint does not allow the student the freedom to explore things on his own, nor does the lecturer provide proper guidance to lead the student progressively and coherently to new insights or understandings. This is because the focus of teaching is primarily on letting students know the work rather than understanding the work.

Dark teaching can directly result in dark learning (Bengsten & Barnett 2018). This happens as academics are restrained by so much attention given to tests and examinations, that results in students memorising and regurgitating factual information (Koopman 2018). In the process, dark teaching limits a student's learning experiences. Bengsten and Barnett (2018) takes this a step further and point out that such dark teaching is constitutive of the unbridled nature of learning, which represents a loss of control by which student-centred learning should take place. Waghid describes the students in such a dark space as becoming 'technicians of knowledge' (2012: 74). In other words, students are trained to master facts to perform specific functions. We often see the consequences of training students as technicians of knowledge when we visit schools to evaluate their practice as future teachers. Most of them present their learners with factual information without making it relevant to their lived world experiences, nor do they illustrate the real-life applications of the conceptual knowledge they deliver. Although numerous studies have been conducted that provide insight into which teaching methods are most effective in the university classroom setting, dark teaching continues to be visible, which at times is beyond the control of lecturers.

The unexpected emergency of COVID-19, where lecturers across the country expectedly had to shift from an in-person mode of instruction to an online web-based approach, could create even darker spots within the already existing dark teaching. Dreyfus writes:

[We] should remain open to the possibility that, when we enter cyberspace and *leave behind our emotional, intuitive, situated, vulnerable, embodied selves...*, we might, at the same time, necessarily lose some of our crucial capacities: our ability to make sense of things so as to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant, our sense of the seriousness of success and failure that is necessary for learning ... (2008: 6-7; emphasis added).

Apart from the fact that a shift to online teaching and learning dismisses the body's capacity to see the lecturer or student in action in the classroom, the situation becomes worse if teachers or students were not adequately trained to function in a fully online world of cyberspace. Drawing from our own experiences in the faculties of education where we work, most of the staff were not adequately trained to teach in a fully online environment that uses server software or social media platforms. The focus of the training we (and our colleagues) received, was on how to use technology as a supporting teaching tool. What exacerbates the situation even more, is that the majority of the students do not have mobile devices, internet access and data to do so. For example, at the institution where the second author works, close to 3000 students applied for laptops and data, and less than 10% received them. Students were also provided with limited data that made it even more difficult to connect via learning management systems for synchronous teaching. For example, one of the first author's students wrote in a WhatsApp message: 'We are six siblings with two smartphones to share amongst us. So, we will have to plan who gets the phone to connect for our respective lectures'. When the second author asked one of his third-year Chemistry students when she would submit her assignment, she said, 'My laptop broke, and I now have to borrow from one of my peers to do it'. These are some of the challenges that might directly impact on the quality of teaching and learning during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Next, we explore the philosophy behind technology by drawing on the scholarly work of Martin Heidegger to reveal the concealed world of technology. We are specifically interested in the impact of technology on student thinking and being.

## **2 Heidegger's Philosophy on Technology and Anticipation of the Technological Age**

In Martin Heidegger's magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1967), the essence of human existence is perceived in terms of his notion of *Dasein*. Heidegger uses this term *Dasein* to mean an 'idiosyncratic interlocutor'; it is translated from the German as '*Sein*' (being) and '*Da*' (there/here). The focus of our existence is therefore not so much on how people think or what they believe in, but on how they act and cope in the world within a particular context (*Da* - there/here). It is in the process of 'being' or 'acting' in the world that a person's thoughts

are made explicit. For full details on the different modes of *Dasein*, see Heidegger (1967), Dreyfus (2006), and Koopman and Koopman (2018), amongst others. In his later works, Heidegger's (1977) philosophy shifted to focus on the field of 'technology' as a mode of *existence* without any reference to '*Dasein*'. He explored the notion of technology in his post-World War II essays on technology as follows:

... this context is historicised so that any particular intentional arc or relationship between human existence and the world is always already circumscribed by a historical framework such as the technological one. Thus, for any set of norms or worlds to be revealed, other norms or worlds must be concealed. These norms vary, but the revealing-concealing structure of being itself within which these variable norms occur is invariable. The enframing is one such variant upon this overall invariant structure of being and as such it necessarily conceals other variants (Heidegger 1977: 2).

This citation by Heidegger paints a portrait of how technology as a field could lead to the creation and establishment of a new world where new ways of thinking will lead to new ways of being. In other words, technology as a source will be crafting new ways of being that will repress or what he calls 'conceal' existing ways of thinking and acting in the world. This means, as Waddington (2005) point out, the revealing and concealing structure of being in the technological epoch depends on people's understanding of the significance of technology in their lives.

Although Heidegger does not conceive of technology as a tool or device, his focus in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, is primarily about the philosophy driving technology. Thus, existence in a digital or technological epoch should be viewed from the perspective of particular behaviours and actions in the world that subscribes to technology. To explain these ways of being, he coined the phrase *das Ge-stell*, which in translation means *enframing* (Belu 2017). According to Heidegger, enframing denotes a cultural imprint or a mode of revealing a specific attitude of modern civilisations. More specifically, enframing is a representation mainly of how people will treat each other and nature primarily as a resource. Although Heidegger's depiction of technology could not point to the particular technologies or the various technological devices we see and know today, it is



more about what this attitude discloses or conceals in the modern world. He lucidly describes what he means by the impact of technology on a person's thinking and attitude, when he writes how the individual will be reduced to objects or things:

... humans will be viewed ... as a heap of fungible raw materials, resources, or standing reserve (*Bestand*) awaiting optimisation (Belu 2017: 3).

Heidegger predicted that the final goal of all human behaviour and action is predicated on the idea of pushing maximum profit at minimum expense, while at the same time gaining control of human behaviour and optimising them as resources.

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed how students in our classrooms are viewed as raw materials in need of crafting for a market-driven knowledge economy within global capitalism. This neo-liberal agenda has infiltrated every sphere of the university, which revolves around the commodification of knowledge and relegates mathematics and science to a level above lived human experience (Koopman & Koopman 2018). This (neo-liberal) agenda is visible and witnessed by students and academics during the current COVID-19 pandemic, where the completion of the academic year takes precedence over human lives and safety (DHET 2020). While the government is fully aware of the major economic inequalities and the huge digital divide, their focus is on using every means possible to complete the curriculum. The nurturing of the student as a resource is also evident in university curricula that continue to advance and promote the practices and demands associated with neo-liberalism. Key among these demands is the focus on 'higher-level skills' (human capital) and 'problem-solving' research (intellectual capital) (DHET 1997; 2013), which are all directly linked to the objectives of a specific economic strategy (DHET 2012). In 2008, the World Bank linked growth and development in Africa to the quality of its university graduates. Thus, for universities to remain relevant abroad, they need to be competitive within the rules imposed by a global knowledge economy. This global knowledge economy advances global capitalism as a function of a market economy (Castells 2010). According to Bourdieu (1998), it is not only global capitalism that restructures and rearranges human social relations; the principles and practices of neo-liberalism also govern it. Viewed through the lens of

enframing, it underscores specific discourse formations aimed to develop an attitude of ‘imposition (challenging forth) that discloses and frames people and things as resources’ (Belu 2017: 24).

Peters and Jandric (2018) reiterate that technology or enframing in modern society forges a new world for universities across the globe. For example, these authors report how industrial capitalism is weakening and slowly being replaced with business sectors that embrace digitalisation. Over the last two decades, we have witnessed how multinational corporations such as Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, Air B&B, Uber, and many others have generated more significant profits than the oil and gas industrial corporations. This means that over the last forty years, we have gradually shifted from an industrial to a post-industrial civilization. In universities, this situation is not any different, as they are gradually phasing in the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) designed to replace the old world of classroom-based, face-to-face teaching and learning. For example, at the institution where the first author works, plans for the in-phasing of a fully online Post-Graduate Certificate in Education qualification are already in place. If all goes according to plan, the implementation date is 2023/ 2024. MOOCs, according to Peters and Jandric (2018), should be viewed as post-industrial education and cognitive capitalism, where social media are dominant within learning management systems. According to McRae (2013: 1), this,

... new generation of technology platforms promise to deliver ‘personalized learning’ for each and every student. This rebirth of the teaching machine centres on digital software tutors (known as adaptive learning systems) and their grand claims to individualize learning by controlling the pace, place and content for each and every student.

This shift to a not-so-brave, new online world is mainly about digital capabilities and the inconceivable possibilities and realities that a digital world can create. This new world with its infinite possibilities is evident in how the internet expanded into an information superhighway of stored data, which is spread and distributed to various networks and is used by multinational corporations. Such data is used by the application of various algorithms to predict the future with a high degree of probability, turning machines into super-forecasters. Berry (2011) explains how network software has been

created to encourage a communicative environment of rapidly changing feedback mechanisms to tie humans and non-humans together into new aggregates. Berry (2011) writes:

... faster processing speeds are crucial for them to be data-mined for predictive, marketing, and social monitoring purposes by governments, corporations, and other large organisations, often without our knowledge or consent. This transforms our everyday lives into data, a resource to be used by others, usually for profit, which Heidegger terms *standing-reserve* (Heidegger cited by Berry 2011: 263).

In addition to the development of big data, there exists only a glimpse of its potential capabilities and uses. However, technological mobile devices such as smartphones, iPads, tablets and smartwatches, together with their Web 2.0 and 3.0 applications and capabilities, have imposed a new cultural imprint on human action and behaviour. These developments in the field of technology, Peters and Jandric note, have created a new social order of ‘interactivity, interconnectivity, automation of social functions and a lack of privacy’ (2018: 3). These new social orders have created the development of new norms and new forms of thinking that have slowly replaced *Dasein*, where lived experience and people’s attachment to the physical world were the focus. Thus, technology has *brought forth*, as Heidegger names it, something concealed that inhabited our being, that in the process crafted particular modes of being. This new world of digitisation, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is the new cultural imprint (or world) that universities must instil in their students to understand, so that they can be active role players in the system. It is predicted that this shift to online work and business might become the new norm, which means the shift to a whole new world that revolves mainly around technology.

### **3 COVID-19: Forging a Web-Based Online World of Virtual Teaching and Learning**

Before we present a portrait of this new online virtual world of teaching and learning and how it is expressed in universities due to COVID-19, let us first look at what space is. To do so, we draw from the scholarly work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) entitled *The Phenomenology of Perception*. According to

Merleau-Ponty's (1962/ 2005) 'lived body' theory, in order for space to have meaning, an experiencing living body must be present to experience it. This means that the living body gives meaning to space, viewed as silent, invisible and confined to specific natural laws, in order for the body to function. Merleau-Ponty holds the view that the human body is the first point of contact with the material world. The first point of contact of the body with the world takes place unconsciously after birth. From that moment onwards, the body starts to learn to make sense of the various orientations of space, such as depth, height, verticality, horizontality, length and breadth, amongst other things.

Furthermore, the body learns to move mainly forward and then backwards, upright using its legs and not hands, amongst many other things. This is an extremely complex phase of human existence as the person tries to comprehend/conceive the perceptual field of space. In time (as we grow older), we learn to understand human connectedness in this visible world with its own dimensions of space. By understanding, we mean the person learns how to anchor the body in this spatial world. Over time, this understanding deepens, and we soon learn to connect with all other objects in time and space. All of this is living space and we learn to experience the world through our bodies. We also learn that meaning is always present. For example, when we enter our homes or offices at work, there is a particular mood and various tactile, emotional and sensory responses that are triggered, such as happiness, joy or anxiety and tension, among others. We also learn to connect with our environments through our sense organs, that is touching, seeing, hearing, tasting and smelling. From this perspective, the body is seen as the centre of action, and this action Merleau-Ponty describes as an expression of the 'will', which automatically gives the body intelligibility and privileged metaphysical status. This connection to an attached world is also referred to as the physical space that the body views as his or her home (hence the term 'mother earth'). It raises the question: What is the nature of physical space within the confines of classroom-based, face-to-face teaching and learning, as well as online or virtual teaching and learning in universities?

Milne (2006) captures the various types of physical spaces that exist in universities coherently. There are classrooms (or lecture theatres) where teaching and learning take place. This space conforms to various orientations and dimensions (size) with a particular layout such as a workstation in the front of the venue for lecturers, seating arrangements for students (comprised of desks), and movement/walkway space for lecturers to move around between

rows to reach students. This space is equipped with teaching tools such as chalkboards (or whiteboards) to write notes, visual aids such as laptop and data projectors, smartboards, speakers, Wi-Fi for internet connectivity and so forth. This space is intelligible and takes into account aspects such as the mood of the lecturer or students, rules and behaviours that guide human action. This formal physical classroom space further extends to physical, social spaces such as parks or gardens, cafeterias, coffee shops and restaurants. These spaces have a more relaxed atmosphere, where students can be who they are within the boundaries of the rules. Then there are study spaces consisting of multi-level libraries with workspace for students (desks, tables and computers to access the internet), small group workspaces (for study) or meeting rooms for seminars. This space has unwritten rules of silence, reading and study.

Universities also have private physical spaces such as hostels or dormitories with dining halls. The rhythm of university life in all these spaces is organised around a timetable the student receives for classes, tests, examinations and assignments. This means that all learning activities are structured and mapped on these timetables. The various spatial aspects that make up the totality of university physical space makes various spatial aspects explicit and visible, a particular kind of environment conducive to face-to-face teaching and learning. This is done to facilitate the smooth delivery of the curriculum. These physical spaces are visibilities that reveal human hands and discourses that speak to the heart and soul of everyday life in a university (Sharpe, Beetham & Freitas 2010).

In the online world of virtual reality, the situation is very different. In this space, the classroom, library, social engagement, meeting rooms, seminar rooms, amongst many other features, are replaced with an internet-based virtual learning environment which is constituted of various learning management systems (LMSs), such as Blackboard, iKamva, Google Suite, and other massive open online courses (MOOCs). Marin, Simon and Masselein refer to this world as the 'screen universe' (2018: 56). In other words, it is in an imaginary non-real world on a technological device where lecturers, students and colleagues meet to carry out their various responsibilities. Van de Oudeweetering and Decuyper refer to this screen as a place where 'interacting visualising practices' take place (2019: 109). These LMSs (which are discussed in more detail below) are designed to meet synchronously and asynchronously. Virtual social spaces are online social media communities such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Snapchat, amongst many others. This brief description

of physical space and online or virtual space reveals fundamental ontological differences between the two worlds.

While physical space represents an environment that mediates lived experience and human contact, where the human sense organs are actively engaged to collect data in time and space, virtual space is a man-made artificial notional or imagined world with no physical contact. While physical space makes human hands visible, online or virtual spaces hide (make invisible) human hands involved in the images conveyed between users and producers. According to Ward (2018), instead of being in the real, physical face-to-face setting with the lecturer who incarnates and illustrates the material to be learned, students sit and stare at the screen. In other words, in an online space there exists little or no time for the student to actively engage with the lecturer through questioning, ‘clarifying or challenging ... students passively consume pre-constructed resources supplied to them’ (Ward 2018: 432). This unquestionably represents two completely different worlds with different intelligibility, rules and behaviours. Drawing on Deleuze’s (1986) notion of visible and invisible, online spaces are untouched, and hide human hands and ongoing coping. They make invisible the finer intricacies and details of life; they are synonymous with a ‘machine that is almost blind and mute even though it makes others see and speak’ (1986: 34). This space creates a unique discourse of possibilities created through the imagination that discursively shapes what the student can see, should see, say and therefore think or perceive as a new world. This space promotes a particular way of being, acting and behaving. In other words, virtual space represents an invisible discursive formation that can distort people’s thinking about the natural world. Of particular importance is that we (the authors of this paper, and we assume many other lecturers in universities across the country) are not familiar with or comfortable in this space. What these individuals (especially the ‘authoritative ones’) might miss in a virtual space is the human spirit, facial expressions, laughter and critical engagement, a norm in a physical space. Let us take a closer look at what this virtual world looks like for students and lecturers.

### ***3.1 Inside a Learning Management System***

A learning management system (LMS) is an internet-based, digital learning platform that promotes the technologisation and digitisation of teaching and learning in higher education. In addition, it is a virtual learning space designed

to integrate online elements with face-to-face instruction, or to develop completely online offerings with little or no face-to-face instruction (Wikipedia 2019).

A learning management system uses web-based server software and offers its users an array of communication and course content tools to share information, as well as comprehensive analytical software, such as the student retention feature (tracking students' performance). The communication tools, such as announcements, allow lecturers to post instant messages to students. An LMS also has a real-time chat feature to allow students who are online to chat with their peers. For lecturer-to-student communication, it has a discussion forum in which students can chat with lecturers in real-time or asynchronously. It also allows lecturers to send emails.

For course content, such a platform allows academics to upload various materials such as course content notes, journal articles (while adhering to copyright laws), assignments and tests, amongst others. When uploading materials, these learning management systems have a server software program to connect with a calendar where the lecturer can set dates (refined to specific times) when students can have access to the materials, and for the setting of deadlines for assignments or tests. Furthermore, lecturers can use a feature to post quizzes, tests and examinations that allow students to access them and to complete them online. Other features include a grade centre where assignments submitted can be checked for plagiarism, tracked using statistics tracking, and marked through its grade centre, which can be done online or offline. One of the most important interactive tools is an interactive teaching platform that allows lecturers to do live streaming of lessons from anywhere on the planet, where there is internet accessibility. These lessons can be recorded and accessed later to be watched online or offline if they are downloaded. A media library where videos and various forms of media posts can be uploaded, is another feature of an LMS. All these features in the advanced analytic system of an LMS can be tracked to determine who accessed the platform and when the student or lecturer was active on it. The retention centre of LMSs allows lecturers to track all student activities, including how many times a student missed submission deadlines, as well as individual student performance in relation to the group average.

According to Bates (2014), learning management systems promote mainly transmission teaching and subsequently, transmission learning. This, he argues, is because an LMS is viewed mainly as a high-quality internet-based

delivery system, as opposed to offering high-quality teaching that promotes lecturer-to-student or student-to-student active engagement. These virtual platforms with all their powerful software applications, Bates argues, promote dark teaching that is effective in reinforcing memory learning. He holds the view that this approach is primarily due to its instrumentalist nature situated in a mechanistic, non-real learning space, where all that matters is the mastery of concepts, abstract ideas and facts. Dreyfus (2001), in his book *On the Internet*, shares similar sentiments as Bates by raising numerous concerns about the limitations of the virtual realm. To him, the main concern, amongst many others, is the fact that the virtual realm disregards an essential part of embodiment, that is the physical aspects of our existence and how they shape our human understanding of the world. It is the *lived-experience*, the non-conceptual dimension and elements of human existence, that provides a reason, that LMSs cannot provide. In a piece written seven years later, Dreyfus (2008) point out that online learning is passive, dispassionate and disengaged teaching. We are fully aware that there are many proponents that view the conceptual dimension as important and hold the view that it provides deep insight and reason, but what is absent is the element of thinking that drives human behaviour, described by Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of absorbed coping. In the absence of absorbed coping, the student acquires no fundamental awareness of the physical world, that includes existence, that leads to knowing and gives meaning to a person's life.

According to Peters and Jandric, these learning management machines were primarily designed to gain better control, enforce optimisation and monitor efficiency. The shift to online learning aims to transform education mainly to move towards 'increased standardisation, centralisation, and adaptive learning systems' (2018: 242). By so doing, the focus of learning is not about developing a student's unique understanding of reality— as a co-creator with the teacher — but mainly as a source to commit to conceptualism, in line with a behaviourist paradigm. This is because universities, as explained in the previous sections, have become more focused on knowledge capitalism expressed as competencies formulated in a way that makes them objectively measurable. This argument is supported by the White Paper for Post-Graduate School Education and Training, which points out that one of the aims of higher education in South Africa is to develop graduates with high-quality knowledge and high-level skills (DHET 2013). While this is the main focus of higher education, the needs of the students are moved to the



periphery. In a behaviourist paradigm where the primary focus is on the transmission of information, the main objective is to instil in students, particular technologies of the self that do not allow students to take control of their own learning.

### ***3.2 Biopower: The Online Digital University as a Producer of Human Capital***

According to Foucault (1978), biopower is a system in which the human body (the student, in this context) is viewed as a central component in the operation of power relations. This power imposed by universities is expressed as a normative force that rules over the human subject. This is because the university is trapped in what Peters and Jandric (2018) refer to as a political knowledge economy. This statement is also corroborated by Peters (2004), citing the work of Readings, to explain how the university had already shifted course almost three decades ago in response to globalisation. Readings writes:

... the University is becoming a different institution, one that is no longer linked to the destiny of the nation-state by virtue of its role as producer, protector, and inculcator of an idea of national culture. The process of economic globalisation brings with it the relative decline of the nation-state as the prime instance of the reproduction of capital around the world (2004: 69-70).

This shift to transnationalism and corporatisation, as pointed out by Peters, is not a negotiated space that opens up a dialogue between student and the university to discuss what is the best approach or most appropriate model to switch to in an online world, nor is it a space that considers the conditions in which students find themselves. Instead, this space is about the university's commitment to promote teaching and learning that harnesses knowledge for wealth creation. Therefore, it is fair to claim that the university has become a highly uncontested and unsymmetrical space concerning who decides what and when. Thus, what we observe is the enframing of the student into a new world with a complete disregard for the social and economic space in which they find themselves. Excellence in this space is defined as a techno-bureaucratic discourse. Foucault (1978) points out in his essay on governmentality that the

epistemic discourse of government is to lay claim on its citizens through various forms and formats, one of which is to optimise and control them. Dreyfus (cited in Peters & Jandric 2018:2-3) presciently and lyrically brings together Heidegger's notion of enframing and Foucault's discourse on power expressed as modern biopower, in the digital age:

At the heart of Heidegger's thought is the notion of being, and the same could be said of power in the works of Foucault. The history of being gives Heidegger a perspective from which to understand how in our modern world *things* have been turned into *objects*. Foucault transforms Heidegger's focus on *things* to a focus on *selves* and how they became *subjects*. And, just as Heidegger offers a history of being, culminating in the technological understanding of being, in order to help us understand and overcome our current way of dealing with things as objects and resources, Foucault analyses several regimes of power, culminating in modern bio-power, in order to help us free ourselves from understanding ourselves as subjects.

In universities today, the target market is students who must be imbued with certain subjectivities, mindsets and capabilities. To do so, universities are more interested in promoting certain actions and behaviours through what Peters and Jandric (2018) term 'cognitive capitalism', expressed as a form of biopower to gain control over the human body. In a cognitive capitalist framework of thinking, human subjectivity is side-lined, teaching and learning are intensified, and the focus is on high-level thinking and critical engagement with course content, while theoretical knowledge is privileged over practical knowledge. In other words, learning is viewed as a product and not as a process. This strand of learning is mainly viewed from the perspective of behaviourism that does not recognise the reality that students face every day. This focus of teaching and learning reduces the human subjects to objects that are viewed as human resources expressed as biopower. This is because the vision of higher education is to be a service engine and innovation hothouse of global capital, which is best achieved through new digital technologies such as LMSs.

According to Heidegger (1977), for this shift to take place, a new (digital) world must be forged and revealed as a norm, while the old (physical) world in which the human subject is the centre of attention, is slowly phased

out. This shift is made to maximize profits at minimal expense. In other words, the essence of technology is the technologisation of the human subject, according to Heidegger's notion of technology as a form of enframing.

This shift should be viewed in the light of the new role of universities as a site of knowledge production and mechanism tied to a dynamic global market for knowledge, goods and services. In other words, while the focus in a constructivist epistemology is to promote and develop a student's understanding and connectedness to the world, the behaviourist objective is cognitive knowledge capitalism (Scott 2012). According to Scott, the shift to cognitive knowledge capitalism aims to make learning more professionalised, following an objectivist approach with little or no focus on the cultural breadth, critical consciousness and intellectual independence of the student. This is because, as Lucrarelli, Peters and Vercellone (2013) note, the focus of teaching and learning is primarily on the practical expertise and instant employability of the student. This denotes a break with the constructivist view of learning (in the material world) and a re-alignment with the behaviourist view of learning (in the digital world) as the student, and his or her needs are no longer at the core of teaching and learning. The upshot of this shift is that universities are now becoming more aggressive as revenue-generating centres in their own right and no different from multinational corporations that are more interested in profits and worker productivity.

## **4 Recommendations**

In the first part of this paper, we provided a general overview of the challenges facing the higher education sector with specific reference to who the student is that enters the university, by providing a portrait of the many personal problems that interfere with her becoming in the university. We then provided a succinct overview of what we mean, with the phrase 'dark teaching' as a backdrop to understand the possible learning challenges the student might face in an online environment. This discussion took us into the second part of the paper, where we explored the kinds of teaching and learning that can take place in an online world. Here we presented our pessimism about this shift and the dangers that dark teaching and learning holds. From this angle, we circled within and between the tensions associated with dark teaching, the concealed meaning or hiddenness that online learning spaces hold, and the inconceivable impact of technology on the thinking and being of the future student.

Although we expressed our deep-seated worries about this shift, there are many important lessons that we can learn from this experience. It is very premature to predict the future of higher education and what kind of world awaits us post COVID-19, but technology and the constant advances made in technology will make it inescapable for lecturers and students. Therefore, we recommend that universities strive to provide adequate training to academics to design courses and pedagogies that will scaffold interactive dynamics constitutive of understanding the online world of teaching and learning. This training should be fine-tuned to resist what we see as dark teaching and learning, where online LMS is simply viewed as high-definition delivery machines of information, but to facilitate interactive approaches between the student and the lecturer. From this perspective, the training should take into account what an online culture entails, such as e-timetabling, effective time management, how to ensure more significant student commitment, greater flexibility, and how to design, structure and deliver online materials appropriately. In other words, one of the main recommendations is to create an online world that is student-friendly and student-centred, where the student becomes a co-creator of knowledge. As former teachers, students and learners, we are aware that effective teaching is more than a dispassionate recital of facts and claims. Effective, passionate and caring teachers/lecturers engage with ideas to transport their students to new understandings. This is one of the aspects that is missing in online learning.

Over the last two decades, many new advances were made in technology, and we have witnessed the computing power and features that smartphones have to offer. We know that even more advances in the field of artificial intelligence will be made in the future. Therefore, university administrators and leaders must re-invent the university to tap into the powerful opportunities that smartphone technology has to offer. The question that begs asking here is how do we re-invent expressive patterns of gestures, movement, intonation, and various other dimensions of face-to-face teaching into a fully online virtual classroom environment?

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