Editorial: Comparative Perspectives on Higher Education Systemic Change, Curriculum Reform, Quality Promotion and Professional Development

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Quelling the Fires: Responding to Questions of our Time in a Troubled Higher Education Space

South African higher education is undoubtedly at a critical crossroad. The '#RhodesMustFall' and '#FeesMustFall', as well as other similar movements in institutional settings across the country, are demanding change – a 'business *unusual*'' approach to traditions and modus operandi of South African higher education institutions. The crisis is no longer looming; it is here. Racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, neoliberal and neocolonial practices are under some serious scrutiny from our students. This is 1976 relived, except that this time the picture is far more complicated. The democratic dispensation of 1994 has enabled greater freedoms at individual, institutional and societal levels. The irony in the context of higher education is that institutional autonomy (read freedom) has become an easy cushion for the maintenance of a racist, patriarchal and neoliberal status-quo, while the state has become more sophisticated, actively engaging in what feminist scholars would call a politics of 'accommodation' (see Youdell 2006). Such accommodations of course are never purely for the advancement of human agency. They are caught up in tactics of control; a double-edge sword that can lead to the destruction of higher education as we know it.

It is the abovementioned complexities that make the current national ructions in higher education both exciting and troubling. Students with very little experience of apartheid are asking serious questions about the state of transformation in higher education, and are mapping out the type of institutions they wish to study in. Questions around the persistence of colonial curricula, white-centric institutional cultures deliberately used to marginalise and exclude black students and staff, pretentious language policies which are conveniently crafted around the linguistic provisions of the Constitution while seeking to maintain a racist status quo, exorbitant costs of higher education access often fueled by the commercialisation of higher education and the inadequate state subsidisation, as well the shocking lack of black academic, particularly, senior staff in South African higher education institutions are rightfully among those being asked by students across the country.

Yet, of equal concern, are the images of torched buildings, of violence and the intimidation of staff and students which abound in many campuses across the country, enabling 'comtsotsis', i.e. 'youth engaged in anti-social behaviour and who attempt to justify their behaviour as legitimate political activity' (Chisholm 1992: 4) to receive undue attention . As Jansen (2015) argues, if we leave such 'thuggish' behaviour unchallenged, 'We sustain the very conditions that apartheid and colonialism embedded in our society' (online). 'Comtsotsi' behaviour as seen at the University of the Western Cape and other higher education institutions, allows for the prevalence of racist discourses that project black students as 'uncultured' and 'naturally violent'. However, this does not mean we must ignore the impact and importance of the student movement that has forced government and university administrators to agree to zero fee increments for the new academic year while simultaneously forcing some higher institutions to cease exploitative labour practices (e.g. the privatization of campus cleaning services). Most importantly, however, are the implications of the student movements for higher education provisioning in general, and for higher education teaching in particular.

Essentially, at the heart of the student protests across the country are questions of the contextual relevance of higher education provisioning: in a globalized, postcolonial higher education environment, our students are asking us to consider the type of universities that African countries should offer. We are being asked to think about whether universities in Africa can

truly be African, and what this might mean for curriculum, pedagogy, ideologies, institutional cultures, access, support services and representivity, among other things. These are very difficult questions with no clear and simple answers. However, these complex questions present opportunities for universities to 'think outside the box', to re-envision what it would mean to offer accessible higher education in post-conflict, African contexts (Jansen 2009).

At this stage, the reader may wonder what all of this has to do with this special issue. In this special issue, we present articles which seek to analyze higher education teaching and learning, with a particular focus on systemic change, curriculum reform, quality promotion and professional development. These are not very easy concepts, as each is loaded with a range of histories and possibilities, particularly for the African context. For instance, notions of systemic change, curriculum reform and quality are inevitably caught up in neoliberal, Western notions of 'standards' and policy borrowing (see Steiner-Khamsi 2013). Higher education institutions in South Africa are not immune to the practice of borrowing as is evidenced by the increased usage of university ranking systems to measure excellence and international competitiveness of our programmes, with both the reception and the translation of international policies being caught up in notions of so-called 'best practice'. Often, notions of 'best practice' arrive with expectations of uniformity (globalization) of content, the normalization of Western knowledges and inevitability, reliance on Western-centric institutional structures. However, rarely do we ask whether such 'best practice' can ever be universalised *for all.* Yet, despite students loudly asking for change, while universities (perhaps rightly) are under siege, we need to pause and reconsider what it means to be African and to teach in African universities.

While the entire notion of creating African universities may appear paradoxical, our answers may lie in what William Pinar (2009: 1) calls, 'a test our generation must pass': internationalization. Taking into account the ubiquitous pressures of globalization and the our country's violent history of colonialism and apartheid, we suggest that South African universities take seriously the process of considering foreign knowledge, processes and structures with a critically informed strategy that takes local knowledges and experiences into account to produce new universities that are decolonized and internationally competitive. Instead of using history for political expediency,

history ought to inform the ways in which we interrogate our current positionings and the futures we desire. Undoubtedly, a process of engaging in national '*currere'* (see Pinar 2012) is required.

The articles in this special issue seek to engage us in *complicated conversations*. They present national conversations on the various ways in which our history informs present-day higher education provision: be it through pedagogy, self-situating practices, theory, knowledge interrogation, funding dilemmas, technology or representation politics. Indeed a deliberate effort is being undertaken to engage in a project Soudien characterizes as a 'sociology of the cognitive encounter' (cited in Pinar 2009: 9) – an attempt to de-universalise the European experience while pursuing a 'modern indigeneity' (Pinar 2009: 9). Such approaches require an understanding of internationalization as not representing a substitution of the local, but rather as a means through which foreign knowledge can be incorporated in envisioning new African universities (including curriculum, systems, structures and quality assurances).

An article which speaks directly to issues raised in the current waves of unrest, entitled *Nostalgia, anxiety and gratification: narratives of female staff in a merged higher education institution,* by Gachago, Sosibo and Ivala, engages a process of self-situating by presenting a narrative and historical account on experiences of academic and administrative women in higher education who were involved in mergers. Understanding the effects of mergers on individual experiences of staff, particularly women is, arguably, one of the most difficult and under researched complex processes in post-apartheid higher education as the authors have correctly claimed. Gachago *et al*. found that the narratives of the eight women in their study are symbolic of both pain and loss. Such pain and loss, they argue, is characterized by deep patriarchal cultures which existed and continue to do so in higher education institutions – cultures that mainly support male networks and solidarities. The authors suggest that while both pain and loss exist, it does not exist equally and in the same way for all women. Complicated by race, class and sex, the women's experiences present some ambiguities, with some white women able to find their voices after the institutional mergers, while some working class, black administrators, find themselves in more vulnerable employment conditions. Such intersections point to different experiences shaped by individual, social identity markers. The authors conclude by appealing to new forms of indigeneity as espoused by Soudien (2009). This means collective

forms of imagination, organization and solidarities by women in higher education institutions. They argue that 'the promotion of change should be a collective and relational responsibility, emphasizing the importance of supportive leadership and women's networks for an experience where female employees can be free to be who they are'.

If we are to take seriously the need to create modern indigeneities while recreating African higher education institutions, then the article is instructive as it encourages us to carefully interrogate systems and structures in higher education provision.

Macro Issues in Higher Education: Looking at Systems and Structures

Higher education on the African continent, and particularly in South Africa, faces the daunting challenge of replenishing its ageing professoriate in contexts increasingly characterized by the casualisation of academic labour and deteriorating working conditions. In this cacophony of competing interests fueled by a decline in governments' support for funding higher education, professional development is, in many universities, an expensive luxury which is sacrificed to fund other imperatives, such as subsidizing student fees. Where professional development programmes do exist they are often characterized by elementary ad-hoc interventions or just-in-time, just-enough pedagogies to meet compliance requirements.

The question of whether responsibility for professional development lies with central executive structures or decentralized Faculty or School level entities remains unresolved, with different institutions finding value in either or both models. Typically, decisions about the location of support to staff is determined by other structural arrangements, and perhaps, more importantly, the extent to which university executives ascribe sufficient value to the enterprise to provide the requisite resourcing and support.

In their appraisal of a de-centralised professional development model adopted by a South African higher education institution, Mashiyi and Kizito argue that de-centralisation made the funding and organization of professional development activities in the faculties difficult to manage. The absence of a dedicated structure to ensure adequacy of funding and appropriate academic skills to support various professional development

activities meant that faculties were left to their own devices and the coordination of the teaching and learning activities tended to be marginal activities without requisite commitment of teaching and learning representatives. The authors identify two main reasons for this: firstly, the T&L representatives were usually junior staff with no authority to influence performance in the departments and secondly, the academics themselves had very high workloads which limited their participation in T&L activities. However, a positive outcome of de-centralization was the opening up genuine spaces within the faculty for lecturer negotiation and ownership of their own T&L processes.

The kind of neglect for professional development as key driver of institutional performance does inevitably impact on the quality of institutional offerings and outcomes. Higher education institutions in the continent and elsewhere are subjected to number of quality promotion, enhancement and assurance activities. In South Africa, higher education institutions were audited for the period 2004-2011 and have since been subjected to rigorous accreditation processes including the alignment of higher education programmes to the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. Most of these interventions are geared to enhancing the student experience by focusing, amongst others, on improving and standardizing various curriculum offerings available in higher education institutions. In this context it is prudent to ask: What lessons can be drawn from the work of quality promotion and assurance units and national quality councils and professional bodies (both nationally and globally) in respect of the curriculum and the way institutions manage quality? It is equally prudent to consider the perspectives and experiences of students and staff on quality promotion and assurance at their institutions. Matsebatlela explores the influence of the South African Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC's) institutional audits on teaching and learning at three South African Universities. Using case studies, Matsebatlela's findings indicate that the outcomes of the audits are not entirely convincing. While the processes have had a positive albeit limited and variable effect on teaching and learning at the three universities, the progress made in various areas is uneven, with some institutions struggling to implement their improvement plans effectively. Matsebatlela concludes that the HEQC should 'put in place more robust follow-up and monitoring mechanisms, including compulsory follow-up site visits, and that institutional audits be conducted at more universities'.

This recommendation warrants some reflection: higher education institutions are vociferous in their demand for autonomy, especially from the prying attentions of regulatory bodies and government. Yet, when institutions are afforded the opportunity to exercise their autonomy in crucial areas of their core business such as the curriculum, they defer their authority to these very regulatory structures they resist. Mindful of this dilemma, the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) is intended to harness collective energies towards enhancement of the higher education sector rather than focus on individual institutions exercising rituals of compliance.

The concern with autonomy is routinely associated with the curriculum. It is now commonsense that a key driver of quality higher education is, indeed, the curriculum, which continues to bear the trademarks of a bygone era. To date, attempts at curriculum reform have amounted to little more than tinkering with enduring monoliths which find expression in conservatism and, more recently, anti-intellectualism, particularly evident in increasing demands by students to be rewarded more for doing less. Universities, in concert with government and regulatory bodies have been complicit in scores of students being 'academically adrift' (Arum and Roksa 2011) and having to navigate curricula that are riddled with obstacles that impede meaningful progress, while earning them qualifications that often fail to prepare them for productive livelihoods.

Recent attempts by the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) to re-envision a relevant curriculum has resulted in a national consultative process which has concluded the there is 'wholly insufficient curriculum space to enable such [innovative] provision to be incorporated without compromising the integrity of the 'irreducible core' of knowledge in the curriculum' (CHE 2013). Rawatlal and Dhunpath challenge the conservatism in their article which is a sequel to an earlier article in *Alternation* (Rawatlal & Dhunpath, 2014) in which they argue that the proposal made to government to extend the undergraduate curriculum is fundamentally flawed because the proposal advances an econometric solution to a pedagogic problem. In their current article they propose multi-trajectory progression planning to transcend the econometric discourse in curriculum design. Now Rawatlal and Dhunpath have adopted a more conciliatory stance; they argue that if radical curriculum reform in structure and content is not likely to materialize in the foreseeable future, (with an intensification of

foundation provisioning in the form of alternative access programmes) then we need to turn our attention to investigating what structural elements of foundation programmes might be strengthened to enhance student progression. They explore the advances made in online technologies and artificial intelligence to support a multi-trajectory approach to design curriculum pathways. They argue that through the use of algorithms, it is possible to institutionalise progression mapping to enable students and academic advisors to have online, real-time data on students' progression status, and the possibility of selecting alternative curriculum pathways which have a history of success. This data, when aggregated, has the added potential to harvest evidence for more substantive curriculum reform to address what has become a stubborn pathology in higher education reform.

Collaborations and Partnerships with Civil Society Organisations

The question of 'learning spaces' in higher education has commanded much attention, especially in the context of rapid and pervasive expansion of technology. Regrettably, the tendency to conflate space and technology narrows the discourse to the realm of the physical and geographic, neglecting the philosophical and ideological dimensions of learning spaces and the political dimensions associated with who gains access into these spaces, how the dominant discourses in these spaces resonate with those of the communities they are expected to serve and how community voices are accommodated within what is often the portals of intellectual elitism. The question of where the typical NGO is located in this space remains unresolved.

Dhunpath (2003) argues that the increasing pace of globalisation has been accompanied by a concomitant increase in the status and legitimacy of NGOs as the voices of civil society. Keck and Sikkink (1997: 1110, cited in Dhunpath 2003) add that the behaviour of NGOs is 'invariably normative, prescriptive, increasingly internationalised, highly politicized and at times very effective'. In many instances, they have become the discursive and material terrain through which the marginalized subjects of anthropological / ethnographic research are brought into the public domain.

Attempts to locate the role of NGOs in higher education through three case studies of an action research project which compared student, NGO and community reflections of a community engagement experience comprise the focus of the article by Preece and Manicom. Their findings suggest that the learning spaces and environments 'enabled students and community members to engage in mutual learning, through dialogic and reflective processes that enabled application of discipline-based theory, as well as broader learning, related to power dynamics and sharing of knowledge between community members and students'.

Preece and Manicom identify three main considerations related to the pedagogical contribution of community spaces and environments. Firstly, the impoverished nature of the learning spaces created a need to focus on human relationships as a learning resource. Secondly, the environments became the pedagogical spaces for different forms of learning, which relied on the adaptive leadership principles of respect and dialogue. Thirdly, the knowledge acquired was not simply new skills or information as it also included knowledge about relationships, and the enhancement of self-awareness. Notwithstanding the potential success of the engagement, Preece and Manicom caution that such initiatives require considerable preparatory discussions and ongoing dialogue between the different agencies.

Citing Gibbons (2006), Preece and Manicom poignantly conclude with the assertion that 'structured CE in community spaces as an 'agora' can provide opportunities for mutual learning that contributed to the co-construction of 'socially robust knowledge''. This is more so the case in contexts where universities are looking at civil society organisations for partnerships in the development of students through service. Such approaches often deviate from Western positionings of universities as the only sites of knowledge production and emancipation. However, as the articles in this special issue show, universities in Africa need civil society organisations in as much as civil society organisations need universities.

Like Preece and Manicom, Hlalele and Tsotetsi, in the article premised on emancipation theories when engaging with communities, argue that engagements with communities need to be mutually beneficial for the parties involved. Hlalele and Tsotetsi reflect on a collaborative venture between their university and an NGO by the name of PULA. PULA requested the university to offer extra curricula classes in Physical Science and Mathematics to grade 10 learners in the area. In response, the university

offered PULA with student-educators who not only assisted the school learners enrolled in the NGO project but also themselves (students) to develop as future teachers. The authors concluded that engagement needs to be reciprocal, ideally of benefit to all those involved and to not assume that communities are ignorant of their own needs. An approach that recognizes the assets of all players, the authors argue, can play a significant role in bringing about social change.

Singh-Pillay's article on in-service learning among the technology education students she teaches digresses very little from the findings and conclusions of the other two articles on community engagement in this special issue by focusing on the benefits that higher education institutions receive when engaging in community projects. Reflecting on a pilot study which involved the engagement of her technology education students in a community engagement project on environmental sustainability, Singh-Pillay argues that the linking of pedagogical content in higher education with applied community engagement processes presents not only the possibilities for students to enhance their knowledge, it also results in the production of a critical citizenry that is conscious of impeding social issues around their communities. In her own words, she notes that engaging her students in a community project enabled them to develop 'a deeper understanding of the ESD [module] content [and assisted them in] social responsibility as teachers'. She, like Hlalele and Tsotetsi, suggests that student involvement in community projects is yet another approach for bringing about social change and for producing critically informed knowledge.

Higher Education Funding

Increasingly, the discourse of a socially robust knowledge is eclipsed by an econometric discourse, which values higher education as an instrument that furthers the interests of capital and multi-national corporations. Ironically, the past decade has witnessed drastic changes in the way universities are structured and financed. Globally, governments are investing less and less in higher education, leading to the emergence of private sector-funded universities, and an increasing number of privately-funded students in public universities. While this development has widened university education opportunities, it has pedagogical implications as well. Class sizes have

increased, and diverse student populations with varied learning abilities, cultural capitals, social class, and linguistic variations are accessing higher education. Alternative instructional strategies, resources and paradigms will need to be embraced and financed for successful outcomes, especially if we are to reimagine higher education for our local realities. Interestingly, universities have responded by shifting the burden of increased costs to students. Are there viable alternatives which disrupt the exponential increase in the costs related to higher education provisioning? As highlighted above, the recent '#FeesMustFall' campaigns across the country are an expression of the deep frustrations experienced by students and their families who are expected to invest in qualifications, we emphasise once again in this editorial, which do not necessarily lead to productive employment.

In the article by Bokana, he contends that the key driver of the underperformance of the higher education system is because state funding lags behind the increase in enrolments and the chief consequences have been creaking infrastructure, slow growth in the academic staffing base, high student attrition, and low throughput rates. This is exacerbated by the incoherent, inefficient and dysfunctional higher education landscape. Are there innovative non-traditional funding models involving synergies between non-traditional partners? Bokana argues that the South African government's funding framework is an important steering mechanism to achieve policy priorities, the most important of which is the overall transformation of the higher education system. He notes that government subsidies are expected to 'contribute to the realisation of (1) equitable access, (2) better quality research and teaching, (3) improved student progression and graduation rates, and (4) better responsiveness of the higher education system to economic and social needs'. The emphasis on planning, Bokana argues, is informed by the fact that if the higher education system is to respond to the national sustainable development agenda, the size and shape of the system cannot be left to the vagaries of the market, in particular, uncoordinated institutional decisions on student enrolments and programme offerings (DoE 2005: 3).

Bokana concludes with the assertion that a significant review of national educational policy reforms in higher education approaches and concomitant changes in the levels of university funding is required if South Africa is to meet the demand for enrolment growth, particularly if such growth includes all those who are willing and able to attend university.

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Re-imagining Pedagogy in Higher Education

In this section, a series of articles surprised with a range, both broad and deep, offered by higher institution teachers. Certainly innovation, experimentation and the courage to think can be applied to these papers, which destabilize and question taken-for-granted pedagogies, practices, beliefs and structures in institutions of higher education.

For many years now, pass rates have been a thorny issue in South Africa as the number of African students who drop-out or fail is proportionately higher than for other race groups. Drop-out and failure rates continue to be unacceptably high, costing the country millions for unrealized educational outcomes with the cost of damage to self-esteem incalculable. In 2012, Vithal and Dhunpath theorized that both sides of the equation, students and institutions were under prepared for the dynamic South African context; the former were under prepared for higher learning while the latter were under prepared for providing appropriate support and responsive pedagogies. In particular, the lecture method has increasingly come under scrutiny for its modes of teaching, language of instruction and marginalization of indigenous knowledges and by implication, contributing not only to drop-out and failure rates, but also to limiting access to higher education. The current student actions (#RhodesMustFall; #FeesMustFall) fuelled by anger, disappointment and distrust have made apparent the under preparedness of the State to support the educational aspirations of higher education students. Whilst the macro perspective looks bleak, at the institutional, faculty or module level the quest to improve both access and success continues as is evidenced by the interventions reported by various researchers.

The debate on the relative merits of discipline-specific versus generic academic literacies development has raged on since the nineteen eighties, without resolve. Advocates of generic academic literacies routinely cite student under preparedness – a product of dysfunctional schooling, which needs to be mediated, while proponents of discipline-specific literacy programmes bemoan the inadequacy of conversational literacy to enable deep-conceptual learning. The problem has become particularly acute with the imperative of providing access to the previously excluded South African students and the internationalization of higher education.

Over the years, Universities have responded with various intervention models to address the articulation gap. These include centralized

writing centres and more localized academic development support centres. To date, it appears that the only consensus on the dichotomy between generic versus discipline specific literacies is precisely that: an unhelpful dichotomy. A more useful question to probe would be about how institutions are equipped with a continuum of literacies from generic to specific to meet varying student higher education experiences and how this can be achieved not just by applied linguists but by all academics who take seriously the responsibility for literacy development.

Mabila, Gwaindepi and Musara in this edition focus on the meanings and concepts, which they argue, are lost, when teachers foreground the use of conversational language in students' descriptions of economics and business studies graphical representations. Using Cummins (2000) model of cognitively undemanding (BICS) to cognitively demanding tasks (CALP) along a continuum of context-embedded to context-reduced tasks, Mabila *et al*. contend that the Cummins' model provides a vivid explanation for the students' difficulty in using appropriate terminology and semantics and their heavy reliance on general conversational language which is compounded by the observed negative interference of the home language. The authors conclude that curriculum developers should consider integrating subject specific language courses at all levels of study throughout the Bachelor of Education programme to enable a firm grasp of the subject specific language which will enable them to filter down the correct usage of subject specific concepts to their own future students.

A bold response to the 'under prepared' stalemate is offered by Ivala, Thiart and Gachago in the article, 'Flipping the classroom … '. Ivala *et al*. convincingly argue that the flipped classroom is based on solid theoretical underpinnings (zone of proximal development, autonomous learning, peer mentoring and learning, self-directed learning, and problem solving). Despite the strong foundation and popularity amongst some students, the study found that a number of them disliked aspects of the flipped classroom. The integrity of this article and its value for those who may want to try it out is the attention paid by the authors to the critique of the approach and the limitations of its use. The recommendations made are restrained and appropriate.

It is not only the lecture method that needs to be re-appraised in the light of newer, available technologies; it is also the 'intent' of teaching. Teaching intent can be of two types (at least): to enable successful

completion of a module or qualification (outcome of teaching) and to ensure that students survive the study period (process of study). Understandably, when teaching in contexts of economic austerity with large numbers of poor students with poor academic histories, and deprived backgrounds, caring for students appears to be a natural response particularly as it is assumed to be benevolent, significant and worthy. Indeed, care work is intertwined with teaching intent; but is it possible that it can have a hazardous dimension? In the article by Bozalek, Watters and Gachago, teaching intent as care work is deconstructed to smash its taken for granted truths. Bozalek *et al.* argue that the intent of teaching can take on a dangerous kind of care, especially when it is wrapped in discourses that appear to benefit students. They contend that a misguided sense of care can be undemocratic, irresponsible and counter-productive, notably, because misguided care operates within the confines of paternalism and parochialism creating, for example, dependent individuals (paternalism) with limited global reach (parochialism). The authors have taken care to describe the conditions where paternalism and parochialism are necessary. The idea is not to reject caring for those we teach, but to be guided by a critical ethics of care so that it its hazardous effects are mitigated.

In keeping with ideas of support and innovation, Murray in his article which seeks to explore the effect of two bridging intervention programmes geared at increasing higher education access in the Faculty of Science at the University of KwaZulu-Natal uses regression adjustment techniques and a Heckman treatment selection model for bias control to show that both the programmes under investigation proved successful in improving throughput rates in the programme. The two programmes provide bridging facilities for students who ordinarily, due to their poor basic education schooling, would not be able to cope with a qualification in science. The one programme enables students to pursue a range of non-credit bearing courses in the first year, exposing students to the cultural capital and pedagogies of higher education (known as the foundational approach) while the other enables students to extend their first year of study to two years in order to assist students in managing their course-work (known as the augmented approach). For Murray, both these interventions proved critical, given the imperatives of access, and the general lack of preparedness by students coming from predominantly under-resourced township and rural schools. In order to respond to the 'question of the moment', Murray argues that higher education institutions need to be responsive to students' educational backgrounds by

offering support. He finds that while both approaches were useful, the foundational approach offered better outcomes as opposed to the augmented programme.

Paideya's article is another attempt at providing appropriate support to higher education students, this time in the discipline of Chemistry. Chemistry has an unfortunate history of a high failure rate and with massification of the higher education system the number of failures has risen concomitantly. Supplemental instruction, a student support intervention has been set up for a number of years with mixed success. Paideya's incisive exploration of the profile of students who attend the supplemental sessions in combination with the reasons they provide for attending the sessions is enlightening. The profile offered comprises the age, year of study, gender, past achievement, residence and language of instruction of those who attend the sessions. The study provides explicit evidence that the reasons students provide for attending or not are complex and multifaceted. Some reasons offered for not attending clearly expose the dimensions that are factored in the design of when and how supplemental instruction is offered. Clearly then, even when support structures are not well-attended by particular student profiles, the support should not be withdrawn as a profile is not fixed it can change as the circumstances of students change and could lead to a change in attendance patterns.

Finally, the reimagined trope is strengthened by two theoretically based articles. The first by Kruger, 'Experimenting with nomadic posthumanism …' speaks specifically to the problem of 'Man' as the progenitor of the ills that beset the planet. The roles played by the Enlightenment, philosophy, anthropology, science and psychology to propose, promote and propagate anthropocentric dominance cannot be ignored, especially when one considers that the sustainability of the planet is being compromised, that a dubious notion of social justice is employed to service neoliberal tendencies, and rampant capitalism has widened the gap between those who live well and those who struggle for survival. Care for plants and animals have been at best, relegated to the periphery, and at worst, destroyed in the Anthropocene period. The paper by Kruger is more than just a 'what if' proposal; it is a timely reminder to galvanize a movement (perhaps #HumansMustFall) to displace the dominant notion of the human as master of the environment and supreme life form and, more pertinently, to experiment with new ideas to solve the challenges in the sphere of education.

Unlike classical deconstruction moves which seek to collapse oppositional binaries such that they coincide and become one and thereby nullify the apparent contradictions, posthumanism displaces the ontological and epistemological foundations of identity as it has been understood anthropocentrically, in the process rearticulating it (identity) in relational terms. It seeks out and occupies a gaze from the interstitial spaces between, for example, virtuality and actuality, and truth and falsehood by deploying a different mind game (human needs do not supersede the needs of other life forms) and defiant logic (what is good for humans is not necessarily good for the planet/other life forms) so that an authentic, broad-spectrum social justice and ethical orientation can be (re)asserted. Those who are concerned with solving problems in education are advised to engage with this vibrant invitation to experiment with nomadic posthumanism.

Since time immemorial, learning has been highly valued. The displacement of informal education by a systematized, centralized and formalized education controlled by the State (even private education has to subscribe to state regulations) has always been cast in positive ways, even when there is much anecdotal evidence to the contrary. The intention is always assumed to be good, to produce educated persons leading to improved lives. Whether one refers to basic or higher education the confidence and belief in education to deliver the promise of a better future has not wavered. In fact, there is greater demand for access to higher education. It is not surprising, therefore, for relying on the intensity of the gaze on the scholarship of teaching and learning to provide insights. The scholarship of teaching and learning is relied on to improve, question and challenge what, how and why we teach or learn in the ways we do. But are we doing enough, especially given our current pressures?

As a response to the current endeavours and practices of teaching and learning, Olivier's article is a *tour de force* of theoretical musing, logic and deliberation. He starts at the beginning: What are the tacit influences on teaching and doing research? He makes explicit the links between communication action (strategic or communicative) and interests (technical, practical and emancipatory) and then draws on Lacanian discourses to explain the choices made. Further linkages are made by turning to Derrida and Ranciere to deepen explanations of the tacit influences on our teaching and research. We believe that the strength of the article lies in the deployment

of a range of theoretical/philosophical perspectives and concepts which in turn reflect the range of interwoven communication-interest combinations.

It is heartening to note that pedagogy, practice, policy and probing continue to evolve in higher education. It is also heartening that scholarship on these issues is not distant from the very difficult and complicated conversations demanded by our students. While these efforts highlighted in this special issue are commendable, much more still needs to be done. We need more voices, new ways of thinking and a reinvigoration of the activist spirit among academics. There is critical need to close the gap between 'them' (students) and us. We need to take seriously international imperatives while understanding the important questions presented by our context and of our time. An academic corps divorced from the daily realities will not survive the pressures of our time. It is time for an academic project that takes seriously questions around decolonization and internationalization in the context of systemic change, curriculum reform, professional development and quality promotion in higher education.

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