Editorial

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in the Time of COVID-19

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Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic brought basic and higher education almost to a complete standstill, leading to educational institutions exploring mechanisms to 'save the academic year' while ensuring that 'no learner was left behind'. According to UNESCO, 9.8 million African students are experiencing a disruption in their studies due to the closure of higher education institutions. South Africa, like other countries, implemented a hard lockdown to contain the spread of the pandemic while preparing the health care system to respond to the expected increases in COVID-19 patients. Fearing contamination from the virus, the management of higher education institutions quickly arranged for students to return home and turned to emergency remote online/ e-learning to save the academic year.

However, a transition to an online mode is complicated on a continent where only 24% of the population has access to the internet.

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Emergency remote teaching and learning poses several challenges for a country such as South Africa, where the economic disparities between the rich and the poor are among the largest in the world (Tregenna & Tsela 2012). Further, the digital divide in the country mirrors the racial inequalities of the apartheid era, whereby the greatest proportion of learners with limited access to smart phones, computers and who also have connectivity challenges, are predominantly Black African and Coloured. It is not surprising, therefore, that the greatest debate to date concerning the massive roll out of emergency online teaching and learning by higher education institutions has focused on matters of justice: the learners' differential access to technology-enhanced learning, connectivity issues, and unconducive learning environments due to over-crowding and other challenges experienced in the home sphere. du Preez and le Grange (2020: 92) specifically point out that in South Africa there is 'unequal access to technologies used in online learning as well as unequal access to data and connectivity' and a large percentage of the population do not have access to the internet at home. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the chapters in this edited volume tackle the challenges posed by digital inequalities.

The challenges of emergency online learning are however not circumscribed to limited resources on the part of the students; many institutions of higher learning were not ready to shift to e-learning instantly. Teaching practices (the theory and the practical/ clinical components) also had to be transformed, almost overnight, to be in line with the pedagogy of online teaching and learning. It should be recognized that to suddenly require the academic staff to change from face-to-face contact teaching to technology-mediated teaching and learning calls for a major paradigm shift on their part. Teaching and learning is not about the technical delivery of information, from one source to another; it is an integral part of one's identity and hence it should be conceptualized in social and relational terms. It is a social practice.

Borrowing from Doston's (2014) analysis of epistemic oppression, Bartunek and Moch's (1987) notions of First, Second, and Third Order changes are used here to illustrate the kind of transformation and paradigm shift that is required on the part of academics and institutions to fully embrace e-learning. According to Bartunek and Moch (1987:486), *first-order change* involves 'the tacit reinforcement of present understandings' and does not require any changes in the organizational schemata themselves. As

Doston (2014) notes, this kind of change is often resorted to when there are inefficiencies in the system and only results in attempts to change strategies or behaviors in order to fit the solution to already-existing beliefs and assumptions, without interfering with the latter.

Applied to the responses that higher education institutions implemented in response to the challenges of COVID-19, first-order change could be equated to simply moving one's content online, without interrogating the pedagogy of online learning, nor taking into account the lived realities of the learners during the pandemic. Hence, this solution addresses the fact that the classroom is inaccessible to both the learner and the educator; the latter's attempt at resolving the problem is to get the content to the student. As some of the chapters in this edited volume argue, an approach of this nature is problematic as it does not take cognizance of the social, economic, and social realities of the learners, amongst others.

Pohlhaus (2012: 3) makes a strong argument in favour of recognizing the sociality of knowers. She avers that: 'The knower's *situatedness* refers to the situations in which the knower finds herself repeatedly over time due to the social relations that position her in the world' (emphasis in original). Pohlhaus (2012: 3) continues and opines that out of this situatedness arises 'particular habits of attention that may attune the knower to others' habits of attention or not, depending upon one's social vulnerability … social position has a bearing on what parts of the world are prominent to the knower and what parts of the world are not'. In their account of reflexivity, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) make a similar argument. They argue that we should go beyond the prior-understandings and social origins that condition our understanding and reflect upon 'the position that the analyst occupies ... in the microcosm of the *academic* field, ... in the objective space of possible positions offered to him or her at a given moment, and, beyond, in the field of power' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 39, emphasis in original). The events that were unfolding as institutions of higher learning were responding to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic were, ultimately, about power.

The above-mentioned position is commensurate with the social and cultural tradition in Psychology (Vygotsky 1981), which argues that learning is socially and culturally-mediated by means of tools such as language, in the zone of proximal development (comprising the gap between what the learner can accomplish by themselves and what he/ she can accomplish when learning is facilitated by a competent adult or peer). A mere provision of

gadgets ignores that learning takes place at the zones of contact, between people, who are also situated in culture. Providing data and computers to students to learn from home, without addressing the students as situated knowers, and the pedagogical issues surrounding online learning, addresses the problem only at the level of first-order change. The social and cultural positionality of the learners, such as their crowded living environments, their access to linguistic tools, and even the real possibility of gender-based violence, are left un-interrogated.

Second-order change involves an alteration of the organizational schemata themselves, the shared epistemic resources or mental constructs by means of which the organization collectively makes sense of the world (Bartunek & Moch 1987; Doston 2014). When the mental constructs and epistemic resources are no longer sufficient to fulfil organizational goals, it is the interpretive frameworks or the schemata themselves that ought to be changed, resulting in second-order change. Second-order change involves changes in the group's values and their ways of thinking and feeling in relation to a particular problem or domain, thereby leading to new strategies (Bartunek & Moch 1987; Doston 2014). In the context of the COVID-19 experience, second-order change occurs when we begin to see the issues from the perspective of the marginalized students, and we become sensitive to the full range of their experiences. At this stage, the student *emerges* in our understanding as an *umuntu*, a human being who is deserving of our respect and compassion independently of their standing in life. When this level of change occurs, a space is opened for those affected by COVID-19, be they staff or the students, to communicate their accounts in full and be heard, rather than being discounted as insignificant.

Medina (2012) refers to the process whereby communicative obstacles prevent others differentially from expressing their views, leading to them being silenced, as hermeneutical injustice. Relinquishing power and privilege, in order to listen attentively to the experiences of the other who is less privileged than us, is an integral part of second-order change. A few chapters in this edition explore these issues with reference to the concept of *ubuntu* and the invaluableness of human life independently of whose life is at stake. In this regard, our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on higher education can benefit from the several attempts to infuse the philosophy of *ubuntu* into open distance learning (ODL) (Letseka 2016; Mashile & Matoane 2016).

Third-order change involves 'the training of organizational members to be aware of their present schemata and thereby more able to change these schemata as they see fit (Bartunek & Moch 1987:486). As the organization develops the capacity to reflect upon itself, it gradually becomes able to identify 'and alter elements of operative, instituted social imaginaries that inform and preserve organizational schemata' (Doston 2014:119). In the context of a university, this calls upon us to take a step back to become aware of our epistemological systems and cultural traditions, their limitations, and change them where this is required. In the context of COVID-19, institutions of higher learning were called upon to reflect deeply on their epistemologies, their limits, their deeply-held beliefs and identities about ourselves and others. This according to Bartunek and Moch (1994) is the most difficult aspect of change.

The chapters in this edited volume talk to various aspects of first-order, second-order, and third-order changes that were implemented by institutions of learning in South Africa, in their attempts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes were concurrent, although the degree of the implementation of each level of change, and successes, vary. The chapters also reflect on various aspects of epistemic exclusions (Doston 2014) and hermeneutical injustices (Medina 2012) that were witnessed, and call for an implementation of an *ubuntu* approach in higher education institutions' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic; a social justice perspective that frames the problem using the perspective of *both/ and thinking*, rather than *the binary logic of* us (management, government) vs. them (students) (Alinia 2015).

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In **Chapter 1**, **'Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge at a University in South Africa', Zinhle P. Nkosi, Nokukhanya Y. Ngcobo, Ayub Sheik** and **Nellie N. Ngcongo-James** report on the University of KwaZulu-Natal's response to the impact of COVID-19. This constituted extensive planning among all stakeholders at the university, in ensuring that students and staff are well equipped to confront the pandemic. This chapter aims to highlight how the university has responded to the institutional closure and how it has protected its integrity in ensuring that teaching and learning is not compromised. For the purposes of this chapter, only data sourced from

lecturers is discussed. In a bid to save as much of the 2020 first semester as possible, the University management required academics to put their content on-line, to be accessed by students. This also required academics reviewing module content, approaches to teaching, modes of delivery, and assessment strategies. By way of illustration, in order to present a class lecture, lecturers have undergone several training and workshop sessions on remote teaching, on Zoom live teaching, as a replacement for traditional classroom teaching, for example. The chapter focuses on the School of Education, and reports on its programmes. Collection of data was impacted by the lockdown and legal requirements of social distancing. Consequently, interviews through the Zoom App were conducted with eight lecturers located in the Languages and Arts Cluster, within the School of Education. Document analysis was also used to establish what plans and programmes were in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amongst findings, it is evident that the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) has taken proactive measures in ensuring that teaching and learning continue, and every lecturer has access to resources for remote teaching and learning. Whilst cognisant of the fact that the University is still in its infant stage of remote teaching and learning, the study indicates that staff are responding positively to these changes and that despite the pandemic, morale remains high.

The impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic on higher education in South Africa has inspired the academy to adopt new pedagogies in the teaching of African languages. The second chapter shows that through the use of an isiZulu corpus, African language courses can be offered online, using digital humanities methodologies such as the AntConc concordance program. African languages are resource-scarce languages (Bosch *et al.* 2007; Pretorius & Bosch 2003; Keet & Khumalo 2017). This scarcity includes the paucity of exhaustive grammatical descriptions, the compilation of both large and specialized corpus resources, and the development of machine-readable lexicons. A corpus is thus carefully designed and systematically collected natural language data from a variety of text types and sources following a particular set of principles, which constitute a sample that statistically reflects the use of that particular language, and is processed, stored and accessed by means of computers.

In **Chapter 2**, then, **'Using Corpora in Online isiZulu Language Teaching', Langa Khumalo** argues for a novel way of teaching African languages, particularly isiZulu, using corpora and lexical software as open-

source online resources. UKZN has developed the isiZulu national corpus (INC) to be the biggest African language corpus, as well as two other corpus typologies, the English-isiZulu Parallel Corpus (EiPC) and the IsiZulu Oral Corpus (IOC), that are available as digital resources for language research and language teaching. Using AntConc, which is a freeware concordance program for Windows, African languages courses can be offered online in response to the COVID-19 education lockdown.

In **Chapter 3**, **'Delivery of Clinical Teaching and Learning for Health Sciences Students during the National Lockdown in Response to COVID-19: A Pragmatic Approach at the University Of KwaZulu-Natal', Busisiwe P. Ncama** and **Sinegugu E. Duma** argue that COVID-19 has posed a challenge to teaching and learning at institutions of higher education in South Africa, but even more so in the delivery of clinically focused programmes that require experiential learning to happen in healthcare settings, which are the epicentre for combating the COVID-19 epidemic. The national lockdown, which resulted in the abrupt closure of university residences and the withdrawal of students from healthcare settings to promote physical distancing and reduce the spread of COVID-19, also disrupted the core principles of clinical placement and clinical rotation – the main delivery mode of all clinically focused programmes in the College of Health Sciences (CHS), University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The impact of the sudden withdrawal of students from clinical placement because of the national lockdown to flatten the curve of the spread of COVID-19, is huge for clinical learning. Although it is possible to extend time for clinical placement and achievement of clinical learning outcomes once the epidemic is over for students in pre-clinical years and junior years, the same cannot be said for senior and final-year health science students. The latter have to achieve all the exit-level outcomes of programmes, and meet the requirements of the professional bodies before graduating and registering as qualified health professionals.

Yet, final-year health sciences students can gain a lot of knowledge and experience in managing epidemics of this nature by being in the frontline, working and learning side by side all other health professionals in fighting this epidemic. Even so, the reality is that students are novices, and thus at greater risk of being infected with COVID-19 in their line of duty, than experienced professionals. Therefore, a careful balance needs to be reached in meeting their clinical training needs.

With regard to **'Implications of the Minister of Higher Education's "no child left behind" on an African Child during the Corona Virus Pandemic in South Africa',** in **Chapter 4, Christina Kgari-Masondo** and **Zoleka Mkhabela** point to the fact that the global decolonisation of education in higher learning encourages scholars to revisit the African past for inspiration to deal with contemporary education problems deterring students from enjoying the education they deserve. The current global Corona pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities existing in societies, leading to education institutions finding it difficult to ensure that all students equal access teaching and learning. In South Africa, the majority of students are African, and they reside in rural ecologies that lack infrastructure like electricity and running water. Many of such students lack resources to engage in the current exclusively technology-based education, due to poverty and funding needs. Despite that, the Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Blade Nzimande, introduced the principle of 'no child left behind' during the implementation of online teaching. Yet, this was done without providing ways and means of attaining that. The chapter interrogates the feasibility of not leaving any child behind, especially those in rural ecologies who have no access to online teaching and learning gadgets and struggle with electronic network access. Existing research indicates that there is a lack of acknowledgement of African teachers' voices about solutions to their students' experiences drawing on indigenous knowledge, in matters that the government introduces in varied contexts. Therefore, the chapter reports on a qualitative study through the auto-ethnographic observations and reflections of two African lecturers about the 'silenced' narratives of diverse African students' living contexts that need to be accommodated in the implementation of online teaching and learning, and so ensure they are not left behind during the era of pandemic. For this project, we draw on one of the IsiZulu idioms, *umuntu akalahlwa* (a human person is not disposable), as a way of mitigating the concern of 'no child left behind'. The study concludes that *umuntu akalahlwa* is a pedagogy that can be used in unsilencing measures that inhibit students from accessing online teaching and learning as it safeguards the human rights of all students.

In **chapter 5, 'Flipped Learning within Mathematics Teacher Education in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: Embracing Connectivism in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic', Jayaluxmi Naidoo** positions the research focus within the context of the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has

disrupted life-encompassing societal and educational lockdowns globally. Higher Education Institutions are undertaking various approaches to complete the academic semester remotely while seeking to maintain academic integrity. Within the Fourth Industrial Revolution, digital tools are viewed as essential in facilitating remote learning. Globally, institutions are introducing virtual and remote learning within their curricula. In mathematics education contexts, coupled with embracing remote learning, are issues of what it means to incorporate flipped learning within the context of COVID-19. Naidoo's chapter draws attention to a qualitative study that explored mathematics education students' perceptions of flipped learning within the context of the pandemic. The study was framed by connectivism, which is a network learning theory guided by the view that learning is a process whereby new information is continuously being acquired. Participants were invited to interactive virtual workshops focusing on flipped mathematics learning within the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. Subsequently, participants were interviewed online, based on their perceptions of flipped mathematics learning. The findings of this study indicate that there are challenges with using flipped learning and the advantages of collaboration inspired by flipped learning within the context of COVID-19. Globally, these findings have relevance when considering the perceptions and implications of flipped mathematics learning within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 6, by **Vasanthrie Naidoo** and **Maureen Nokuthula Sibiya, 'COVID-19: Raising the Bar on Education Technology to "Flatten the Curve"',** introduce essential knowledge and discusses key issues related to quality assurance practices with distance learning. This is in the broader context of the World Health Organization's announcement that the current outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), health crises have constituted a public health emergency of international concern. It has necessitated international lockdowns of countries as part of strict infection control protocols. The COVID-19 pandemic has also become a major challenge for most learning institutions around the world, making this disease a pervasive force shaping and challenging higher education as it faces the new realities of distance education. The pandemic crises have affected the continuity of learning and the delivery of course material at higher education institutions. To remain relevant, tertiary education institutions have had to re-invent their learning environments in order to embrace distance education whilst still trying to maintain effective student-lecturer relationships. Various

dimensions of quality assurance challenges often surround the facilitation and delivery of distance education or multimedia platforms of teaching and learning, prompting the need for rigid quality control principles to guide programme or course delivery. Notably, there is still a need to identify functional deficits and challenges of distance education programmes from a learning and teaching perspective. So, deriving from their own experiences, and research with distance education, Vasanthrie Naidoo and Maureen Nokuthula Sibiya, deals with seminal scholarly insights and key issues related to quality assurance practices with distance learning. Stimulating discussion and establishing a connectivity between quality assurance practices and online teaching and learning programmes, this chapter also offers valuable insight into forthcoming as well as existing curriculum developers who plan to engage in distance education curriculum development and delivery.

The sudden onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic around the globe has forced the shut-down from the outside world, compelling everyone to review existing practices at all levels. The norms derived from life – personal and professional – as it used to be lived, are no longer relevant during the pandemic and new practices are being adopted to cope within confinement measures. In their **'Covid-19: A Liability or Serendipity for Teacher Education? Exploring Lockdown as an Opportunity for 'Innovative Disruption' in TEPs', Aruna Ankiah-Gangadeen, Yesha Mahadeo-Doorgakant** and **Seema Goburdhun** study the impact of confinement on Teacher Education Programmes (TEPs) within a Mauritian Tertiary Education Institution (TEI) where, for years, management invested massively in technological resources and attempted to bring about a paradigm shift in teaching, but with little success. It is noted though, that, following the lockdown, teaching shifted from prevailing and predominant face-to-face sessions to online modalities within a span of days. With teacher educators having been propelled out of their comfort zones, and being currently engaged with new modes for course delivery, the authors seek to understand how the lockdown has unleashed new potential and possibilities with regard to TEPs, at the level of curriculum content and transaction. Rather than adopting a deficit view of the situation, knowing fully well that the abrupt shift to online teaching inevitably carries its dose of liabilities and problems, the authors deliberately focus on positive experiences and fresh perspectives that may serve to revamp TEPs as far as scope and currency are concerned.

The case study on which this chapter is based, was anchored in Appreciative Inquiry and adopted a grounded approach to data generation and analysis. To allow for the production of rich textured data emanating from varied perspectives, participants constituted teacher educators with different areas of specialisation. The findings revealed that the forceful shift to online learning brought about an awareness of opportunities afforded by online teaching and learning modes as well as more willingness to continue along these lines in the future. It also provided insights into the shortcomings of the TEPs with regards to skills and attitudes to be developed.

In **Chapter 8, 'Understanding Remote Teaching and Learning Challenges amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic to Enhance Professional Development: A Systematic Review of Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles, 2012–2020', Vino Paideya** produces a systematic review of scholarly focused on academics' remote teaching experiences, from 2012 to 2020. She points out that remote teaching and learning for many higher educational institutions nationally and internationally have become a growing response to enacting contingency plans to contain and manage the effects and impact of the COVID 19 virus pandemic. Yet, many institutions have been developing and encouraging such remote online teaching and learning for many years. Focused on the literature, her research explores the challenges experienced with novice online teaching and learning practices. Although several reviews exist that focus on specific aspects of online teaching and learning and blending learning practices, there has been no broad overview of literature exploring recent trends and challenges of remote teaching and learning. Data sets were divided into three main themes: the student, lecturer, curriculum needs. Research analysis over this period suggests that challenges in remote education need to be addressed through ongoing provision of professional development for lecturers, trainings for students, and technical support for content development. Paideya's research indicates that there is a need to identify credible novice online teaching and learning practices during the transition from face-to-face to online learning during the time of COVID-19. She also provides a contemporary picture of challenges that can be avoided with the implementation of remote teaching and learning during COVID-19.

Lungi Sosibo, in Chapter 9, focuses on **'Redressing Inequalities while Envisioning University Student Teaching during COVID-19 Lockdown: Lessons from #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall'.** The

chapter's point of departure is that the intensity of COVID-19 is currently not the same in developed and developing countries. It appears that developed countries are heavily burdened by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The instability brought about by this pandemic has serious ramifications for the country's economy and schooling at all levels. In order to flatten the curve, the South African government implemented the lockdown of the country, which meant no contact learning could occur. Consequently, the decision was made by departments of education, schools and universities to offer remote teaching and learning. This chapter reports on the efforts made by one South African higher education institution (HEI) to save the 2020 academic project in the midst of COVID-19 lockdown, based on the author's experiences and observations. Results revealed that during the COVID-19 lockdown, HEIs operated at different stages of preparedness regarding provision of remote teaching and learning. The author argues that prioritising remote teaching and learning after the 2015-2016 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests should have prepared South African HEIs better to meet curriculum demands emanating from COVID-19 lockdown. Furthermore, had all institutions increased capacity development and ensured wider staff and student accessibility to resources, the curriculum would have been delivered efficiently during the COVID-19 lockdown. The chapter concludes by showing how the COVID-19 lockdown has transformed and reshaped the manner in which teaching should be done in the future.

Finally, in **Chapter 10, 'Leadership amidst the COVID-19 Crisis: Exploring a Curriculum for Servant Leadership in HE and Beyond', Kasturi Behari-Leak** and **Suren Behari,** bring this volume to a close. The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread rapidly across the globe, leaving practically no-one unaffected. Evidence suggests that this virus does not discriminate against anyone: every race, gender, class, faith, ethnicity and nation have experienced disruption and disorder as a result. It is a demonstration of our common humanity, of our sameness. Through participant observations, the authors, located in South Africa and the United States, offer personal perspectives, observations and experiences of leadership practices at local, national and international levels. By means of this chapter, they explore how leadership as agency can be strengthened and consolidated in the Higher Education curriculum. The chapter draws on the scholarship and theoretical principles of leader-less and leader-full models, to advance an argument for 'servant-leadership' at the individual, community,

organisation, national and global echelons of society. The proposed action-oriented leadership curriculum is based on a model of servant leadership that encourages us all to work together to devise ways to make each individual and citizen more capable of managing and responding to change and disruption in critical, empathic and socially responsive ways.

Conclusion

The chapters in this edited volume reflect on the various challenges that were experienced by higher education institutions, in their attempts to facilitate the transition to online teaching and learning, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have reflected on these institutional responses using the notion of first, second, and third-order change. The chapter highlight resource challenges and the pedagogical and epistemological obstacles that were encountered, thus making the notion of 'leaving no learner behind', difficult. Ultimately, institutions' responses to online teaching and learning is a matter of social justice. Not only should they take into account the social and cultural positionality of the learners: they should also be informed by *both/ and thinking*, which is commensurate with the *Ubuntu* paradigm.

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Editorial

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