Uncertainties and Ambiguities of (Re)learning[1] to Teach in the Context of Crises

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Abstract

This chapter offers a reading of the situation in institutions of higher education generated by the corona virus. Unprepared for the closure of institutions and still expected to provide tuition, the only option exercised presently is emergency remote teaching. Online platforms are simultaneously useful and challenging as institutions grapple with digital pedagogies. The question that we ponder in this chapter is the effectiveness of emergency remote teaching in the absence of experience to teach *for* these conditions. Effectiveness presupposes learning to teach. However, learning to teach requires learning differently, i.e. (re)learning, underpinned by a sensitivity to circumvent marginalisation and exclusion. We draw on the works of Agamben, Habermas, Laclau, Foucault, and Derrida, and deploy a range of deconstruction devices like empty signifyers, uncertainty, ambiguity, undecidability and pharmakon to build the argument. We also contemplate the possibilities and impossibilities of (re)learning to teach, and remind those who teach in higher education do so with creativity, and alacrity whilst being aware that ambiguity, complexity and the possible –

[1] The bracketing in (re)learning is a reminder throughout the text of its undecidable, ambiguous and complex character.

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impossible binary stalk all efforts to function in situations of intense abnormality.

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1 Introduction

This chapter sets up an argument about the need for (re)learning to teach in the context of crises and the multifarious challenges that are entangled therein. The landscape of teaching in higher education has changed substantially since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is both a scramble to cope with an unimagined situation as well as technological opportunism. In the meantime, higher education has responded by moving online and making extensive use of digital technology when institutions shut down to prevent the spread of the virus. Two years have passed, and the crisis has not abated. In fact, more variants have emerged, with UHI and Deltacron being the latest ones[2]. More variants are expected. Thus, the temporary move to emergency remote teaching may be prolonged for months, if not years.

Given the current situation, and the rapid implementation of virtual technologies for teaching and learning, we make a case for (re)learning to teach during a crisis. We do this by describing the challenges within notions of uncertainty and ambiguity. In that sense, uncertainty destabilises the arguments made throughout the chapter. Furthermore, we argue that higher education is enmeshed in issues like the vaccination mandates and profiteering by pharmaceutical and technology corporations and the state's desire for population control.

Next, we invoke the notion of 'empty signifiers' to explain that clarity is lacking, and that fear and panic underpin and amplify the challenges we face. In closing, we turn to Derrida's (1981) notion of pharmakon to consolidate and explain undecidability, uncertainty and ambiguity that affect both the prescription and the practice of (re)learning to teach. We begin with a quote from Dickens to capture the crisis situation as generated by the pandemic.

[2] Earlier variants with Greek letter names are Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Omicron. Deltacron (the merging of Delta and Omicron) is a new discovery of the way the virus is morphing to create variants.

2 Future Present

Charles Dickens (1859: 1) begins his classic *Tale of Two Cities* with these memorable lines:

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

With this oxymoron, Dickens lucidly documents the turmoil of the French Revolution, capturing an age of stark contrasts between London and Paris and the events leading to the French Revolution. Many of us will identify with the comparison because it resonates with our experiences of negotiating an uncertain, pandemic-stricken world. Indeed, for the past 22 months, higher education has been plunged into a 'winter of despair'. All that was once knowable and reliable about how and what to teach, has been disrupted and destabilised. Although always an imperceptible presence, uncertainty has become an explicit condition of teaching. In contrast, techno-optimists are certain and confident that a 'spring of hope' lies in digital and virtual technologies. It is a mantra they have been repeating for decades (see e.g., Martindale & Wiley 2005; Detweiler 2004; Lamb 2004) and during the pandemic crisis, touted as the only viable solution (Schroeder 2021; Dhawan 2020). The future, they proclaim, is here and now, whether or not we are willing or ready to navigate it. Yet, as we celebrate the triumph of resilience (or ignorance), we need to pause to reflect on our accomplishments thus far. Reflection is vital, as non-conventional teaching accomplishments may be perceived as spectacular or as irreverent blips in the history of education.

> All too often, we allow ourselves to be carried away by our busyness. We are too hyperactive, too reactive to even notice the hidden value-creating dynamics waiting under the surface within and around us. Tethered to our smartphones, we are too caught up and distracted to take the time necessary to sort through complexity or to locate submerged purpose. In our urgent rush to 'get there' we are going everywhere but being nowhere. Far too busy with transactive speed, we rarely step back to lead with transformative significance (Cashman 2012: 2).

While it may take decades to comprehend the full import of our decisions and actions regarding an undecidable, and oft times ambiguous teaching situation, there are signs and warnings that we have already been short-sighted (see Agamben 2021). A study conducted by Seirup, Tirotta and Blue (2016) found that during a period of normalcy, the benefits plateau for both faculty and students and the preference of both is face-to-face teaching. The study implies that the benefits of online teaching peak without adding more value thereafter. Despite the constraints on growth and progress, we can anticipate that the desire for online teaching will escalate during prolonged periods of social isolation. Even the half-and-half approach, blended learning, is experienced as both useful and ineffective by an individual (Fisher, LaFerreire & Rixon 2019).

Blended learning, initially used in corporate spaces to allow its employees to work and study without loss of employment (Sharma 2010), was recognized quickly by higher education for its flexibility and usefulness in resolving the challenges it faced, e.g. using distance education to attract part-time students. Without fully comprehending its challenges, blended learning became a new addition to the pedagogy lexicon (Rasheed, Kamsin & Abdulla 2020) and a catch-phrase for being current. Czerniewicz (2020) suggests, however, that 'It is something else, so call it something else!' She reminds us of the enormous challenges associated with designing higher education teaching and learning in 'normal' contexts, and by implication, the additional challenges that surface when 'hurried, incomplete and rushed efforts to teach online' (Czerniewicz 2020: 1) are implemented during a crisis.

The study conducted by Selwyn (2007) reveals a sobering view of the use of technology in higher education. It is neither used optimally nor perceived positively for creative and productive outputs. In the study, computer technology is viewed as generating linear thinking and hindering creativity (Selwyn 2007). More troubling, are the findings of a ten-year longitudinal study by Englund, Olofsson and Price (2017). Their main finding is that experienced higher education teachers are resistant to change. This is of concern because it means that there is a significant group of professionals who will continue to teach as if all platforms are the same. When the outcomes are unpredictable and contradictory, as the studies above reveal, resistance to change during crises may be accompanied by a reluctance to (re)learn.

Despite the undesired outcomes of online teaching, it has been embraced with bravado by 'instructional MacGyvers, having to improvise quick solu-

tions in less-than-ideal circumstances' (Hodges *et al.* 2020: 2). Those with the requisite resources thrive in this new age – or so it is believed (Luke 2003), as many privileged institutions invest their trusts and their endowments to the Silicon Valleys of the world. In the same way that we were seduced by the promise of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' (4IR), 'e-learning' has become the new mantra of higher education (see e.g., Gunasekaran, McNeil & Shaul 2002; Pantazis 2002). We are yet to determine whether both these labels are just 'empty signifiers' (Laclau 2000).

Empty signifiers tend to ascribe indeterminate labels of signification, which function primarily as receptacles that can be filled with different meanings, leading to obfuscation, ambiguity and even contradiction. Similarly, the signifiers '21st Century learner' and 'Generation X', are attached to another empty signifier - 'digital natives' – those we imagine are capable of taking responsibility for their learning or those 'naturally' programmed for a digital world, or even, the true inheritors of a digital future. Though there is minimal empirical evidence to suggest that digital natives learn differently, students are being inaugurated into teaching and learning realms that they apparently find comfortable (Speer 2007). The replacement of the now irrelevant digital native/ immigrant binary with the notion of 'digital wisdom' (Prensky 2009) is also not helpful because it suggests another empty signifier, 'digitally enhanced *homo sapiens'*. The offshoot is that the implemented alternatives, headlined by empty signifiers (4IR, e-learning, 21st Century learner, Generation X, digitally enhanced *homo sapiens*) create the illusion that higher education is providing 21st Century teaching (another empty signifier). The illusion - arising from the contradicting and obfuscating empty signifiers - serves ambiguity rather than providing clarity about impactful teaching and successful learning outcomes.

Despite the complexities revealed in the studies mentioned, online learning programmes have been used for decades, with many prestigious universities offering them as integral components of their programmes. Like all educational offerings, some are exemplary, some mediocre and some deficient (Serdyukov 2017). The willingness to defer to the authority of educational technologists 'who believe that online education practices are an act of salvation to the so-called 'educational apocalypse'' is disturbing (see e.g., Laskova 2021). Such a view frames technological innovation as a response to education in crisis rather than the intrinsic value and opportunities it offers to respond to the ubiquity of technology. Although online teaching is

potentially worthwhile, it is entangled in crucial economic and political agendas. For instance, the biggest beneficiaries of the education-in-crisis discourse are the technology companies, some of which have found in universities a lucrative marketplace to offer off-the-shelf solutions and customized learning management systems (Luke 2003). But the dangers of the present are not about the here, and now of capitalism and greed, it is about the future, as Agamben elaborates:

> Just as wars have bequeathed us a series of nefarious technologies, it is very likely that, after the health emergency is over, governments will attempt to continue the experiments they couldn't previously complete: universities will be closed to students, with classes only conducted online; we will no longer gather to have conversations about politics or culture; and wherever possible digital devices will replace any contact – *any contagion* – between human beings (Agamben 2021: 30). [Italics in original]

The project of re(learning), we think, is more vital than we thought – because it must include more than just new pedagogy, it must incorporate broader, critical content to prevent new forms of silencing, marginalisation and exclusion. No matter the different interpretations and meanings constructed, we attribute the origins of the challenges to the COVID-19[3] pandemic. The pandemic, in turn, has created a crisis of unimaginable magnitude, enabling the future to occupy the present. It is a present for which we are unprepared. We know there are challenges and that the solutions throw up challenges too, but the nature of the crisis is difficult to fathom, perhaps because it is too soon to know, or because we have not asked the appropriate questions. Nevertheless, in spite of our uncertainty about the crisis, and not wanting to deploy the notions of 'crisis' and '(re)learning' as placeholders, we provide content and interpretations of the former and latter notions in the sections that follow.

3 The Present: A Pandemic-Generated Crisis in Higher Education

On the 11 March 2020, the Director General of the World Health Organisation

[3] The origins of COVID-19, however, are contested.

declared a worldwide pandemic following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Chinese city of Wuhan (World Health Organisation, or WHO 2020).

As the virus spread, educational institutions shut down – leading first to interruption and thereafter a shift to emergency remote and distance teaching and making use of online platforms to do so. The closure led to the loss of face-to-face learning opportunities, delayed qualification completion, and the suspension of activities like graduation ceremonies, sports and social events. Globally, similar measures were implemented in higher education institutions.

It is unusual that there has never been a moment in history when institutions of higher learning all over the world were simultaneously affected by lockdowns, closure and the cessation of all physical contact.[4] Under these circumstances, several questions regarding teaching arose: Do we teach as we were taught? Can those who lack knowledge and education of digital platforms teach? Does the trope, 'teach as we were taught' exemplify an entrenched habit resistant to change? Is resistance to change a reflection of our 'idleness' to learn and relearn? Furthermore, unresolved questions, posed just a few years back, about the nature and purposes of learning (Mishra & Mehta 2017), the teaching of skills (Scott 2015), and questions about what students can do with knowledge rather than acquiring it (Silva 2009), persist. Higher education's long sleep (the way we teach) has been interrupted and we face the challenge of teaching not as planned distance teaching but as an emergency, remote approach. Could this prolonged, pandemic-induced crisis be the catalyst to learn, unlearn and to (re)learn the way we teach? Perhaps, when we consider that teaching has shifted from face-to-face lecture room arrangement to 'face-in-virtual-space' platforms, be it Zoom® or Microsoft Teams®.

However, the optimism we have of digital technology as the solution is not exciting as the 'form' of teaching changes but not its 'shape'. By 'form' we mean the teacher as leader, speaker, director, lecturer – the one orchestrating the teaching performance. Instead of teaching while standing in the front of (or behind) a group of students and delivering the contents, we shift platforms and assume we can connect with, inspire and hold the attention of those we teach (if we ever managed to do so successfully). As regards 'shape', Slack and Wise explain:

[4] Even during the so-called world wars, only parts of the world, were directly involved (see Reynolds, 2003).

> The particular shape manifested by the process at a particular point in time is what Williams[5] means by culture 'as a whole way of life' (2005: 4).

The 'shape', resultantly, is unaltered. 'Teaching as we were taught' has become a 'way of life', that is to say, it is a cultural phenomenon: a template for the ways we teach (Owens 2013). Figures 1 and 2 show that, in essence, the default approach, 'teach as we were taught', endures. The similarities between face-to-face and faces-in-virtual-space are not accidental – because the way we deploy technology neutralizes the differences between the practices. Furthermore, the practices share common purposes, processes and outcomes. It appears then that the way we deploy technology is an indicator of our unwillingness to stray too far from the comforts of the familiar. In that case, we have to ask, can digital technology produce a different culture of teaching?

Figure 1. Teaching in a lecture hall[6]

[5] A reference to Raymond Williams' (1960) book*: Culture and Society 1780-1950*. New York: Anchor Books.

[6] Source: ID 1677373561 Shutterstock.com

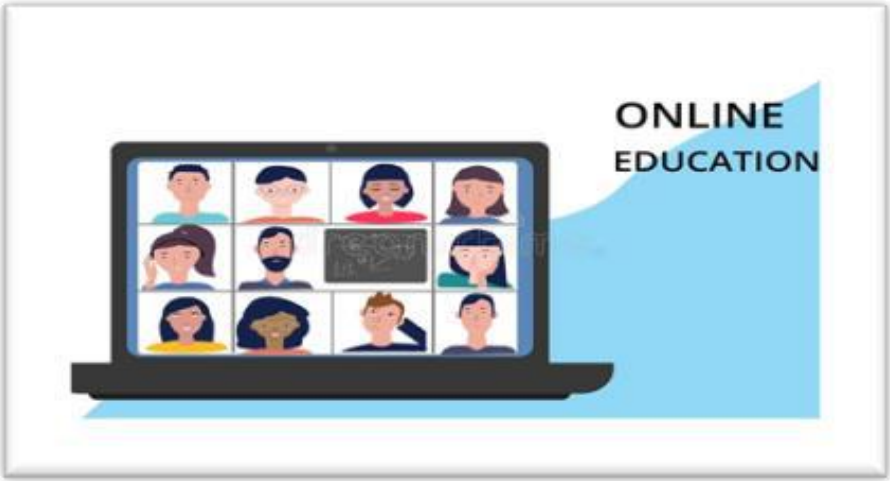

Figure 2. Teaching online[7]

Perhaps we are mistaken in thinking that the pandemic-induced crisis we face in education is unique and that the online route is the only solution. Audrey Watters (2020) asserts that 'there are precedents for what we are experiencing now – not just in the distant past or some faraway land' (2020: Online). She provides evidence by looking at the polio outbreak in Chicago Public schools in 1937 and the use of technology (radio and newspapers at that time) for educational provisioning. Regarding the pandemic of 2020, Watters (2020) questions why lessons have not been learnt from the Chicago 1937 outbreak. She argues that education has always been in a crisis and that the rise of the global crisis is a continuation of the perennial problems immanent in education – the difference now is that we are not only aware of the crisis in education, we know that the old solutions we thought were useful, are not. Old processes may, nevertheless, be useful with a caveat– it requires a rethinking, reimaging and reimagining of former processes. The world's population has grown, and sophisticated transport systems have enabled the virus to spread, unlike anything known previously. Incidentally, it also enables a rapid sharing of research and interventions that work in and for education, without knowing its full impact, we hasten to acknowledge.

[7] Source: ID 183402639 © Ruslana Velychko. Dreamstime.com

Watters turn to the past will probably be counterbalanced by historians' interrogation of the COVID-19 pandemic in the future: how will they narrate the sudden changes, actions, decisions, and outcomes of those who lived through the crisis? What kinds of narratives will be valued and whose interests will they serve? A global event like the pandemic can trigger realignments of truth, of power and of hegemony. Displacement and disruption are reconfiguring the world as we know it. For example, we are witnessing, at present, the displacement of the power of the state with the power of pharmaceutical and medical research (Sharfuddin 2020).

A more complex analysis reveals that at the same time, a tenuous relationship exists between the state and medical research. Furthermore, the relationship is also symbiotic or antagonistic– depending on consensus or disagreements regarding diagnosis, intervention and prediction. For instance, various stakeholders, who seek alternative interventions, prefer Ivermectin as a treatment for COVID-19, even though it has been disparaged by governments and the medical fraternity (Nazar 2021). In comparison, the hegemony of 'vaccine as panacea' is undeniable, as evidenced by government stances (OECD 2021). The proliferation of government efforts to encourage and even to make vacci-nations compulsory, it should be noted, succeeds (to an extent) because of the public's fears of the dangers of not being vaccinated. The vaccination mandate, however, is subverted by misinformation and the rise of online 'experts' (Na-eem, Bhatti & Khan 2021). In contrast, anti-vaxxers operate in two ways: highlighting 'dangers' posed by the vaccine (see e.g., McDonald 2021) and posting a 'tsunami of misinformation' (Mokhtari & Mirzaei 2020). Hypervisible, too, is the domination and greed of developed nations as they monopolise the production and distribution of vaccines and virus research (Moreno, Sándor & Schmidt 2021; Storeng, de Bengy Puyvallée & Stein 2021).

Against this backdrop, it is apparent that as important as higher education is, it is a peripheral and not a central issue. Even though it is relegated to the margins of state agendas, higher education is also caught up in vaccine politics because students and staff possess rights that may be at odds with the 'must-be-vaxxed' expectation. The situation is tenuous and could lead to actions similar to the protests that destabilised higher education institutions in South Africa over the past few years. Crises, it appears, destabilise conceptions of 'normal', the idea that the activities of individuals, families, society, culture, the state, and higher education institutions, are stable, predictable and normative in character.

The 'new normal', first applied in industry (El-Erian 2010), was coined to denote deviations from established ways of doing business. Now 'new normal' is recast as a state of precarious instability; uncomfortable, yet unavoidable. It marks a dangerous phase for human beings because an invisible (to the naked eye), organism, a virus, not only orchestrates daily life, it can also end life, and more importantly, its trajectory is erratic and ubiquitous. The 'new normal' entails consenting to changing habitual patterns of living and learning in spite of the reluctance to do so.

Despite the world's interventions and remedies (or maladies depending on one's perspective) of past crises, such as, e.g., the two world wars, the plague, malaria, smallpox, and the great depression of the 20th Century, doubts exist about humanity's ability to cope and overcome the effects of the first global threat in the 21st Century, especially in light of the emergence of corona virus variants and four waves of high infection and death rates (D'Souza & Dowdy 2021). Apart from misinformation and fake news (Mokhtari & Mirzaei 2020), doubts linger because of collective amnesia – forgetting the tenacity and resilience that enabled past crises to be resolved, and propagating ideas of helplessness, hopelessness and futility (Pinto, Soares, Silva *et al.* 2020; Shaw 2020). George Santayana emphasises the point, in a different way to Watters critique (2020), that 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (2011: 172).

Governments have also to remember past solutions and failed interventions, and more importantly, recognize that it has to manage opposing dynamics to appease its citizens. On the one hand, it is reliant on medical science to combat the spread of the coronavirus and, on the other hand, it has to ensure the economic sustainability and viability of the nation. Similarly, higher education has to configure its way out of a conundrum to appease students: offering viable education experiences whilst maintaining a safe, contagion-free environment. Online education provides a solution, albeit with limitations and complications. Before the pandemic, the up-take of modes to displace the dependence on contact teaching and learning has been slow or absent, even though higher education institutions have instituted development programmes, mentorships and resources for staff. However, COVID-19 has significantly changed attitudes and preferences and galvanised practitioners towards technology-based, remote, online teaching approaches. Resultantly, we conclude that the crisis in higher education is narrowed to continuity of teaching, accompanied by the assumption that learning is taking and will take place.

4 Online Teaching: Pandemic Panic?

The shift to emergency remote online teaching has been described as 'panic-gogy' (panic + pedagogy) (Kamenetz 2020) and 'pandemogogy' (pandemic + pedagogy) (Escartin 2021). Sean Morris brought attention to the word, 'panic-gogy' after discovering it on a Twitter feed which described teaching solutions as 'grasping at straws' (Baker 2020: 1) and teachers' panic about 'how to maintain teaching in this environment that [they] don't understand' (Baker 2020: 1). In short, these are descriptors of the efforts made to make education available in ways that accommodate students' situations during a crisis – a view that, presumably resonates with the idea of 'no student left behind' (Domina 2014). In contrast, 'pandemogogy' refers to the methods of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Escartin 2021). The term was debated at a virtual conference in the Philippines (Escartin 2021). Both 'panic-gogy' and 'pandemogogy' are caricatures of the global education sector's response to the crisis. Not all institutions and teachers are panic-stricken and not all are similarly obsessed by the pandemic.

Crises need not be debilitating. The history of education is littered with examples of ways in which crises,

> have been leveraged to encourage the adoption of new media: Sputnik is the most famous of these crises [solutions] perhaps, prompting a considerable push for better science and math education but also for more machinery to administer it; but we can also look at the rhetoric around teacher shortages, snow days, standardized testing, school shootings, and so on. And yes, pandemics (Watters 2020 online).

In other words, crises can spark innovation and originality. Crises can be seen as events of human possibility and beneficence. The convergence of digital technology and its reduced cost and greater accessibility (compared to costs of yesteryear) has made education accessible to millions, expanding the possibility of finding solutions to the endemic crises in education. Coupled with mobile technologies, the internet, and various media technologies, means that reconvening learning in new and exciting ways is feasible, possible and attainable, but not without complications and uncertainties.

A particular complication is the tyranny of fear that underpins decisions, actions, and inactions, too, during crises, e.g., the COVID-19 pan-

demic. When people are enrapt with anxiety, it presents the state with an opportunity to consolidate power over its citizens. In a series of incisive analyses, Giorgio Agamben (2021) warns of the connection between knowledge and power underpinned by fear. The suspension of face-to-face teaching is from, Agamben's perspective, reminiscent of Foucault's (2007) notions of biopower (control over citizens) and governmentality (rationalities, practices and techniques of governance for the control of citizens) (Foucault 1991). It is, in effect, the production of 'bare life' (Agamben 2005), if the temporary suspension of contact teaching becomes a permanent feature of higher education. More troubling is the uneven provisioning or ownership of resources that students need for wireless access to institutions of higher education. We know that the outskirts of the cities and suburbs are not adequately resourced for digital teaching and learning as large sections of South Africa do not have electricity supply and/or Wi-Fi networks. Without careful rethinking and (re)learning to teach, we are conjoined within circuits of power and the production of marginals:

> The new model of social relations is *connection*, and whoever is not connected tends to be excluded from relationships and condemned to marginalisation (Agamben 2021: 10). (Italics in original)

The State's response in South Africa to COVID-19 (similar to responses elsewhere in the world) has created, for the first time, a unique and shared set of conditions that exclude physical connection. Higher education's response involves the use of virtual platforms. Virtual platforms obviate isolation and social distancing and offers solutions that ensure continuity and connectivity. It also leads to feelings of detachment, alienation, uncertainty, ambiguity and fear. Consequently, higher education has to engage in (re)learning to teach during a crisis and an intense situation of abnormality.

One domain that requires deeper examination is that while higher education attempts to maintain some semblance of normality in curriculum delivery by moving their offerings online, the impact of these approaches is yet to be scientifically evaluated and their pedagogy appraised (Aristeidou & Herodotou 2020). As we try to mitigate the effects of the 2020 'lockdown' by invoking the well-intentioned discourse of online learning, we should clarify whether we are re-appraising the fundamentals of our pedagogies (as we should be doing) or responding in haste because we are unnerved by the pandemic.

5 Rethinking Teaching: (Re)Learning to Teach

Teaching in a post-pandemic world requires (re)learning and re-imagining, much like the shifts, for example, from orality to literacy and then to a combination of literacy and orality (Friesen 2018). Other examples are Kittler's discourse on 'inscriptions within a discourse network' (1990: xvii) and Foucault's 'episteme' (2005: xxiii), which make evident that each period in history has its 'way of constructing, storing, and transmitting knowledge' (Friesen 2018: 2).

When knowledge construction regimes and practices are disrupted, existing habits and rituals are disturbed too, signifying that learning or (re)learning has to take place for continuity and, at times, even discontinuity. Thomas Kuhn's (1970), 'The structure of scientific revolutions', is a testament to erasure (unlearning) and starting again (re)learning, when a paradigm shifts and destabilises existing praxis. According to Kuhn, 'to desert the paradigm is to cease practicing the science that defines it' (1970: 34). It also requires a questioning and rethinking of 'received beliefs' and assumptions (1970: 4). There is now a pandemic-induced paradigm shift in higher education, necessitating the asking of new questions, finding new solutions and rethinking the purpose of academe. Moreover, it is an opportunity to revisit the viability of existing pedagogy approaches knowing that we are unlikely to 'cease practicing' the science of teaching and learning. However, we should, at least, question the assumptions that underpin our practices.

Existing higher education pedagogies operate on assumptions based on decades of teaching rituals and experiences: the teacher is the knower, the student is the learner; teachers are the knowledge producers and students, the consumers; teachers keep up with the latest developments and technologies while students are the learners about the latest developments and technologies. However, the present cohort of students represent an anomaly, challenging all our assumptions (Jones 2008). Most of them are leading 'technology saturated lives' (Lenhart *et al.* 2015), in other words, they do not need teaching about the use of technology[8]. In fact, the history of technology innovation was driven

[8] We acknowledge that in some settings and backgrounds, there are individuals who have limited exposure to technology and will require orientation. In higher education institutions, these are offered through generic modules and supplementary support programmes rather than by disciplines (although there

by students, viz., Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates and Paul Gardner Allen, and the college dropouts, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Furthermore, knowledge and refutations and contestations thereof are available on multiple fora, allowing students to challenge the core tenets of disciplines and their histories (see e.g. Dhunpath, Amin & Devroop 2018). Students are more familiar with technological developments than most higher education teachers. These assumptions are not consequences of the crisis we face; they have been present for quite a while. Students are not empty vessels (Lukacs & Galluzzo 2014), they are critical thinkers and can contribute meaningfully to knowledge production (Low 2017; Zyngier 2007) and are aware of future imperatives (Amin 2016) than we give them credit.

Given the transforming relationships between the knowers (teachers) and the known (students), we have to acknowledge that it is the *discrepancies* between assumptions and realities, which constitute the 'core of the crisis' (Kuhn 1970: 69). In other words, we are being distracted by the pandemic crisis from recognising our contributions to the challenges we face. Once again, we turn to Kuhn to understand what needs to be done: we have to engage in 'picking up the other end of the stick' (1970: 85) – that is, we have to invert student and teacher roles, (students teach and teachers learn) and also expand the teacher student roles (both teach and both learn). The implication is that we have to be guided by students when it comes to the use of technology. Students, we know, can sustain interest and engagement on the internet and social media for hours whilst there continue to be debates about the length of students' attention spans (Bradbury 2016). While Bradbury (2016) debunks *Time Magazine*'s finding that it is just eight seconds long, he does not offer a time span; instead, he asks and explains:

> What is different between a live and recorded event is the emotional buy-in. Certainly books, or even videos, can be excellent media for conveying content, but a live teacher can inspire a student to think more about a subject and delve deeper into content than can be achieved by passive media alone. Motivational speakers know this very well, and many make a remarkably good living by giving live

may be specific discipline-based technologies like GIS for Geography). However, once students are inducted into technology, they have access to knowledge just as those whose lives are 'technology saturated'.

> presentations. Certainly charisma helps in generating excitement about a subject in students, but probably the biggest aspect of inspiring students is passion for the subject on the part of the teacher. Lectures are one place where a teacher can model intellectual, personal, and moral values (Bradbury 2016: 512-513).

In effect, it is worth considering that learning from students about technology will not lead to teachers being displaced in the lecture room or virtual space. In fact, teaching could be more effective when student interest is combined with the skills and knowledge of technology-savvy teachers who exude passion and share their values, and we hasten to add, address student experiences of social injustice, marginalisation and exclusion. The 'live teacher' has to be *alive* (sensitive) to cultural differences, dissimilar socioeconomic backgrounds, sentiments raised decades ago by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999; 1995) and still worth following in the virtual age.

There is no standard recipe for how or what to (re)learn. There are multiple factors, e.g. the context of teaching, academic disciplines, and availability of technologies that will influence a change of teaching tactic. (Re)learning, by implication, entails modifications, amendments, erasures and expansion of the norms that have underpinned and regulated teaching in higher education.

6 (Re)Learning as Pharmakon

(Re)learning to teach in higher education is not a neutral intervention as it involves intent, choice and consequence. It is an uncertain endeavour as interests, passions, and competencies are individually-based preferences. Habermas (1968) identified three interests in relation to knowledge: technical, practical and emancipatory. Similar interests apply to and persist in (re)learning to teach during and for a crisis. Technical (re)learning is characterised by substituting one practice by another e.g. replacing a face-to-face lecture with a pre-recorded one. A practical approach is characterised by acceptance of the limitations of a situation and finding ways to cope e.g. making copies of texts and posting those online for easy access by students. An emancipatory (re)learning approach is underpinned by critical reflexivity and transformation e.g. revising the curriculum so that it is relevant to, significant for and consistent with students' present needs and future aspirations – an education

that prepares them for a successful life, not just for a qualification or a career. It is possible that interests could be combined in various ways, e.g., practical and technical or technical and emancipatory. It is possible, too, that one approach is not used consistently lending an undecidable character to the matter of (re)learning.

The notion of undecidability can be traced to the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, the Algerian-born, French scholar and the Greek word 'pharmakon' (see Derrida 1981). The Greek word is characterised by dual meanings in opposition to each other, namely, 'poison' and 'cure', a typical feature of the logocentric convention and binary logic of western language. From a logocentric (speech/ word-centred) perspective, the meaning of, for example, 'true' is only understood when paired and compared to 'untrue/false'. Western conventions of language are fragile and vulnerable to ambiguity and misconception as it is a confounding and inappropriate medium to represent reality (Rorty 2008). The implication is that as much as we try to explain the notion of (re)learning, we are confronted by the limitations of language to express and represent the complexities, the ironies, contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the notion. Derrida's interpretation of pharmakon offers an alternative logic to understand the effects of the limitations of the language conventions we apply.

Pharmakon is more complex, as it captures the presence of a binary opposition within a single word creating a situation of ambiguity and undecidability. Additionally, both the benefit and harm generated by the pharmakon affects the same person concurrently. The pharmakon is the culprit that produces the cure/poison binary resulting in uncertainty, ambiguity and undecidability. In that sense, (re)learning to teach is the pharmakon. It is both useful and harmful at the same time. The pandemic has created an unusual situation where the usual modes of practice have to be suspended. To cope with the 'new normal', new knowledges, skills, and competencies have to be acquired. (Re)learning, from that perspective, is beneficial for professional growth. But (re)learning creates anxieties about what, how and whom to learn from. (Re)learning takes up time that further burdens an overworked, isolated cohort whose sense of certainty and knowing about teaching have been destabilised. Thus (re)learning has a harmful dimension. (Re)learners benefit and are harmed simultaneously. The same argument applies, for example, to the use of technology (Adams 2017; Lewin 2016; Kern 2014), discourses of professionalism (Marom & Ruitenberg 2018) and second language learning

(Lombard 2016), indicating the presence in education of multiple pharmakons at play. It may explain the reasons for the uneven teaching and learning outcomes. Crucially, (re)learning as pharmakon produces an inescapable possible-impossible binary. The latter point explains our reluctance in this chapter firstly, to answer all the questions posed and secondly, to postulate a recipe for (re)learning to teach.

7 Looking Forward …

We have provided a topography of some of the complications and complexities that accompany higher education's efforts to function without interruption, albeit differently. A landscape changed by a crisis requires a change of tactic. Experience, credentials, and tacit and explicit knowledge are insufficient and even inappropriate preparation to teach differently. We will need the assistance, competencies and skills that students possess to overcome some of the challenges faced during a crisis and add those to our repertoires. We will have to unlearn and (re)learn whilst keeping in mind the helpful and harmful effects that are immanent in those endeavours. To (re)learn to teach asks that those who teach in higher education do so with creativity, celerity and sagacity whilst being aware that ambiguity, complexity and the possible-impossible binary stalk all efforts. Social isolation, physical distancing, rapid changes and technological developments demand quick responses, actions in the face of fear, and the generation of solutions that work, even if the effects are undecidable. Despite seismic shifts elsewhere in our lives, we can responsibly approach the project of (re)learning for relevance by conceding that change is necessary. We may also have to step back and reflect to move forward. Whether we react with speed or act with caution, there will be risks and benefits, but higher education can no longer insulate itself from change.

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