

Editorial

Good teaching practices: Re-examining curricula, materials, activities, assessments

KC Lee Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning, cdtleekc@nus.edu.sg
National University of Singapore
Singapore

Jenny Scoles Institute for Academic Development, jenny.scoles@ed.ac.uk
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, Scotland

Abstract

Issue 4.2 presents 11 full articles, two reflections, and three book reviews from a diverse teaching and learning contexts in terms of discipline, dynamics of students and classroom, region, approach, and so on from Afghanistan, Kenya, New Zealand, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, Zambia, Pakistan, United Kingdom, Uganda, and United States. Separately yet together, these publications provide a timely reminder to us to re-examine what we are doing in our classroom beyond and despite the COVID-19 pandemic. They surface issues that affect student experience and success such as accessibility, equality, diversity, fairness – all of which are what Leibowitz identifies as issues confronting the global South (2017).

In his editorial for issue 4.1, Zachary Simpson themed it, 'Reimagining higher education in the wake of COVID-19' (2020). This issue continues to advance the theme of *reimagining higher education*, but it takes a slightly different angle by addressing the fundamental question of what good teaching practices are in different teaching and learning contexts – discipline, dynamics of students and classroom, region, approach, and so on. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to re-examine what we are doing in our classroom beyond and despite the pandemic; it is a timely reminder for us to inquire about our teaching practices and their impact on learning in a systematic and scholarly manner.

This call to investigation aligns with Brenda Leibowitz's (2017) first conceptualization of this journal where she envisioned it providing insights that could be learned from different institutional contexts, especially those in the global South. We are pleased that this issue of 11 articles, two reflections, and three book reviews provides a breadth and depth of insights from diverse teaching and learning environments, as well as topics of discussion closely relevant to the global South as articulated by Leibowitz (2017).

We draw upon Miller's synthesized principles of good teaching, online and in person or face-to-face (Miller, 2014:23-24), to provide coherence to the diversity presented in this issue. Citing Chickering and Gamson (1987), Ambrose, Boettcher, and the American Distance Education Consortium, Miller identifies six general principles that she argues underpin good teaching regardless of mode. These principles are: (1) interaction between peers; (2) active engagement; (3) focus on practice and effort by student; (4) personalized learning; (5) variety of activities; and (6) higher-level thinking processes. Together, they underscore the importance of how we, as educators, design programmes, curricula, materials, tasks, activities, and assessments to strengthen and enhance student learning and experience.

Jo-Anne Vorster starts the conversation, building a convincing case for teachers in any higher education discipline in South Africa to be scholarly in their teaching. While recognizing that not all may be engaged in SoTL, she calls for institutional leaders to support and appropriately acknowledge such inquiries that could better facilitate not only student success, but also solutions to some of the challenges faced by South African higher education institutions. Vorster's argument is relevant beyond the South African context, and connects to investigation and discussion of principles underpinning good teaching practice, as exemplified by the subsequent articles in this issue.

In their attempt to integrate and enhance higher order thinking and student voice, the next three articles explore the impact of curricula in three very different contexts. First, Underhill shares how a three-year curriculum, which uses an iterative spiral approach in reinforcing argumentation, helped her film-making students in a South African higher education institution interrogate what they learned particularly for meaningful conceptualization and, subsequently, for voice and agency. Separately, in a very different context, but also aimed at building argumentation, Anwar and Ali found that implementing Toulmin's 'Argumentation Pattern' in their curriculum has helped their predominantly-female Pakistani students find confidence and voice in discussing controversial socio-political issues. Finally, in evaluating their work-study programme for nurses and midwives in Uganda with a focus on continuing adult education, Kyakuwaire and colleagues' findings further support the relationship between enhanced critical thinking competency and student involvement and agency.

Continuing the conversation on curriculum design, but approached from a different angle, are five articles that study the use of online approaches to teaching and learning – synchronous, asynchronous, fully online, flipped, and blended. Despite technical problems, sustainability, teacher readiness, and unequal access presenting some challenges for educators, the first two articles show some positive outcomes for online learning. Naseem and colleagues' investigation into a fully online programme in training in-service nurses and midwives in Afghanistan, and Chachar and colleagues' evaluation of a blended programme for undergraduate psychiatry students both suggest that a high level of student engagement can be achieved with a well thought out and carefully implemented curriculum.

Lee and colleagues' study provides further insights into student engagement on an asynchronous online platform. They find that an emphasis on practice and student effort, scaffolding, and the design of different tasks and activities contribute to increased interactive student engagement. Two further studies narrow the scope through investigation into two different types of activities: one on the use of blogs and another on social media. Kiarie and Muindi's inquiry into a collaborative blogging exercise in a Kenyan context of found that their respondents who were from communication and media studies in one public and one private university responded positively to online collaborative learning. Their recommendation, hence, is for blogging to be implemented for peer-to-peer interaction and learning. Investigating the use of social media for learning in Rwanda, Njuguna and colleagues found a positive relationship between their mass communication students' attitudes toward social media and their belief in using social media competently in their journalistic work.

At a finer more granular level of curriculum design, Hussain's article presents a close observation and reflection on three specific instances where learning took place during field work in northern Pakistan. She contends that students' experience in open inquiry and their engagement in the field have created a learning space that enables them to make sense of the world with multiple realities. Similarly, in their contribution, Banda and Kapwepwe argue that there is much that indigenous knowledge, culture, and teaching could contribute to learning in higher education in Zambia through a hybridization of teaching practice.

The two reflections in this issue advance the idea of contextualisation. Learning, as reflected in these essays, is about making a connection not only at an academic level but also at a social, emotional, and spiritual level. For Comer and Brashears, this is achieved through personal narratives. For Dencer-Brown, this materialises through building a relationship with the community in which she is researching and who regards her as an outsider. Although these are instances of personal sharing, their reflections bring to the surface a wider question examined in this issue, that is, 'what constitutes good teaching practice?', with a wide variety of responses supplied by the issue.

Rounding up the issue are three book reviews, one titled *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* edited by Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza, and Olivia U. Rutazibwa; and two reviews of the book: *Standing Items: Critical pedagogies in South African art, design, and architecture* edited by Brenden Gray, Shashi Cullinan Cook, Tariq Toffa, and Amie Soudien. Critical pedagogies that are localised and not heavily drawn from Euro-American perspectives appears to be a central discussion for both books.

Foucher delivers a high recommendation for *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* and commends the book as a compelling resource for those who are considering adopting decolonial and feminist thought in their development of a critical pedagogy. In their reviews of *Standing Items: Critical pedagogies in South African art, design, and architecture*, Horner and O'Sullivan separately and respectively find the book to present a compelling argument for critical pedagogies. What resonates most with Horner is that the book demands us to not only reflect critically on our practice but also to become "advocates for change through our practice". For O'Sullivan, she is impressed by the book's interrogation of pedagogies that have otherwise been heavily influenced by Euro-American perspectives.

In summary, this issue asks that we critically re-examine our curricula, programmes, materials, tasks and activities whilst being open to the multiple contexts and perspectives in which teaching and learning practices unfold. The disruption caused by COVID-19 is merely a catalyst for us to address factors that affect student experience and success such as accessibility, equality, diversity, fairness – all of which are what Leibowitz identifies as issues confronting the global South (2017).

Funding sources:

There is no funding sources.

Acknowledgments:

As guest editors, it has been a most enriching learning journey working with Zachary Simpson, Editor-in-Chief, and the authors, in putting together an issue with such diversity and breadth: thank you for sharing your experiences and wisdom.

Our special appreciation goes to Milton Milaras, Managing Editor, whose insights, direction, and efficiency have made the smooth completion of this bumper issue possible.

References

- Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. 1987. Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*. 3-7.
- Leibowitz, B. 2017. The significance of SOTL in the South. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*. (1)1: 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.36615/sotls.v1i1.7>.
- Miller, M.D. 2014. *Minds online: Teaching effectively with technology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Simpson, Z. 2020. Reimagining higher education in the wake of COVID-19. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*. (4)1: 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.36615/sotls.v4i1.145>.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>