

## Pedagogical continuities in teaching and learning during COVID-19: Holding up the bridge

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### ABSTRACT

2020 and 2021 in higher education were characterised by pandemic-related disruptions to conventional modes of teaching and learning. These prompted discussions about pedagogic shifts, academic continuity and the future of teaching and learning. Debates on the 'future-focused' university have raised questions about system-level and resourcing issues, teaching and learning practices and new ecologies of e-learning. This paper engages with these debates to better understand the continuities and discontinuities in the new pedagogies and how these affect what universities may do differently going forward. The pandemic prompted exploration of hybrid models of teaching and learning, with radical changes to traditional face-to-face teaching. The theoretical framework of the paper synthesises the concepts of pedagogical continuity and social justice to analyse the research findings. The research is based on data collected from interviews with 15 senior academic leaders at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) about how they negotiated pedagogy during the transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT) and online teaching and learning. The findings indicate that academic staff were able to draw significant gains in the transition to ERT that may offer new opportunities and possibilities for learning in an uncertain future.

## Introduction

The impact on higher education of the pandemic, against a background of profound social and economic inequalities, compels scholars to reflect critically on the future of higher education. The extreme disruptions of the pandemic and their consequences for higher education offer an opportunity to explore the concept of pedagogic continuity as a praxis that permits ongoing access in the context of social justice.

To continue with teaching and learning in lockdown, universities resorted to emergency remote teaching (ERT), using technologies to provide access for students who were geographically dispersed. Hodges, Harrison, Kephart, Swatski and Williams (2020:13) define ERT as provision of “temporary access to instruction and instructional support in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis”. According to Motala and Menon (2020:96), the critical question facing higher education in the wake of ERT is “how to develop an equitable teaching and learning strategy in order to adapt to a post-COVID world, providing a better and more just future for students and youth”. This paper interrogates the extent to which pedagogical continuity was possible under ERT and how far the social justice imperative in South African higher education was foregrounded in the process. This research question is based on a retrospective analysis of the transition to ERT in 2020 during the pandemic, questioning whether the gap between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ normal has been bridged. The discussion locates pedagogic continuity as a central mechanism by which the severity of the disruptions to higher education, adjustments to curricula and assessments and inequitable access to resources for teaching and learning could be ameliorated.

The initial period in early 2020, following the announcement of a nationwide lockdown, created immense pressure on higher education institutions to ensure continuity of teaching and learning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020a). With face-to-face education impossible, ERT and the use of online platforms dominated. It soon became obvious that the end of the pandemic was not in sight. The implications for teaching and learning were that alternative modalities needed to be explored while recognising the probable long-term effects on the viability and sustainability of blended approaches. As the aftershocks of the pandemic receded, the participants in this research had, with experience and hindsight, time to reflect on managing teaching and learning despite the barriers that had earlier seemed insurmountable: in a sense, to hold up a mirror to their own practices and consider whether these had had the desired effects.

This paper presents a series of theoretical positions on issues of pedagogic continuity, inequality and the material challenges confronting the transition to ERT before engaging with the data collected. The experiences of senior academic staff at UJ are discussed with the aim of understanding the meaning of 'pedagogic continuity' in the context of the pandemic. This provides a new framework through which to understand the non-negotiable factors that shape teaching and learning even under conditions of disruption and interruption. However, more research is required into, for example, comparative levels of performance, throughput and graduation before and during the pandemic as it is anticipated that it will have far-reaching effects on the culture of teaching and learning in higher education.

### Understanding pedagogical continuity

During the pandemic and when ERT was being implemented, the search for pedagogical strategies that could meet the demands of online and digital teaching modalities became paramount. The primary, existential question of pedagogical continuity requires interrogation as it delves into the process by which the gap between the 'old' and 'new' normal has been and continues to be bridged. The modified understanding of pedagogic continuity developed here draws from and extends beyond its origins within a particular disciplinary lineage.

Pedagogic(al) continuity focuses on the enculturation and socialisation of students through a process of stable knowledge transmission (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 1997). Delamont et al. (1997) distinguish between pedagogic continuity and the idea of critical mass that underpinned postgraduate training and education in UK universities. 'Critical mass' refers to the breadth of activity and opportunities for transmission that degree programmes offered. Pedagogic continuity implies viewing the process of transmission itself (engagement or co-creation) as the force that creates the space for acquiring and consolidating knowledge (Hacking, 1992; Delamont et al., 1997). The focus is on sustaining a consistent and stable intellectual lineage within the discipline itself.

Another approach to defining pedagogic continuity relevant to this study is that of Hacking (1992) who describes pedagogic continuity as a 'many-stranded rope' of which, if one strand is severed, the rope endures. This implies the presence of interlocking and mutually reinforcing dynamics that sustain learning progress while maintaining the integrity of what is to be learned. Continuity here arises from the process itself and not just from the inputs into the process. Comparing science and social science PhD programmes in the UK, Delamont et al. (1997) found that science programmes were more likely

to have pedagogic continuity in place because of how disciplinary knowledge and social induction occurred. Induction to laboratory work, regular collaboration on research projects, regular contact through learning spaces and interaction with post-doctoral fellows created a stable community of practice through which science students were able to move. Students entered the space, adopted and continued their predecessors' work, received funding to work on different aspects of the same problem and regularly had to share equipment, databases and methodologies with each other (Hacking, 1992; Delamont et al., 1997). By comparison, students in the social sciences mainly worked closely only with their supervisors and/or a small group of peers. Aside from engagement through department- and faculty-run events, these students had few opportunities for co-learning and 'inheriting' the forms of cultural and social capital inherent to their disciplines, including through clear pathways to post-doctoral employment. A lack of multiple, diverse opportunities to learn, practice and consolidate knowledge often produces a gap between what students think they know and what their supervisors "know they don't know" (Delamont et al., 1997).

These definitions of pedagogic continuity are dependent on universities functioning in particular ways such as through regular contact, stable communities of practice, resourcing and co-learning opportunities. However, their deeper value lies in a committed focus on ensuring continuity of knowledge cultures and the coherence of particular disciplinary canons even as knowledge transforms through the development of new processes, findings and fields of inquiry. This enables us to extend the notion of pedagogic continuity to a specific period of time, recognising that what matters under crisis conditions is the ability to construct a bridge during a period of instability so that substantive learning continues, epistemic access is facilitated, and the quality of knowledge communities is sustained.

Pedagogic continuity is thus not only about the continuation of long-standing disciplinary canons and practices but also about finding pedagogic strategies and tools that can secure continuity of learning without sacrificing the breadth, depth or complexity of what is to be learned in terms of professional knowledge and of personal/social development. Moreover, and particularly in the context of ERT, in this framing pedagogic continuity includes the material and resource availability and constraints that influence the extent to which teaching and learning can successfully take place. Coulange, Stunell and Train (2021), for example, argue that this kind of pedagogic continuity was poorly taken into account when French schools closed because of the pandemic. What teachers took to be their responsibility to 'continue' and their resulting findings illuminate the variances that occur in these interpretations, which hold both equity and quality implications. In their findings, Coulange et al. (2021) suggest that

students' socio-economic statuses affect the nature of pedagogic continuity that teachers prioritise, the focus of their teaching as well as the degree of flexibility they bring to their teaching and the level of buy-in they are able to secure.

These findings are similar to those of Hoffmann, Sayed and Badroodien (2016) on teacher professional identities in South Africa. Coulange et al. (2021) found that teachers in poorer schools in France are likely to be more concerned with the socio-affective dimensions of pedagogical continuity, meaning that they are focused on sustaining the social bonds that encourage students to continue to attend classes and submit work. In so doing, they demonstrated concern for their students' wellbeing and displayed patience with the delays resulting from the shift to online learning and the challenges of limited internet access and disruptive or crowded home environments. On the other hand, because their learners were more likely to have access to the internet, devices and space to work, teachers in wealthier schools were more able to experiment with new methods and focus on students' content mastery and the introduction of new work (Coulange et al., 2021). This highlights the mutually reinforcing nature of our framing of pedagogic continuity: it is not enough only to sustain the social space of the classroom under ERT and remote learning conditions. There needs to be a related emphasis on what is to be learned and, crucially, on the tools used to facilitate learning.

Beché's (2020) research is pertinent to the pandemic response in education in Cameroon which is highly stratified by infrastructural and material inequalities including access to mobile devices, network coverage and electricity supply. Expectations of continuity of basic and higher education therefore came with pressures to respond to both existing and emerging challenges of "ensuring pedagogic continuity, identifying and managing education inequalities, careful choice of the tools necessary for pedagogic continuity, and supporting students needing to progress to higher levels" (Beché, 2020). Motala and Menon (2020) and Czerniewicz, Agherdien, Badenhorst, Belluigi, Chambers, Chili..., (2020) identify these problems in South Africa. The tools and technologies for pedagogic continuity need to be responsive to the 'lowest common denominator' of learning needs. A simple pivot to online is inappropriate, ineffective and likely be unsuccessful.

Beché (2020) cautions that reliance on information technology specialists and learning management system providers may result in overreliance on learning management system (LMS) quality as an indicator of the overall cohesion and continuity of the pedagogy particularly where distance education has received little institutional attention (Beché, 2020:769). In making this claim, he distinguishes between rolling out innovations and building a coherent system of distance, online or hybrid learning.

*Securing pedagogic continuity as a bridge between worlds*

Kalantzis and Cope (2020a) critique the 'old normal' and argue that, globally, because of rigidity, higher education institutions and systems were inadequately prepared for the change and flexibility needed by the pandemic. This assertion may only be partially accurate as there are accounts of the resilience, agility and flexibility with which higher education institutions responded to the pandemic (Motala & Menon, 2020; Menon & Motala, 2021; Czerniewicz et al., 2020). They had resources for ERT and online learning in place and not all academics were resistant to using them. However, tools such as Blackboard largely served as supplements to face-to-face learning rather than as integral resources for enabling learning in the absence of physical contact. Developing new roles for existing digital resources thus represented a necessary but complex shift.

Kalantzis and Cope (2020a) argue that existing modes of delivery, course design and assessment were already outmoded and old-fashioned when the pandemic struck. The opportunity existed for strong alignment with current trends in technology, reimagining pedagogy more appropriate to 21st century curricula. The shift to online learning presented scholars with new prospects for teaching and learning outside the possibilities of the traditional classroom, with online and multimodal teaching and learning potentially able to increase quality and equity (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020a; 2020b). To this end, they propose five ways to support the shift to online learning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020a:24-27):

1. Scale up higher education, scale down its costs
2. Develop pedagogies of social knowledge and collaborative intelligence
3. Create pedagogies of intense engagement
4. Focus on higher order thinking
5. Lifelong and life-wide continuity

Their argument rests on the view that the traditional brick and mortar university should be relegated to the past, with contact education replaced by robust online teaching and learning. It will be demonstrated in this paper that the lessons from the pandemic signal that, while technological innovations can be used for teaching and learning, the value inherent in face-to-face contact should not be underestimated. Despite reflecting critically on these issues in work written in the early stages of the pandemic (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020b), no consideration is given in this to the challenges of equity, access and technology that persist in shaping higher education's responses and adaptations to the changes. It may be that their location within institutions in the global North represents an intellectual blind spot for authors who therefore fail to account for the ways that universities are not only sites of

higher learning but also of social mobility and personal development, places of safety and nurture for marginalised students and critical actors in social, ecological and economic processes and debates. Their approach also neglects the relationship between pedagogical continuity and teaching and learning.

Badat (2020) also cautions against the tendency to assume that innovations and interventions trialled during the pandemic will apply to online and distance education in its aftermath. Scholarship on teaching and learning under COVID-19 has been varied but there has been a tendency to hold up the pandemic as a critical moment for revitalising education technologies, practices and pedagogies, often towards greater digitisation (Badat, 2020). Ensuring continuity of learning has been of secondary concern when it should animate how existing interventions are evaluated and new ones designed. What worked well under ERT may not hold in the future and the full impact of learning loss, unequal learning outcomes and non-completion as a result of the pandemic is yet to be seen (Badat, 2020; Beché, 2020; Tawil, 2020).

Reflecting on the six months following the global announcement of the pandemic, Tawil (2020) argues that there was broken continuity of access to learning as a result of uneven shifts to online and hybrid learning, with many school-going and university students unable to continue learning at previous levels of quality or engagement. Li, Rao and Tse (2011) differentiate between vertical and horizontal continuity, where 'vertical continuity' refers to being able to successfully transition between learning and achievement stages and horizontal continuity to learning continuity between sites such as home, school and community. As students' homes had also to become sites of learning with parents and others sometimes acting as learning supports, the issue of horizontal continuity was arguably foregrounded in the response to the pandemic. Pedagogical continuity thus had to incorporate the issues of assessment, learning development and progress alongside the displacement of traditional horizontal continuity dynamics that had previously enabled education systems to function largely unchanged (Li et al., 2011). At the outset of the pandemic, guaranteeing equity required ensuring horizontal continuity but, as the pandemic continued, securing vertical continuity became paramount because of how this impacted student throughput, graduations and their preparedness for the world of work.

Hodges et al. (2020) emphasise that pedagogic continuity is not only about students' learning processes but also about staff. Sustaining professional social networks interrupted by the pandemic enabled faculty at the University of Maryland to collaborate, share ideas and modify programmes,

making pedagogic continuity a facet of faculty development and support through the crisis. For the staff of the university's Faculty Development Centre (FDC), which ordinarily supported faculty with face-to-face teaching development, this meant working with the information technology specialists that would be driving implementation, on-boarding and training staff and students to adapt to new teaching and learning technologies. Faculty also required space to consider the existential transformation of their teaching practice that the pandemic demanded (Hodges et al., 2020). It was not simply about placing lecture content online but about staff and students managing a new, unfamiliar socio-pedagogical terrain. Using the platforms normally used for teaching allowed FDC staff to model new approaches to online learning while troubleshooting problems encountered while offering new development and engagement mechanisms online.

Hodges et al. thus argue for the importance of flexibility and adaptability in ensuring authentic and relevant teaching and assessment strategies even where these represent a shift from established ways of being and doing. This offers new opportunities to rethink the structure of learning, recognising that the online pivot requires a greater cognitive load from students that cumbersome administration and course navigation would only worsen (Hodges et al., 2020). Both Beché (2020) and Hodges et al. (2020) argue that information technology services should not and cannot replace the work of academics, curriculum specialists, learning designers and academic planners but should be part of a new complementary dimension of academic planning and support that recognises the interlinkages between these different facets.

Hodges et al. (2020) use the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 1999) to frame their understanding of the factors necessary for pedagogic continuity. These are social presence, teacher presence and cognitive presence. Similarly, to the conceptualisations of Coulange et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2011), this argues that all three forms of presence are required to sustain both vertical and horizontal pedagogic continuity. Teacher presence through guidance and support and social presence through a shared learning community cannot support continuity in the absence of clear, well-planned and deliverable content (cognitive presence) that enables and facilitates learning. Nor can social and cognitive presence secure effective learning without teachers to guide, scaffold and shape the learning experience. These forms of presence may be easier to negotiate under face-to-face conditions and in the transition to ERT, this planning matrix required more sensitive handling to deliver a robust learning experience. As will be seen below, respondents in this research speak to the challenge of ensuring teacher and social presence as a condition for fostering successful



cognitive presence as students adapted to a greater degree of self-directed learning under very new conditions.

This has implications for how the impact of the pandemic in different contexts is reflected on. In the case of the University of Johannesburg (UJ), located as it is in a deeply unequal society, supporting pedagogic continuity required addressing social justice as critical to ensuring access, participation and continued learning.

### *Social justice as a critical imperative*

Fraser (2008; 2009) advances three dimensions of social justice (the economic, the cultural and the political) which are useful when considering a socially just pedagogy. Each dimension either militates against or contributes to the achievement of social justice and she considers a socially-just pedagogy from each of the dimensions. This framework has direct relevance to South Africa. The economic dimension includes exclusion from basic amenities like food, commodities, access to funding etc. These exclusions were poignantly highlighted during the pandemic. During the pandemic, higher education institutions took action to provide data and laptops for needy students, together with nationally driven interventions such as means-tested free higher education (Motala & Menon, 2020). These redistributive efforts were important to but insufficient for dealing with a highly inequitable social context (Motala & Menon, 2020). In terms of teaching and learning, a social justice pedagogy must foreground transformation including teaching, research and the academic project (Bozalek & Carolissen, 2012). Unequal access to higher education exists in many societies as exclusions due to affordability, meeting the requisite standards or other socio-economic factors remain. The pandemic redefined barriers to access as technology and geographical location surfaced as inhibitors (Motala & Menon, 2020).

The cultural dimension forms the second aspect of this framework. Critical for a socially-just pedagogy is the unequal perceptions of human characteristics. Hegemonic Western higher education systems have excluded irrationally the prior knowledge of students, giving this no place in the curriculum (Morrow, 2009). Creating awareness of the warped nature of the higher education system is essential to a social justice pedagogy and actively seeking solutions to redress these. The imbalance in value accorded to epistemologies is rooted in categories of race, gender, sexuality, ability or nationality. The recent decolonisation debates in South Africa have highlighted these issues, focusing on a

transformative social justice pedagogy which includes the possibility of destabilising institutionalised cultural patterns and curricula (Motala, Sayed & de Kock, 2021).

The third dimension – the political – added more recently by Fraser (2008; 2009) makes provision for highlighting categories included and excluded from higher education, including in the pedagogies. Fraser identifies two forms of misrepresentation: the political, where the state excludes or includes based on social demarcations (race, gender, sexuality etc.) which create an uneven power distribution preventing meaningful political belonging. The second form of misrepresentation is more deleterious and is based on who may or may not be treated as a member within those boundaries (Fraser, 2009). This prevents the poor or socially devalued from challenging their situations. It is this latter form that she refers to as ‘misframing’. Higher education is replete with examples of the misframing of inequalities in the absence of a systemic intervention leaving the problems unresolved and institutions as well as students to battle alone.

In focusing on exploring pedagogical continuity during lockdown when universities were forced to shift to ERT, central to this paper is the need to understand how far social justice-informed pedagogical practices and approaches are still to be researched. The paper contributes by demonstrating the social justice implications of securing pedagogic continuity in higher education, given the disadvantages and barriers to access faced by many of the country’s students and the less-than-ideal teaching and learning environment of the pandemic exacerbated by social exclusion. Several positive results from the pivot to ERT could be identified but these must be seen alongside the scale of disruption which affected vulnerable students the most and created new breeding grounds for social and academic exclusion.

## Methodology

The data in this study is drawn from online interviews with 15 senior academics at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). They reflected a diversity of academic disciplines and included four Heads of Department (HoDs) and three Vice-Deans and came from the faculties of Law, Humanities, Art and Design, Education, Commerce, Science and Engineering. Through discussion of the individuals’ experiences, for which ethical clearance and consent of the participants were obtained, rich data was drawn about their opinions of ERT, their experiences and challenges as academic leaders in the context of the pandemic and their views about the future of teaching and learning. It was

acknowledged in the interview process that these views related to their specific disciplines and contexts within the university.

The university's response to the pandemic and lockdown was rapid and multi-layered, driven by the aim of ensuring that the academic year was not lost. A case study (Motala & Menon, 2020) gives a detailed account of the 'new normal' as reflected in the sequence of activities, actions, policy shifts and progress at the university as it moved to ERT. There were three distinct phases in the institution's response to the pandemic:

- March-July 2020: a rapid shift to ERT coinciding with the first semester
- July-December 2020: ERT with more planning, embedding key aspects and learnings of online learning in practice
- 2021: Planned hybrid models of teaching and learning, using both online and limited face-to-face for practicals etc.

The post-2020 period allowed for reflection on and refinement of strategies in relation to the academic project and the researchers probed pedagogical and social justice issues considering the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning during the three phases. The questions posed were open-ended and are shown below:

1. How did the transition from face to face to ERT occur in 2020, and subsequently in the transition to blended teaching in 2021?
2. What were the challenges in ERT in terms of curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment, with reference to specific disciplines in the peak phase of the pandemic?
3. Were there major gains and new learnings that can impact on the way teaching and learning is conceptualised going into the future?
4. How has the pandemic shaped planning for teaching and learning for 2022; what will you do differently in the faculty?

Three focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Data was processed through Atlas.ti and subjected to an initial coding phase that produced a set of themes and sub-themes relating to the research questions which were underpinned by a focus on pedagogical continuity and social justice. The discussion presented below is framed according to the themes that emerged in the analysis of the data. The data is presented and analysed simultaneously, drawing this into conversation with important insights from the literature reviewed. Where respondents are referred to as a general

category, this is due to the prevalence of a shared perspective among them that emerged in response to a specific research question and from their general reflections. Contrasting responses are given wherever these occurred to demonstrate the breadth of experiences that respondents shared with the researchers. Where there are significant similarities in what respondents shared, a selection of responses is included for the sake of brevity.

### Experiences of blended learning

Because the pandemic struck during the first term of the university year, it was recognised that although there would be teething difficulties it was essential to ‘hit the ground running’ and find solutions that would enable learning to continue. For example, Respondent A said that:

I think that some of the immediate problems we had to face initially were obviously student access, tutor access and staff access working from home. Those kinds of things we must obviously deal with swiftly, but for the most part we just got on board and got on with it and did it.

Access in this response related to both physical access to the campus – which was increasingly limited as the pandemic unfolded – and access to the devices, resources and learning materials necessary to allow for a smooth transition to ERT. Kalantzis and Cope (2020a) argue that intrinsic to ensuring pedagogic continuity is the need to develop the agency of staff and students to embrace shared ownership of the learning process in the absence of dedicated physical contact opportunities. ERT processes required staff to be able to navigate the new demands on teaching and to support colleagues and students. According to Respondents B and C respectively:

Our department had not done any blended learning prior to the lockdown. I had done some training with our staff on how to create PowerPoint videos and how to create tutorial videos. So, we've done some training at the end of 2019. I had them loaded on YouTube and then we had face to face class, which I ran more like tutorials, with lots of small group discussions, critical questions, case studies, decoloniality and so on.

We used Blackboard but we did not really engage with our content on Blackboard and so it became a tool to disseminate information and not necessarily a teaching tool. The creativity and the level of finding ways to do things actually was a lot better than it has been in the past. The lack of contact created a more resourceful and better student.

Respondents indicated that flexibility and the willingness to explore new digital tools marked this period which required out-of-the box responses. An unexpected consequence was the concomitant development of resourcefulness and creativity amongst students: for example, finding other ways to connect to peer groups and lecturers, using alternative resources to complete assignments and communicating effectively with lecturers and tutors to stay on track. At UJ, staff reported the

development of networks which hinged on critical reflections on teaching practices, endorsing the views of Hodges et al. (2020) about continuity of academic spaces as critical to successful and ongoing teaching and learning development.

### Challenges faced

Most respondents agreed that academic staff at UJ, including lecturers, tutors and faculty leadership, had to maintain a balance between fulfilling the requirements of teaching and learning and providing social, moral and often material support to students (similar to that reported by Czerniewicz et al., 2020). Academics were caught up in a whirlwind of expectations: from becoming overnight experts in digital technologies, responding to the emerging needs of ERT and supporting students' adaptation to the changes in teaching and learning. A further point of agreement across the interviews was that the contextual challenges faced by students were more apparent when students were learning from home. The personal tensions and strains of their colleagues were also apparent. Respondents C and D respectively noted that:

Dealing with constant trauma and pressure was real. Exhaustion of academic staff was very real.

We've had some students that have tried to commit suicide and the rates of gender-based violence have increased within our student population and unfortunately, we only get to see and to know about these things straight after the fact.

As faculty and management members, respondents were limited in the help they could offer to students once situations had been escalated to authorities or the university's wellness and security units. This meant that they often had to shift from managing to ameliorating the effects of traumatic events and finding ways to support students through these processes, including in their teaching methods, ways of setting assignments and leniency around deadlines. Respondent D pointed out that psychosocial and mental health support was needed for both students and staff as these issues regularly impacted on the teaching and learning experience.

The isolation and distance created by lockdown and remote work emerged as a challenge for maintaining presence, keeping bonds strong and sustaining continuity in teaching and learning. Resources such as funds, data access, devices and time were regularly committed to navigating this challenge - not always successfully, as the section above indicates where students and staff were confronted with high levels of stress and mental strain. Respondent C reported that:

Last year we lost a few students ... and we spent a lot of time trying to figure out where they were, where they went, why they did it and they just fell off of our radar entirely. We also lost colleagues to COVID.

Respondent F added:

We really had sad stories and that posed many challenges and I think we overcame that through daily contact with the lecturers as HoDs to see what was happening, how many students are connecting and can they do that. The biggest problems were the socio-economic situations.

The impact of distance, isolation, trauma and grief on maintaining student and staff morale was a major concern for academic staff as reported also in Motala and Menon (2020). Despite sophisticated systems of student activity tracking via the learning management system (LMS), the challenge of securing consistent student engagement and retention remained. Motala and Menon (2020) reported that there were greater levels of staff collaboration and communication as a result of the pivot to remote learning and students were also eager to complete the academic year despite the apparently often insurmountable problems. Maintaining pedagogic continuity meant that UJ staff were driven to find alternative routes to teaching and assessment and to create flexible assessment strategies, all the while maintaining and building deeper relationships with students. Although sometimes unexpected, in their research at UJ, Motala and Menon (2020) found that an additional feature of ERT was the unusual degree of intimacy created across the digital space, with staff coming into closer proximity with students than they would ordinarily in their contact settings. This resulted in a deepened awareness of what challenges students faced as well as what opportunities there were to resolve these challenges. For example, many students were relieved of the cost of travel to and from campus but simultaneously experienced the loss of a comfortable and secure learning environment as well as having increased domestic responsibilities such as childcare (UJ, 2020).

An ongoing challenge reported in research relates to the inequalities introduced or exacerbated by the pivot to remote and online learning (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Motala & Menon, 2020). In a sense, platforms such as Zoom and Blackboard 'flattened' the usual patterns of engagement and participation that characterise traditional lecture and seminar settings, allowing more socially or academically introverted students a space in which to participate and engage more comfortably. The cost of data and limitations to internet coverage and quality remain unaddressed and continue to constrain ERT.

As Respondent G reported:

Other students have issues with data, or connectivity was [a] problem, others were reluctant to get to grips with getting used to the system. From my experience Blackboard tends to be more problematic than Teams, and Zoom is the easiest.

Respondent F said:

I want to go out on a limb here and say that online learning creates the opportunity to identify at-risk students faster because there is the blackboard profile, and you know who is not signing in, as well as tutors notifying us those, certain students are not attending.

The pandemic highlighted the inequalities present in higher education; these were primarily attributed to socio-economic status and geographic location although there were also concerns about the impact that gender divisions had on domestic labour and care work in the home for both staff and students (UJ, 2020). Tawil (2020) argues that higher education institutions have been more than capable of developing appropriate responses to the demands of the pandemic. In the South African case, this meant that universities flighted a range of strategies (a 'multimodal' approach) that included contingencies and 'second chances' in the design of courses and assessments (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Motala & Menon, 2020). As the lockdown unfolded, universities were able to identify and implement strategies to support students in low-technology environments including posting assignments and work packs (Tawil, 2020). This required shifting timetables and accommodating a more individualised learning culture in which inequalities were acknowledged down to the granular question of what kind of smartphone students had on which to access the LMS and other educational platforms (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Beché, 2020). UJ was thus not alone in its approach but had to tailor it to the specific needs of its student and staff complement. Multimodalism, however, presented a barrier of its own in that parity in quality could not be guaranteed across the various mixes of learning modalities. The assumption that students and staff had a baseline digital fluency surfaced as a further barrier to equity, adding to the cognitive and administrative load of adjusting to new teaching and learning modalities.

Although UJ was well positioned to transition to ERT given its processes of developing blended strategies to incorporate new and emergent technologies, staff nonetheless needed to be re-oriented to develop familiarity with the tools and pedagogical approaches to ERT.

Respondent E stated:

The faculty of education did not experience the change as dramatically as other faculties may have. We had a strategy going back three years prior to that, with regards to online training for example with training with the use of blackboard. The staff who attended the training session from 2016, who had incrementally been including blended teaching and were familiar with the Blackboard environment tools and affordances for teaching and

learning, were better prepared than others ... Initially, there was a lot of negative reactions from the portion of staff who were unprepared, there are still many staff who still rely on paper-based work and the traditional mode of transmission type of teaching.

According to Respondent F:

Within the law faculty most of us used Blackboard so the switch was not hard but what happened in 2020 was that it highlighted the students' profiles, the settings where they were learning and the inequalities.

According to Respondent H:

I am in [the faculty of engineering] and teach a fourth-year course. The challenge we had from both a teaching and learning perspective is that the course caters a face-to-face delivery approach. Where you would derive from first principal approach and students would chip in and expand the functions and arrive at a solution. Then we provide interactive feedback.

Some backlash was reported from staff who had not adopted blended learning strategies. Academics with sufficient training fared better. As Respondent H and others suggested, discovering that it would be impossible to use the same methods and practices in the online mode allowed staff to bring in new strategies, additional tools (such as digital pens) and supplementary resources. Other approaches included virtual workshops, seminars, 'class trips' and co-working spaces. These are elaborated in the section that follows.

### Responses to challenges

The switch to ERT required staff and students to find novel ways to address the challenges that emerged in everything from limited data access to developing chains of communication and points of contact. For example, Respondent F said that in cases of students potentially at risk of withdrawal or failure:

[w]e individually contacted the students telephonically ... we [also] tried to create a learning environment for them where learning could take place and this was done through bursaries, food schemes and various other innovative measures that the lecturers used.

Respondent E agreed:

We followed up via tutors and had a great focus on at-risk students.

Finding ways to stay in touch with students, such as through telephone and instant messaging platforms, may have assisted in retaining some students in the system as well as drawing at-risk students back into the learning environment to continue and complete the year. Lecturers used



creative means to support and retain at-risk students, giving life to what is termed the pedagogy of social justice (Bozalek & Carolissen, 2012). There is a correlation between pedagogic continuity and bread-and-butter issues such as meals and data. Fataar (2020), Czerniewicz et al. (2020) and Hodges et al. (2020) advocate for pedagogy that is 'trauma-informed' and offers parity with the pedagogies used in the contact mode. At UJ, as is evident in interviews and university surveys, there was a clear consciousness of the need for a pedagogy based in humanism and compassion. This involved staff and students being mindful and active in responding to the situational dynamics presented by the pandemic including the impact of illness, job loss and insecurity, family and community disruptions or death in the family or wider social network. It also required finding ways to cultivate social learning experiences across disparate home and learning environments which included synchronous lectures (building more structure into individual students' daily lives), asynchronous platforms for engagement, discussion and activities and finding ways to bridge these in order to support cohesion in the learning experience. In this sense, pedagogic continuity became a function of the institution's social justice ethic as well as being an essential component of ensuring the continuation of the academic programme. Assisting students to meet material needs opened up the space for trust to develop with the institution's academic planning dimension, solidifying the sense of community essential to securing students' buy-in to new pedagogical tools.

As Respondent E continued:

What helped us was our insistence of the flexible design template that we have, which we developed so that we have a seamless experience for students at undergrad level, so students would not have to deal with the new design of each module and waste data. So, we created a structure that will benefit students, which was seen as being managerial, but I took that with a pinch of salt. Those kinds of processes and structures helped us. For me I have an emphasis on quality, and I wanted the students to have the best quality modules and have the best experience.

Some of these platforms also injected fresh enthusiasm into the learning process as students were offered new opportunities to engage with lecturers in ways that they may not have had in the contact mode such as chat boxes and breakaway rooms. Respondent G reported that:

They also had freedom to ask in private through typing a question, it also provided a type of one-on-one engagement for some students.

Students could also contact lecturers and tutors via WhatsApp, although this introduced new concerns about boundaries, timing and inappropriate sharing of content. However, it did allow students more informal means of communication as well as the ability to revisit texts, voice memos or conversations where important information was shared. This broadened the types of communication available to

students and staff even as it presented a new challenge to ensuring appropriate boundaries were upheld as the lines between formal and informal/personal communication were blurred. Another way that social justice pedagogy was seen in practice was through the provision of computer pens for Blackboard, data bundles and zero-rated websites and the use of open-source software and resources, including provision of laptops. This to some extent levelled the playing field, created continuity and provided students from impoverished backgrounds with a fighting chance to continue with their studies.

### Shifts in pedagogical practice

The shift to online learning also required changes in pedagogy although as Kalantzis and Cope (2020a) argue, existing modes of delivery, course design and assessment were already outmoded at the time the pandemic struck. The shift to online learning presented a new opportunity for scholars of teaching and learning to begin thinking about the possibilities offered outside the traditional classroom space, where online and multimodal teaching and learning could potentially extend quality and equity efforts (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020a; 2020b). Despite the challenges that had been faced, teaching and learning had to continue and the space for innovation led some staff members to feel that the pandemic had some unexpected benefits. Respondent B reflected that:

pedagogically it feels richer than it was before. I think there are pros and cons on both sides. I think what online does that face-to-face didn't, that I think my class attendance is slightly better than it used to be ... In the online space, I use Zoom for my classes and students can type into the chat ... I encourage them to type and I get far more students engaging with me in the chat than I do out loud. I think it's just a safer space for them.

What is demonstrated in this instance is pedagogic continuity, the support between traditional forms of teaching and online learning. Respondent B added:

We've continued the year in being far more attentive to the individual student as a human being ... I don't think we really put it into practice as much as we've done now. We're not compromising on standards, but we are far more accommodating and flexible in appreciating the challenges that students face because we face them ourselves. We really understand them, and I think all of that is made in a sense a better educational space.

This observation on the socio-affective dimensions of students highlights the mutually reinforcing nature of pedagogic continuity: it is not enough to only sustain the social space of the classroom. There needs to be an equally strong emphasis on what is to be learnt and, crucially, on the tools used to facilitate learning. According to Mahlaba (2020), the self-directed learning required by the shift to online and multimodal delivery has issued a challenge to faculty to decentre their role as providers of knowledge and reposition student autonomy in the learning process. Pedagogic continuity in this

instance also requires scaffolding self-learning as part of the shift to online delivery to which many students struggled to adapt (Mahlaba, 2020). The notion of 'student presence' supports the idea that, as part of future developments, students have a central role to play in taking charge of their learning as part of their induction into university education. According to Mahlaba (2020) and to Kalantzis and Cope (2020b), developing collaborative spaces with lecturers and peers where students can drive their own learning will likely form part of future changes to education. The prevalence of informal or ad hoc platforms of student engagement such as WhatsApp created new learning spaces and peer networks to support students as they navigated their learning needs during the pandemic where lecturers were not the sole source of guidance or support, and students were able to scaffold knowledge and insight from a range of sources outside encounters with lecturers.

### Views on teaching and learning plan for 2022

Below are lecturers' views on the UJ Teaching and Learning Plan for 2022. This is intended to bridge the way teaching and learning took place in 2020, 2021 and its integration into institution as it finds itself in 2022.

Respondent A stated that:

We realised we actually hadn't planned or prepared for all sorts of contingencies before, so I think now we have a much better sense of a more holistic plan ... Keep [contact delivery modes] in place where it's safe and where we are able to, and then use the advantages of the technology modes of delivery to our benefit as well for different types of assessments ... So, we are feeling more positive about this now going into 2022 and beyond but still with this idea that we have to make sure we remain relevant as university and that humanities remains relevant and sought after and that we cater to students needs going forward. We do feel positive about it.

Respondent B added:

Now we realise there are all kinds of other ways that we can facilitate learning some through online contact, self-study and self-directed learning. I feel like our repertoire of learning or pedagogies has really grown and become more flexible.

According to Respondent G:

The new era provides more opportunities to enhance learning for students. What happened last year we had the opportunity to collaborate with our students and students from Toronto and they could work remotely on a project and submit. What that did for our students, to have that sense of confidence that they are just as good as their counterparts, if not better. They also learnt to work in teams and collaborate with colleagues that are internationally based.

The responses above demonstrate both awareness of pedagogic continuity and social justice pedagogy. Respondent H reported that:

The modules that we teach in [the faculty of engineering] are conceptualised for face to face and what ERT did was a shift to now providing slides and providing opportunities to engage in practicals and videos. So, going forward I will leverage on software and tools that will make teaching and learning more interactive.

Respondent G agreed that:

Teaching with technology also makes things easier for lecturers, as it does some of the work we spend countless hours on. So, there is more time to focus on developing content.

These responses indicate that lecturers found value in using technology and regularly found ways to extract the most out of these tools for their own and students' benefit. Staff were provided with an opportunity to rethink their existing teaching methods and adapt them to a crisis situation where they were constantly monitoring and modifying to ensure that the strategies were effective and inclusive.

Many scholars caution that it is as important to reflect on what not to carry over in the aftermath of the pandemic, specifically in relation to balancing contact and remote teaching and learning (Badat, 2020; Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Tawil, 2020). Czerniewicz et al. (2020) state that some issues of continuity will require deeper resolution not only in terms of the hasty implementation of improvised and untested solutions but also the transfer of existing bad habits and practices that put students at a disadvantage in the contact mode. Badat (2020) similarly cautions against the tendency to assume that innovations and interventions trialled during the pandemic will or should be relevant to online and distance education. Scholarship on teaching and learning under COVID-19 has been varied although there has been a general tendency to hold up the pandemic as a critical 'moment' for revitalising education technologies, practices and pedagogies towards greater digitisation (Badat, 2020). Ensuring continuity in how learning takes place should animate how existing interventions are evaluated and new ones designed.

This was referred to by Respondent H, who said:

What I have to say about pedagogical gains and losses. It is obvious that we have to change and do it quickly. As we move into the online space it is conceivable that if we do not adapt, other prestigious institutes could conceivably improve their offering and for example then someone who is in Limpopo can be a student at Cambridge, so if the learning is well crafted and engaging, the student will get more value opposed to travelling to Joburg and the related expenses that come with that. If we do not adapt, we will have problems.

Respondent G added:

I think right now we have the required tools to ensure that effective teaching takes place. With regards to staff, I think the situation could not have been predicted and perhaps going forward we need to prepare the staff of what is expected and how to engage with students as well.

The interviewees' responses to the plan were mainly positive and it seems that the Teaching and Learning Plan for 2022 has been well received by lecturers. It is unclear as yet how the situation will evolve during the year, but the contingency plan offers lecturers, the university and students tools to mediate challenges that may arise. The comment by Respondent G that more needs to be done to prepare staff reflects findings by Hodges et al. (2020) who report that pedagogic continuity is not only about the learning process of students but about staff as well. Sustaining professional social networks interrupted by the pandemic enabled faculty at the university to collaborate, share ideas and modify programmes, making pedagogic continuity a facet of faculty development and support through the crisis. Careful management of a new socio-pedagogical terrain unfamiliar to many staff and students is required.

### **Conclusion: Taking steps across the bridge**

Czerniewicz et al. (2020) and others (Archer-Kuhn, Ayala, Hewson & Letkemann, 2020; Badat, 2020; Beché, 2020; Chandler, Burton, Wallace & Darby, 2020; Perrota, 2020) caution that high levels of engagement and success may be proof of student and staff resilience in the face of the pandemic but may not necessarily prove that interventions trialled in the pandemic are fit for purpose in the coming years. The critical question is how pedagogic continuity can be more durably sustained and secured as the world adapts to what may be a 'new normal' in higher education and other spheres of life.

An alternate view from Tamrat and Teferra (2020) indicates that future interventions in pedagogic continuity will need to grapple with the resource shortages that have already been felt in higher education systems across Africa. Some, such as expanding ICT technologies, offering devices to students and staff and paying for data packages, have been unsustainably expensive. They encourage academic developers to think about sustainable long-term options for ensuring equitable hybrid learning including solutions specific to the needs of individual countries and sub-regions differentially impacted by connectivity, security, mobile network and electricity coverage (Tamrat & Teferra, 2020).

In considering solutions to some of these challenges, Kalantzis and Cope (2020b) offer five theses for the future of online learning that present novel ways to think about pedagogic continuity as the

pandemic continued to unfold. As they observe, “technology does not in itself determine the shape of change” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020b:1) and can either ossify outdated practices or offer opportunities to design new ones better suited to the needs of staff and students.

Thesis 1: There will be no pedagogical differences between learning in person and learning remotely.

Thesis 2: There will be no difference between instruction and assessment.

Thesis 3: There will be no class scale.

Thesis 4: Adaptive and personalised learning will not be at the expense of the learning community.

Thesis 5: Educators will stop insisting on inequality of outcomes (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020b:2).

Each thesis engages with the pedagogical architecture of the existing system and the one they propose for the future. For example, when the authors argue that there will be no pedagogical differences between learning in person or remotely, they suggest that remote learning should not simply replicate the communication modes of the contact classroom where timetables and schedules are replaced by the LMS and the classroom by individual tiles on a Zoom screen (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020b). In implementing their own innovations (called CGScholar), they found that mini-lectures, compulsory prompts and info dumps, and students updating and adding to course content, supported an active and engaged learning community that enabled more regular and diverse feedback to individual students and to the collective group as well as displacing the call-response teacher-centred strategies common in higher education.

In expanding on their other theses, Kalantzis and Cope (2020b) continue to argue for a dynamic fusion of assessment with everyday instruction and class engagement that builds the skills necessary for a changing world: less focus on long memory and regurgitation of content and more on working with diverse knowledge sources, critical appraisal and assessment, collaboration with peers and problem solving. Aside from incorporating multiple forms of assessment or evaluation through recording student engagement through the LMS, it also requires demonstrable shifts in students’ skills under principles of ‘productive diversity’. It is notable that, in their later work, Kalantzis and Cope (2020a) emphasise the need for this because it is aimed at de-centring traditional logics about assessment, such as whether knowledge is proved through mimicry or a diversity of perspectives, as well as the transparency of the learning encounter including what is examined.

Learners may start a unit of work with different knowledge, interests and capabilities - of course. Standardized instruction turns these differences into inequalities. When standardization succeeds, it is by imposing an architecture of epistemic and cultural sameness where some comfortably fit the epistemic mold and others not. But in the new school, student projects may be different in their contents and interpretations, while rubrics that ensure comparability against disciplinary standards. Students may have their own voices in community discussions, but their contributions can be equivalent. (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020b:17-18)

This approach is radical because it suggests that future pedagogic continuity depends less on standardisation and homogenisation and more on developing the architecture to support diversity in navigating the learning process. As the UJ experience clearly demonstrates, the shift to ERT was characterised by adapting to existing but largely underutilised models of managing the teaching and learning processes. It was evident that digital technologies afford but do not guarantee a host of possibilities for managing knowledge about teaching and learning and the process of teaching and learning itself. The academic spaces between staff and students acquired new proximities in terms of engagement, compassion and mutual acknowledgement of each other's contextual realities. UJ's commitment to social justice and equitable access in its application of technologies created pathways for staff and students to co-create the new experience. In this way, pedagogic continuity continues to be affirmed by recursiveness in the learning process, with students able to move at their own pace towards knowledge mastery with an ongoing series of checks and balances that ensure that effective learning is taking place. Through analysis of the reflections of academics at UJ, this article suggests that pedagogical continuity as praxis represents an implicit policy position and teaching and learning philosophy that foregrounds teaching and learning under a variety of circumstances.

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