

Editorial

Doing Academia Differently

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ABSTRACT

This special issue seeks to explore how to 'do academia differently' in the interests of justice in higher education. It takes account of theoretical frameworks, teaching methods, research practices, publishing norms, curricular content and the design of courses. The issue consists of nine articles which address different aspects of these areas from a range of disciplines – medical education, literature, visual arts, philosophy, the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education – and from philosophical perspectives that concern humans in their entanglement with natural and technological worlds. The issue opens up a space for the dissemination of alternative ideas, legitimising experimentation for those who wish to do academia differently.

While there has been a wide range of efforts to transform higher education in South Africa, including recent campaigns to decolonise the university, a groundswell of dissatisfaction continues, particularly with respect to the entrenchment of global neoliberalisation in the academy. Neoliberalism and corporatisation of the university has had a major impact on practices of academia and the lives of academics, as well as students, scholars and early-stage researchers (Bauman & Donskis, 2013; Braidotti, 2013; Callinicos, 2006). Neoliberal discourses and practices in higher education perpetuate injustices in organisational structures, and are visible in teaching methods and assessment mechanisms, research practices and publishing norms, curricular content, and design of courses (Mbembe, 2016). For example, publishing and reviewing are scholarly practices which have become problematic in these neoliberal times, precisely because of the enormous demand for academics to publish their work in accredited and prestigious academic journals. Academics find that their career trajectories, including their employment prospects at other universities and their promotion to more senior levels in academia, are primarily based on their citations in so-called 'A'-rated international journals. In addition to this, many academics are pressurised into the unpaid labour of conducting peer reviews of manuscripts for journals and publishers. If academics do not carefully organise themselves, they could be swamped by reviewing tasks and externally moderating large quantities of postgraduate work. Teaching loads are becoming higher, and teaching is becoming increasingly casualised. The pressures that these imperatives place on academics are not conducive to quality thought, collaborative and generous engagement with others, all of which matter greatly in academia. Notwithstanding social justice emphases, the project of socially valuable research is being lost in the pursuit of individualised scholarship.

Much of the scholarship directed at social justice, transformation and decolonisation in the university, in both global and local contexts, has been engaged in a critical interrogation of the historical and contemporary logics of scholarship. This scholarship interrogates how the academy reflects and reproduces unequal access, with practices and privileges which bolster larger material-discursive inequalities and injustices. While valuable and necessary, efforts may have become stuck in a repetitive pattern of critique which fails to offer useful alternatives for re-thinking, re-making, reconfiguring and re-doing scholarship. This special issue was initiated in order to take a further step by considering these alternatives and asking what now (Anderson & Harrison, 2010)? This special issue takes a modest step towards ways of engaging in alternative, experimental and affirmative social justice scholarship, which remains relatively undeveloped in the literature.

In this regard, recent intellectual developments in the contemporary philosophical and theoretical fields of posthumanism, new materialism, non-representationalism and affective studies are offering ground-breaking possibilities for reconceptualising everyday practices of scholarship (see for example, Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Barad, 2007; Barad & Gandorfer 2021; Braidotti, 2013, 2019, 2022; Stengers, 2018; Thrift, 2008; Vannini, 2015). Drawing on contemporary theoretical and methodological advances from these perspectives and others, we were interested in contributions which envisaged ways of thinking otherwise in academia. Papers in this special issue are those which resist the technicist and individualised outputs of neoliberal imperatives.

This special issue on Doing Academia Differently was born from a desire to offer alternatives for re-thinking, re-making, reconfiguring and re-doing scholarship. The contributors think-with ways of making affirmative scholarly spaces that rupture and re-imagine ideas and practices through experimentations with inventive methodologies. Such scholarly spaces include reading, writing, reviewing, pedagogic and curricular practice, research orientations and methodologies. The papers in this volume address the broad theme of doing academia differently, as well as responding more specifically to the following questions:

- How could using theoretical tools such as new materialist, non-representational theories, and posthuman perspectives provide new insights for reconceptualising and conducting academic work and practice in higher education?
- What experimental practices of doing academic work have been explored or can be invented?
- What are the political implications of developing these practices in contexts of neoliberal higher education?
- How might we actualise and/or disseminate these ideas and practices in different geopolitical locations and disciplines in ways that cultivate an ethos for socially just higher education?
- What contributions might post-qualitative research methods offer the scholarship, theory and practice of just academic practices in higher education?

The special issue consists of nine articles which address different aspects of these sub-themes. The articles are set within and address issues in higher education in a range of disciplines – medical education, literature, visual arts, philosophy, higher education – and from philosophical perspectives that concern humans in their entanglement with natural and technological worlds.

Delphi Carstens and Chantelle Gray's paper is written in the form of a Socratic dialogue with each other about what they consider to be two of the most pressing issues of our times – new algorithmic ecologies and the ecological crisis and what these mean for doing academia differently. Their dialogue features refrains of death which they see as being immanent to both digitality and the Anthropocene. Addictions also feature prominently in their dialogue – they hold internet addiction as responsible for widespread disengagement and disaffection in the university classroom. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Stiegler, they propose a careful experimentation as an antidote to the bureaucratisation and neoliberalism currently experienced in academia. This, they aver, will lead to the circulation of healthier intensities for nurturing life in the face of pervasive refrains of death. Paul Mason's article also responds to the constraints that neoliberalism places on academic practices and examines how reading in academia can be done differently. He purports that critiques of neoliberalism and proposals of how reading, writing and pedagogy might be conducted differently have not gone far enough. As a way of redressing what he perceives as this inadequacy, he puts forward 'a pedagogy of epiphany' by which he means an ontological transformation through an enchantment, which happens ineffably by reading a particular text.

Maren Seehawer's article is interesting in that it shows how an indigenous Southern African concept such as Ubuntu can travel to northern parts of the globe, Germany in this case, and be used as a research paradigm which is underpinned by a relational ontology. She sees Ubuntu research agendas as an alternative to extractivist and instrumentalist methodologies, so common in academic research, particularly in Southern contexts. She emphasises the point that how we research is just as important as what we research. Importantly, she extends the notion of Ubuntu to embrace the connectedness of other species and humans on a shared planet – an acknowledgement of the dependency of humans on non-human species. Like Carstens and Gray, the concern is about what reparations can be made to the conditions in which we now find ourselves, as a consequence of the intertwining of colonial and ecological violences.

Sarah Crinall's experimental contribution enacts an alternative embodied way of doing academia. This contribution demonstrates the importance of providing spaces in journals, such as *SOTL in the South*, for this kind of experimental scholarly writing. Crinall uses her own creative blogposts, to diffractively read through black feminist writers. She particularly focuses on poet, scholar and activist, Alexis Gumbs, and her transformative encounters with marine animals (Gumbs, 2020). The writing is creative and processual. The seven blog postings are presented as Tracks and the responses to these as Off-Track – which plays with the intersection between academic and non-

academic prose. Crinall's playful writing as a form of oxygenating scholarship is a further refusal to adhere to neoliberal logics in academia, as alluded to in the papers by Carstens and Gray and Mason.

Chivaugn Gordon, Gregory Doyle and Veronica Mitchell provide a novel, fun approach to teaching and learning through video in the context of undergraduate medical education. Their approach was devised during Covid-19 lockdown to address the lack of student exposure to clinical cases in the flesh during this period, as well as to lighten the mood through combining humour with medical input. The videos, drawing on a range of creative modes, demonstrate new ways of producing teaching materials to engage differently with the core curricular needs of students. The uploading of the videos as Open Educational Resources onto a YouTube channel and a public website extends these teaching resources beyond institutional boundaries and beyond Covid times.

Francois Jonker's article provides a nuanced, philosophically grounded account of a pedagogic intervention in an Art School classroom. Focusing on learning as becoming, the article opens up conceptions of the experiential nature of learning events. Based on the proposition, 'Engage learning as an experience' through its processual potentialities, the article discusses several learning activities in terms of new materialist conceptualisations of subjectivity, agency and affect. Through the discussion of these activities, the article demonstrates how dominant representationalist conceptions of higher learning might be challenged.

Poetic inquiry is an umbrella term covering various ways of using poetic and literary approaches in qualitative analysis. Anne Görlich's article provides a detailed account of how to practise poetic inquiry in relation to interview data, as a means of including affective and emotional domains, areas which are often backgrounded or neglected. Poetic inquiry is for her also a way of acknowledging the imbrication of researcher and analysis. Görlich provides a detailed methodological account of the process – showing the three analytical stages she has devised: deleting text, condensing text, and theoretical interaction. The article will be pertinent to researchers wishing to use this approach.

Reviewing is an often unrewarded but crucial part of the process of academic scholarship. Issuing a strong challenge to dominant practices of reviewing as an individualist, competitive and gate-keeping practice, situated within the problematic euro-western, patriarchal and neoliberal logics that underpin higher education, Tamara Shefer, Michalinos Zembylas and Vivienne Bozalek re-think the process of peer reviewing. Using current feminist, decolonial and new materialist perspectives, their article challenges dominant practices through its radical rethinking of the review process and

argues for alternative ways of understanding and doing reviews. It makes a valuable contribution in its conceptualisation of reviewing as an affirmative, 'response-able' pedagogical practice instead of a gatekeeping one.

The article by Denise Newfield, Nike Romano and Vivienne Bozalek proposes an alternative way of using, or rather 'doing', concepts in the scholarship of teaching and learning in the South. Through a post-philosophical and post-qualitative approach, they challenge the use of formulaic methodologies to dictate the content and structure of pedagogy and research. Instead, they propose that concepts become the generating force. However, they see concepts not as abstract ideas in the human mind, but rather as material arrangements in the world. The article develops six propositions as provocations for activating and doing concepts differently; it invites readers to consider doing concepts differently in their own scholarly practice.

The papers in this special issue have all attempted to develop theoretical and pedagogical tools appropriate to doing academia differently. Together, the papers open up a different conceptualisation of the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education for the South – and for the North. As a collection, they provide a strong impetus for addressing a number of the pedagogic and political problems and issues endemic to higher education at this time. This body of work challenges neoliberal approaches, exemplifying alternative practices which might lead to more just ways of thinking, being and doing in academia.

The publication of this special issue is a way of opening up spaces for the dissemination of these ideas, legitimising experimentation for those who wish to do things differently. We feel it significant that such experimentation is put forward from the global South, offering a challenge to North-South power relations through creating something new within the context of SOTL in the South, which might be of interest globally as well as locally.

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