

**Editorial: Teaching and Learning for Sustainable Futures**

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This special issue emerges from the fourth biennial SOTL in the South conference, SOTL4theSouth, hosted by the University of the Free State in November 2023 at the Golden Gate Highlands National Park in the Free State, South Africa, in the vicinity of the University's QwaQwa campus. The first face-to-face gathering of SOTL in the South since before the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference adopted the theme, Teaching and Learning for Sustainable Futures. The conference organisers believe this theme responds to the urgent need for innovation and responsiveness in higher education pedagogies and epistemologies such that they emphasise and disseminate the values and principles of sustainable development and social justice. The notion of 'futures' encompasses sustainable and equitable opportunities and chances for young people.

It is widely acknowledged that we live in complex and precarious times. The key challenges of the early twenty-first century, such as climate change, financial and economic crises, entrenched and rising inequality, and environmental degradation - and which are especially pronounced in the global South - call for broad social awareness, societal participation, and sustainability consciousness. Of course, higher education is a fundamental driver in promoting such awareness and participation, and education for sustainable development incorporates these key sustainability issues in teaching and learning. However, higher education systems across the world have been complicit in perpetuating unsustainable industrialist and modernist conventions of growth and 'progress'. In an age of rapid technological change, marked most notably by the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), education is

compelled to engage with discourses and practices that are human-centered and that harness technologies made by people for people. This is a challenge for all academic disciplines, and is particularly pronounced in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

With the assistance of a corp of local and international scholars who served on the Scientific Review Committee, the conference organisers are proud to have assembled a diverse collection of teaching and learning researchers and practitioners at different stages of their careers and from across the higher education landscape in southern Africa and broader afield. The papers and panels all engaged with the conference theme in critical and compelling ways, pushing the scholarship of higher education for sustainable development in new directions. The evident intersections between sustainability, social justice, decolonisation, and indigenous knowledge, were particularly welcome and emanate from the articles in this issue in insightful and at times, disruptive, ways.

Indeed, the ongoing debate around the decolonisation of curricula presents welcome opportunities for cross-pollination with higher education for sustainable development, as both emphasise sensitivity to different cultural forms of knowing. Similarly, education for sustainable development prioritises participatory teaching and learning via collaborative and experiential teaching and learning methods. The promotion of systemic thinking and analysis, as well as thinking creatively for future scenarios, are equally important. Furthermore, teaching and learning for sustainable futures values students as crucial catalysts for change, in the present and the future, and thus is motivated by the transfer and exchange of sustainable thinking and acting.

The papers in this issue tackle these challenges in varied and innovative ways. Each paper presents novel approaches to embracing and embedding sustainability consciousness in their specific disciplines. The authors argue for context-specific teaching and learning responses that speak to global issues. In doing so, the lessons and reflections on offer in this special issue will be of interest to teaching and learning scholars and practitioners from disciplines not necessarily represented. Education for sustainable development is transcendent in scope and purpose, just as the challenges it aims to address are universal, regardless of place or purse.

The paper by Phiri highlights the importance of partnerships with local communities in university efforts to develop sustainable solutions to pressing challenges. Addressing needs in climate change education in Malawi, Phiri's qualitative study draws attention to the multidimensionality of the

climate crisis and how pedagogic approaches to climate change adaptation ought to see students and communities as active participants rather than education recipients.

Similarly, Sebolao's article presents a participatory research analysis of the value of inculcating a culture of entrepreneurship among students in the Faculty of Humanities at a South African university. Humanities and Social Science disciplines do not necessarily have clearly defined career pathways as other disciplines, such as those in economic and management sciences or health sciences, for example. In a bid to address the high rates of unemployment among university graduates in South Africa, Sebolao's intervention reveals the possibilities for positive change created by intentionally embedding entrepreneurship training and thinking in co-curricula activities in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The importance of reflective and integrative curriculum practices in the health sciences is addressed in the piece by Van der Merwe, Serekoane and Du Plooy. The authors take their cue from the notion of medical pluralism and argue for the value of an ethnomedical approach to pre-clinical training. In doing so, the article disrupts the often taken-for-granted binary perspective that Western biomedicine stands as superior, and in opposition, to traditional, complementary and alternative medicines. By centering medical pluralism in curriculum renewal, the authors' intervention yielded positive results in cross-cultural graduate attribute training among first-year health science students while also promoting future-focused, responsible citizenship.

In a similar vein, Prozeky and Ferreira foreground place, bodies and ways of being in their article, which explores pedagogy as a learning journey in the context of a postgraduate course on literacy education theories. In contrast to pedagogy pathways, which are typically framed as static and deterministic, pedagogy as a learning journey embraces the degrees of uncertainty that usually accompany teaching and learning. Thus, it anticipates teaching and learning as emergent and unpredictable, informed by particular cohorts in particular classrooms where particular human interactions unfold - shaped by different identities, choices, agency, affect and meaning. The pertinence and value of this approach is underscored by the course's commitment to decoloniality of thought and practice, and to the promotion of an ecology of knowledges.

Genis and Byrne emphasise the need to address content alienation among learners in their paper that presents new approaches to sustainable poetry teaching and learning. Their effort is in response to a crisis of relevance in poetry studies in South African secondary schools, which they

attribute, persuasively, to the prescribed poems having been written in contexts that are geographically, temporally, culturally and socially distant from the learners' life-worlds. A larger scholarly effort to bridge the divide between learners and poetry curriculum is underway through the development of a new teaching anthology of post-1994 South African poetry, with the proposed title, *Amazwi Amasha*, meaning *New Voices*. The authors argue for the intentional incorporation of younger voices and culturally relevant material to reposition poetry as vibrant, insightful and germane to learners' life experiences, choices and actions.

In facing up to the challenge of student resistance to perceived 'cultural tourism' in community engagement in a Visual Arts Honours programme, Berman shares insights into how educators can foster empathy, agency and activism among students. Drawing on experience from an emerging collaboration between a South African university and an organisation of waste reclaimers in Johannesburg who add value, including artistic value, to upcycled waste products, the author illustrates the value of responsible, interdisciplinary collaboration for students, facilitators and community partners. Furthermore, by incorporating social and environmental responsibility into the educational experience, students can be afforded opportunities to actively engage with social and environmental challenges, and the community partners who are doing likewise.

De Villiers offers a provocative view of the state and possible fate of music departments in the technological age. The author sets out a considered critique of the audit model in Higher Education and its negative implications for music departments, as well as how music departments may need to adapt and transform, in terms of curriculum, student recruitment and teaching and learning, in order to remain relevant. De Villiers highlights the tendency of music departments to perpetuate traditional practices of teaching and learning, which are underpinned by literacy and logic, as opposed to the increasing contemporary need for creativity and innovative responses to existential challenges. The paper is an inspiring call to action for music scholars and educators in the academe.

In response to one of the most - if not the most - topical matters of our time, Baron's paper presents a compelling exposition of the implications of the rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) for educators. Given GAI's increasing sophistication and accessibility, Baron reinforces the view that it represents a paradigm shift for education - for the acquisition and demonstration of knowledge. To compound the issue, the author illustrates how GAI can easily circumvent traditional plagiarism detection mechanisms, such as Turnitin, used by thousands of universities and schools around the world. The piece also grapples with the question of what will constitute 'original work' in our new

normal. Aside from the need to rethink and reimagine academic policies and curricula in response to the inevitable deep integration of AI into academia, Baron also calls for vigilance by educational institutions as knowledge, and the creation of knowledge, may increasingly become the preserve of Big Tech.

Lastly, Behari-Leak delivers a disruptive take on the discourse of ‘grand challenges’ that are so often incorporated into the scholarship of teaching and learning in the global South without adequate regard for location and context. In short, the author questions the premise of ‘grand challenges’ when uncritically and unreflectively parachuted into SOTL discourses and practices from the global North. Developed from her keynote address at the conference, Behari-Leak’s provocation invites us to critically interrogate our teaching and learning contexts, and how they are intrinsically linked to historical, and ongoing, coloniality and matrices of power. As with several other pieces in this issue, the paper is a call for reflection and action, and Behari-Leak aims to stir scholar-activists to imagine and create new models and frameworks for sustainability education that contribute to balanced relationships in the global system of knowledge production.

The authors in this special issue have grappled with pressing teaching and learning challenges in insightful, evidence-based, and thought-provoking ways. The conference organisers are, of course, delighted to realise the publication of these papers - to come full circle from call for papers to special issue. However, this special issue does not signify an ending, but rather marks a notable milestone in the work of SOTL in the South along the pedagogical journey towards our collective futures. As higher education educators, we hold the privilege and responsibility of playing an integral part in shaping those futures.



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