

**Editorial****Beyond the pandemic: Lessons for the future of SOTL in the global South (part two)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The third biennial SOTL in the South Conference took place online between November 22 and 25, 2021. The theme of the conference was 'Beyond the Pandemic: Lessons for the Future of SOTL in the Global South'. This theme was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which raised fundamental and urgent questions for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Emerging from the conference were a number of papers that sought to address questions regarding the challenges associated with academic life in lockdown and the transition to online teaching and learning. These papers examined these questions from a diversity of perspectives: student, lecturers, support staff, and academic managers. A first collection of these papers was released in April 2022. This collection privileged the perspectives of university management, lecturers, academic advisors, doctoral supervisors and tutors. In this, the second part of our collection of papers emerging from the 2021 *SOTL in the South* conference, greater focus is placed on student perspectives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third biennial SOTL in the South Conference took place – online, like so many other conferences in the past two and a half years – between 22 and 25 November, 2021, under the theme, ‘Beyond the Pandemic: Lessons for the Future of SOTL in the Global South’. The COVID-19 pandemic created significant challenges for students, academics and university managers alike. While dealing with the emotional shock that the pandemic presented to individuals across the globe (including risks to personal health, restrictions on personal movement, and the loss of family, friends and colleagues), the higher education community was also expected to undergo rapid transition to online instruction. These new forms of curriculum delivery, assessment and teaching and learning present both affordances and losses for teaching and learning.

It is thus necessary to reflect on these affordances and losses – and on what they may mean for the future of scholarship in teaching and learning, particularly in the global South, where resource and capacity constraints loom large in the higher education landscape. This special issue of *SOTL in the South* presents an opportunity to engage in such reflection. Of course, in a global South context, there is pointed focus on the fault lines of inequality of access within and across the global South and the impact that the pandemic may have on the drive for a more socially just higher education. But, what is also emerging now, as the pandemic begins to subside and many countries have removed most, if not all, Covid-related restrictions, is a tension between the *desire* to ‘get back to normal’ and the *need*, we would argue, to negotiate new ways of being and doing in higher education. This tension plays out within us, as individual students, academics and managers, and across departments, institutions and academic communities. Has COVID-19 disrupted higher education and instigated a new ‘normal’? And what will such a new normal entail? Or, as the pandemic continues to recede (though it might not disappear for a long while yet), will our practices in higher education also recede to the practices which we have come to accept, thus representing a return to the old ‘normal’?

And what, if anything, was wrong with the old normal anyway? We would contend that racial, social and environmental injustices are symptomatic not just of a troubled or broken society, but also of a higher education system that has contributed to and reproduced these injustices. Questions of social justice and environmental degradation have moved to the forefront of social discourse and debate. It is our argument – in this editorial, and across this special issue – that higher education, and SOTL specifically, must engage with these questions in order to democratise knowledge-creation and address these complex, intertwined environmental and social problems.

This special issue of *SOTL in the South* thus presents a collection of papers presented at that conference in November 2021. The special issue features 12 peer-reviewed articles and one reflective piece. These inclusions represent less than half of the submissions received for consideration in this special issue, signalling the level of interest in and engagement with the complex issues foregrounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has precipitated a dramatic increase in interest in scholarship in teaching and learning. It should be noted, as regular readers of *SOTL in the South* will know, that this journal takes a developmental approach to publishing and so, while many submissions are not included in this special issue, we continue to work with many authors and their submissions and look forward to publishing their contributions, as they become more fully developed, in future issues of the journal.

Six of the peer-reviewed articles and the one reflective piece were already published in April 2022, in the first part of this special issue. That first part focused on staff, leadership and management perspectives. These include the perspectives of university management (Motala and Menon, 2022), lecturers (Dison, Padayachee, de Klerk, Conradie, MacAlister, Moch and Krull, 2022; Agherdien, Pillay, Dube and Masinga, 2022; Hendricks, 2022), academic advisors (De Klerk, 2022), doctoral supervisors (Manathunga, Qi, Raciti, Gilbey, Stanton and Singh, 2022), and tutors (Ndwambi, Hlabane, Motlhabane and Malgas, 2022).

In this second part of the special issue, we place greater focus on student perspectives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first paper, however, acts as a bridge between the two parts by showcasing a particular SOTL journey from micro to macro levels of teaching and learning practice. In this paper, Mohd-Yusof and Samah, demonstrate how scholarship in teaching and learning takes place at multiple levels, beginning in individual classrooms with a focus on developing student-centred pedagogy. In the case of Mohd-Yusof and Samah, the authors demonstrate how this evolved into the development of structured training programmes, institutional-level experience sharing, and the creation of a centre of excellence in SOTL. Their reflections demonstrate that efforts across all of these levels can, and should, lead to “wide-ranging impacts both within and beyond the classroom”.

The next three contributions all speak directly to students’ experiences and perspectives of learning during the pandemic. Kim Berman uses arts-based approaches to acknowledge the voices of students as they “engage with and move through the despair and trauma emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic period”. As Berman argues, “interconnectedness and empathy are fundamental

lessons for educators in the south. We need to listen to our students.” If we are able to learn these lessons, Berman argues, we may be able to construct a vision for our communities, in which social and environmental justice are no longer mere distant hopes.

Inglis, Combrinck and Simpson, meanwhile, investigate second-year engineering students' thoughts on the impact of learning under lockdown on their own studies, and their imaginings of how first-year students might have been impacted in terms of their transition into higher education. They show how these second-year students argued that “transitioning to university requires that students form and maintain strong social bonds” and that the COVID-19 pandemic likely “disrupted students’ transition to university and the development of their student identities”. As a result, they conclude, it will be more important than before to “offer students opportunities to reflect on how their home and university identities can be harnessed – in tandem – to achieve personal growth and effect social change”.

Desire Chiwandire’s focus is on a subset of students often ignored in SOTL research: students with disabilities and mental health challenges. Chiwandire explores how students with mental health challenges, specifically, experienced the transition to emergency remote online teaching and learning. Drawing on a social justice framework, Chiwandire shows how learning under lockdown presented specific challenges and opportunities for students with mental health challenges. Echoing a point made by Kim Berman, Chiwandire argues that “according all [students with disabilities], including those with mental health challenges, a voice ... is important in enabling these students to feel that they are recognised and valued as full members” of the higher education community.

The focus of this special issue then shifts once more – to pedagogical strategies that account for student voices and perspectives. Mendon Dewa investigates the factors that affect reliability and effectiveness of online assessment – during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic – in a department of industrial engineering at a university of technology in South Africa, drawing not just on lecturer input, but also the views of a sample of 80 third-year engineering students. In so doing, Dewa identifies areas for improvement of the online learning environment, development of more authentic assessment and better academic performance on the part of students. Like the contribution from Inglis and colleagues, Dewa shows how pivotal assessment is to the teaching and learning process.

Finally, Michael Anthony Samuel explores the lessons learnt from short-term emergency remote teaching and learning by critically exploring whether the post-COVID landscape will be one characterised by pedagogies of comfort or those of disruption. Samuel's paper was not presented at the conference but is a direct response to the issues raised both by the original conference and this special issue that has emerged from it. Samuel returns us to the tension we raised earlier in this introductory piece: that "the HE system will continue to bifurcate disparities between those more willing to look to the past and those embracing a learning opportunity for the future". Samuel's article is a fitting conclusion to this special issue as it serves as a challenge to our readers to ensure that "policy, curriculum theory and pedagogical initiatives should be brought under scrutiny in a disruptive examination of the discourses that sustain our higher education environment". Samuel concludes more emphatically, but as you read the contributions that conclude this special issue, we ask you to consider: is disruption the future?

The papers across Issues 6(1) and 6(2) have contributed to the generative expansion of a southern scholarship about teaching and learning. This momentum has foregrounded that a southern way of being and becoming is not restricted to an abstract ideological, political, or social justice ideal. The papers shared in these two volumes have shown that a pragmatic democratic re-imagining of social justice is equally required. The intersection between the theoretical and the operational is a target. This commitment entails labouring at entangled macro-, meso- and micro-levels, in divergent sectors and across historically demarcated disciplines. This special issue has focused on a range of active constructors of the future: managers, curriculum designers and supervisors, tutors and students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In finding the spaces for alternatives, the arguments have shown stories of impediments, but above all, the possibilities for new stories of success. We have become more respectful that a southern scholarship for higher education is not confined to superior research methodologies: artists and engineers have re-appropriated their signature methodologies to expand rethinking the learning, teaching and assessment. Their juxtaposed reflections in this special edition offer inspiration for their unique disciplines and insight for other domains. The affordances and limitations of technology have allowed us to rethink what constitutes our most valuable resources. Perhaps the volume allows us opportunities to leave some elements of our past behind but look resourcefully to what resources we, ourselves and our collaborative journeying communities bring into the pedagogical space.

## Acknowledgements

The editors wish to acknowledge the important work done by Dr Phefumula Nyoni who served as managing editor for this special issue and played an invaluable role in its publication.

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