Editorial

Beyond the pandemic: Lessons for the future of SOTL in the global South (part one)

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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. This special issue of the *SOTL in the South* journal addresses the question of how the challenges associated with academic life in lockdown and the transition to online teaching and learning have been experienced by students, lecturers, support staff, and academic managers in institutions and across society more broadly. The contributions to this special issue grapple with questions such as: what will the longer-term impact be on our institutions, our students, and ourselves as teachers and learners? Will there be a return to 'normal' and, if not, what will the 'new' normal look like – and will it foster greater fairness, justice and equality? This is the first part of what will be a two-part special issue. In this first part, the lens offered privileges the perspective of university management, lecturers, academic advisors, doctoral supervisors, and tutors. The second part of the special issue, to be published in a few months' time, will place greater focus 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 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 raised fundamental and urgent questions for the scholarship of teaching and learning as the transition from traditional contact teaching to online instruction at institutions across the global South and North took place. The impact of new forms of curriculum delivery and assessment and the utilization of digital pedagogies requires further investigation, presenting opportunities and losses for teaching and learning.

This special issue of the SOTL in the South journal addresses a number of questions, including how the challenges associated with academic life in lockdown and the transition to online teaching and learning have been experienced by students, lecturers, support staff, academic managers in institutions and across society more broadly. Sharply in focus are the fault lines of inequality of access within and across the global South and questions have arisen as to whether the transition to online instruction helped or hindered the drive for a more socially just higher education. Much discussion has also taken place on the 'future-focused' university, during and after the pandemic. What will the longer-term impact be on our institutions, our students, and ourselves as teachers and learners? Will there be a return to 'normal' and, if not, what will the 'new' normal look like – and will it foster greater fairness, justice and equality?

While these questions are particularly urgent in the global South, they are also significant in the global North, where calls for racial justice and an end to discrimination have moved to the forefront of social discourse and debate, as evidenced by the Black Lives Matter movement. The knowledge question has been foregrounded, including whether the global North will continue to occupy a dominant position in the production of knowledge. Or are there, finally, opportunities to give equal value to all the knowledge systems of the world? And how will teaching and learning respond to the calls for racial justice? Amongst these considerations was whether higher education – and SOTL, specifically – democratise knowledge creation and address these complex, intertwined environmental, health and social problems.

The questions above formed a starting point for the conference and for this special issue, which aim to provide academics with theoretically grounded and practical strategies to address important current pedagogical debates around social justice, online pedagogy, and SOTL more broadly. There were rich theoretical and empirical contributions from national and international colleagues. The

interest shown, participation and contribution to scholarly discourse on these topics at the conference was tremendous. In order to accommodate the richness of the widely varied submissions, we have opted to present this special issue of the journal in two parts. This first part focuses on staff, leadership and management perspectives. These include the perspectives of higher education managers, lecturers, supervisors, academic advisors and educational developers, with a focus on what has been learned during the turn to online teaching and learning and technology-informed curriculum development.

The first article by Shireen Motala and Kirti Menon analyses how 2020 and 2021 were characterised by pandemic-related disruption to conventional modes of teaching and learning in higher education. 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. The theoretical framework of the paper synthesises the concepts of pedagogical continuity and social justice to analyse the research findings from an institutional case study. The findings indicate that academic staff were able to draw significant gains in the transition to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) that may offer new opportunities and possibilities for learning in an uncertain future.

The article by Laura Dison, Kershree Padayachee, Danie de Klerk, Willem Conradie, Fiona MacAlister, Shirra Moch and Greig Krull discusses alternative notions of institutional purpose and lecturers' conception of success that may influence the emerging post-COVID-19 higher education landscape in the global South. They suggest that a more nuanced and critical understanding of these concepts is essential to evaluate the gains and losses experienced during COVID-19. Their evidence is based on reflections of supporting teaching and learning across disciplines in a large research-intensive public university in South Africa, during 2020 and 2021 and their observations of the challenges experienced by lecturers as they transitioned to ERTL. It was in these moments of disruption and disequilibrium that lecturers were required to re-think the purpose of their courses and of higher education more broadly. Their argument challenges us – as a collective and individually – to reflect critically on the measures of success within courses that have changed dramatically in response to these new circumstances, as well as within the sector.

In South Africa, as elsewhere, there are increased calls for decolonization of higher education curricula and spaces. The #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student protests brought to light and

accelerated these calls. (International audiences might want to read Hodes (2017) for a detailed and critical overview of the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa.) Much complexity and debate exist around the notion of a decolonised curriculum: how to frame it, describe it, enact it. In their paper, Najma Agherdien, Roshini Pillay, Nkosiyazi Dube, and Poppy Masinga foreground the positionality and identity of individuals (themselves) who design, implement, and evaluate curricula. Their article examines how theory-informed pedagogical reflection can assist in our understanding of decolonisation. Their rich educator reflections include personal accounts of pedagogical philosophies, methodologies, and practices, largely within the discipline of social work, through the lens of social justice and equity. They conclude with a consolidated view on an envisioned, decolonised education in the global South context. The contribution that this article, and that by Dison and colleagues, makes is in the value of collective reflection, coupled with embracing personal stories and biographies to enhance teaching and learning.

Denver Hendricks' article highlights augmented reality (AR) as an innovative learning tool that is gaining popularity in educational settings, as it has the potential to significantly enhance interactive learning. He argues that AR has been a significant contributor to blended learning because it can be used in addition to conventional learning aids like text, images, video tutorials and the internet. Hendricks reports on the first phase of an action research study done in an architecture department in a higher education institution in South Africa that offers modules on Architectural Technology and Detailing. A qualitative research approach was applied where principles of the Delphi method were used after selecting a group of eight purposively-sampled lecturers. The participants were exposed to the AR technology, viewed a simulation, and were encouraged to explore three-dimensional model-building for themselves using the AR tool. Themes that emerged from group discussion were recorded to illustrate the possibilities of the application of AR in the context of the modules as well as possible limitations or concerns. Curriculum outcomes were then proposed to enhance an interdisciplinary component, incorporating the AR project outcomes with wider applicability than architecture only. This paper demonstrates the need for colleagues within and between departments to work together towards the meaningful technology-informed curriculum development required in the post-COVID 'new normal'.

De Klerk's paper focuses on academic advising and uses Margaret Archer's notion of social realism and, in particular, the lenses of culture, structure, and agency. The paper explores the role of the academic advisor within the higher education context, and argues for evidence-based, research-informed literature about advising for SA HE contexts. De Klerk argues that each student be viewed

as a holistic entity that comes to the advising relationship with unique lived experiences and realities from which they cannot be decontextualized. Although the study was conceptualised prior to COVID-19, further qualitative interviews took place during the COVID-induced national lockdowns. This affords De Klerk an opportunity to glean insights about academic advising prior to COVID-19, as well as during lockdown and Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) and to reflect on the future importance of academic advising beyond the pandemic.

In the final peer-reviewed contribution to this first part of the special issue, attention shifts to doctoral supervision. Global doctoral education has been particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, which have drawn attention to the vast inequities faced by black, cultural minority and Indigenous peoples. These developments have focused urgent attention on the need to de-homogenise Australian doctoral education. In their article, Catherine Manathunga, Jing Qi, Maria Raciti, Kathryn Gilbey, Sue Stanton and Michael Singh observe how Australian universities have been very slow to create recognition and accreditation programs for First Nations and transcultural (migrant, refugee and international candidates) knowledge systems, histories, geographies, languages and cultural practices in doctoral education. Their paper draws upon the Indigenous knowledge global decolonization praxis framework and de Sousa Santos' theories about cognitive justice and epistemologies of the South to begin to fill this gap. This paper critically explores the application of three core First Nations knowledge approaches – the agency of Country, the power of Story and intergenerational, iterative and intercultural knowledges to Australian doctoral education. Like the contribution of Hendricks, this paper represents a starting point, rather than an end-point, and both contributions highlight the enormity of the work yet to be done.

This first half of this special issue concludes with a reflective piece that privileges the perspective of tutors. Tutoring is one of the important components of student support designed to enable students to achieve their learning goals and improve overall success rates. In their reflective piece, Mueletshedzi Ndwambi, Daniel Motlhabane and Antoinette Malgas show how, during the pandemic, the use of educational technologies moved from being a secondary mode of conducting learning interactions in the tutoring space to being the primary mode of learning; they ask the question: "what does tutoring look like when most students are no longer on campuses?" In an online environment, tutors are not only expected to support students with their cognitive and academic skills but also need to offer support on other skills such as social, affective, technical and metacognitive skills. This reflective paper discusses the Tutor Professional Learning Programme

(TPLP) and identifies Ubuntu as a principle that tutors can utilise to support students to develop a range of skills required to succeed in an online learning environment. It concludes with discussion of desirable characteristics that are associated with Ubuntu, namely being caring, humble, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive and virtuous.

As already mentioned, this is just the first part of this special issue, which address the place of SOTL in the global South in the post-COVID 'new normal'. In this first half, the lens offered has privileged the perspective of university management (see Motala and Menon), lecturers (see Dison and colleagues, Agherdien and colleagues, and Hendricks), academic advisors (see De Klerk), doctoral supervisors (see Manathunga and colleagues), and tutors (see Ndwambi and colleagues). In the second part of the special issue, to be published in a few months' time, we will place greater focus on student perspectives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In that special issue, we will also provide an extended reflection on the theoretical and conceptual themes which the 3rd biennial SOTL in the South conference and this special issue bring to light.

Acknowledgements

References

Hodes, R. 2017. Questioning "fees must fall". *African Affairs*. 116(462): 140–150.