SOTL IN THE SOUTH

A journal dedicated to the scholarship of teaching and learning in the 'global South'

Volume 8, Issue 2 August 2024

Pages: 180-199

Putting the South back into Global South: SoTL as scholarly and social activism

Kasturi Behari-Leak
ORCID: 0000-0001-9744-510X

Centre for Higher Education Development, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

kasturi.behari-leak@uct.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In unpacking the theme of 'Sustainable Futures for Teaching and Learning', I explore the discourse of 'grand challenges' for SoTL in the South. I offer provocations to unsettle the premise that these challenges are in fact universally 'grand' and question our acceptance of the trope that what applies to the North applies equally to the South. In higher education (HE), themes like futures thinking and sustainability have enormous purchase as they encourage innovation to shape a better future. I challenge our complicity as SoTL authors in taking up these themes uncritically. I invite us all to consider how much our location and context in the Global South matter as an explanatory framework for the teaching and learning challenges we face and whether we can use our context as a locus of enunciation for the scholar-activist work we are called on to do. As long as our teaching contexts, linked to historical coloniality and the matrices of power, are sub-optimal for our students to thrive and succeed, we have an obligation to activate scholarly awareness and action towards bringing these into balance. My hope is that through collective scholar-activism, we enter a social imaginary where the world is socially inclusive and morally just, where location and context are immaterial to the possibilities that exist for human flourishing.

Submitted: February 27, 2024
Accepted: June 25, 2024

Introduction

As one of the invited keynote speakers for the 2023 SoTL in the South 4 conference, it gives me great pleasure to contribute to the theme of this special issue focused on 'Teaching and Learning for Sustainable Futures'. As was the focus of the conference, there is indeed an urgent need for innovation and responsiveness in HE pedagogies and epistemologies to emphasise and disseminate the values and principles of sustainable development. Also acknowledged are the key challenges of our time, such as climate change, inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation, especially pronounced in the Global South, which call for broad social awareness and societal participation. If HE is a fundamental driver in promoting such awareness and participation, what can we as academics, scholars and authors do to address a revitalised role of SoTL in the current global ethos?

In locating myself as a scholar-activist, it has been important for me to reflect on who I am and the context from which I come. As a fifth-generation South African Indian who grew up during apartheid, I have been acutely aware of being the Other(ed) and I have observed how context influenced my peers' and my life chances and agency. We went to Indian schools; we lived in areas regulated by the Group Areas Act; and enjoyed the similarity and comfort of being the marginalised Other in the liberation struggle for a democratic and free country. Although my Indianness has been and still is a source of Occidentalism when I engage with others, it is not accidental that my work in HE has been shaped deeply by my own experiences as a child and young adult who lived through inequality, marginalisation, 'minoritisation', alienation and racism.

My meditations as an activist scholar enabled me to reflect critically and deeply on how what was became what is, and how this shapes what can be, for my/our children, emerging leaders and ancestors yet to come. This scholar-activist voice was awoken when I joined the education sector in the 80s and an activist narrative still shows up strongly in my academic work. It was born out of a past riddled with many challenges and struggles and few opportunities; all of which taught me that social injustice is contextual, situated, embodied and real but can be combatted through active commitment, collaborative endeavour and relational agency. Who I am and where I speak from (Moya, 2011) is a leitmotif in my scholarly teaching and writing as I intentionally invoke 'context' as a significant denominator in the intellectual and scholarly projects I pursue.

Context can be assumed to be central to the *SoTL in the South* journal's identity and scope as it asserts itself as a journal 'in the South'. What does this 'in the South' location mean for knowledge

production and dissemination of scholarship from the South, for the South and for the world? In this paper, I explore these provocations by engaging critically with the conference theme, 'Teaching and Learning for Sustainable Futures', where sustainability and futures thinking are two discourses that have crept into HE as 'grand challenges'. Are we willingly or (un)knowingly co-opted to become champions for these causes and what do these ticket items mean for SoTL authors in general and *SoTL in the South* authors specifically? Is it important for us to lean into our location and context to respond pointedly and poignantly to global challenges set by the North, and to boldly insert our 'in the South' voices into these global debates as scholar-activists?

Whose Grand Challenges?

Before we explore the theme of this special issue, namely 'Sustainable Futures in Teaching and Learning', let us look at how grand challenges started and what they have come to mean for SoTL globally. The origin of the concept of the 'grand challenge' is credited to German mathematician David Hilbert, who presented a list of 23 unsolved "mathematical puzzles" to an international society of mathematicians in 1900 which resulted in directing and shaping the work of mathematicians for the next century (Feferman, 1994). In the broadest sense, 'grand challenges' refer to difficult problems identified or set by various institutions or professions to encourage solutions or to advocate for the application of government or philanthropic funds to support solutions driven research (Jütting, 2020). According to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2023), Grand Challenges initiatives are open requests for grant proposals for sourcing innovation that focuses on making an impact by addressing the same problems from differing perspectives, through collaboration for impact. These apply in the most highly developed economies, to energize not only the scientific and engineering community, but also students, journalists, the public and their elected representatives (Omenn, 2006). These solutions aim to develop a sense of the possibilities, an appreciation of the risks, and an urgent commitment to accelerate progress through, for example, an influential link to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), associating them with sustainability (Jütting, 2020).

Grand challenges are grand, and their intention and mission are commendable. In 2021, for example, the Gates Foundation launched its Grand Challenges Global Call-to-Action to build on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and fund cutting-edge science projects that together advance high-priority global health objectives while supporting and expanding a locally led research and development ecosystem with a balance of women investigators. When the funders are also grand,

the links enable transformational partnerships through investment in platforms to link the local institutions that train and connect innovators and support local people (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2023). Linking this directly to research, grand challenges have become popular in research governance to support the allocation of research funding to societally beneficial topics which focus attention and effort on specific problems that have societal relevance and utility (Välikangas, 2022). Here, the scope and focus of grand challenges research is

> more than ordinary research questions or priorities but end results or outcomes that are global in scale; very difficult to accomplish yet offer hope of being ultimately tractable; demand an extensive number of research projects across many technical and non-technical disciplines and accompanied by well-defined metrics (Gould, 2010).

From a Responsible Research Innovation perspective, the main aim in grand challenges is to align research with the values, needs and expectations of society (Owen & Pansera, 2019).

From a teaching and learning perspective, grand challenges are often too complex to activate or embed easily into pedagogy and curricula, given the diversity of learners and teachers, the influence of many dynamic contextual factors, and the gaps in the existing research that address these challenges. Evolving pedagogical tools and approaches offer possible opportunities to enhance teaching and life-long learning, but awareness, access, and implementation are not uniform across institutions and global settings (Hutchings, 2000; Scharff, Cappochiano, Chick, Eady, Friberg, Gregory *et al.*, 2023). A special project undertaken by members of the ISSOTL, involving iterative input and feedback from people around the world since 2018, culminated in the identification of five Grand Challenges for SoTL. These are: how to develop critical and creative thinkers; how to encourage students to be engaged in learning; the complex processes of learning; how identities affect both teaching and learning; and the practice, use and growth of SoTL (Scharff et al., 2023).

While the ISSOTL grand challenges research solicited input from ‘across the world’, it is difficult to conclude that the five identified topics are truly representative of the challenges faced in the Global South. Indeed, we could speak to the five challenges from a Global South lens, but these are not ‘our’ challenges. Where is our Grand Challenges agenda and when are we going to set our own agenda? Who gets to decide and how do we decide on this? Topics like climate change, SDGs and, more recently, university futures, artificial intelligence (AI), ChatGPT, machine learning, online learning, cyber security, etc., are currently ‘trending’, by virtue of the airtime they receive from conferences, journals, publishers, etc. Why do lived realities such as food security, epistemic injustice, funding, poverty and inequality, load shedding, gender- based violence, racialisation,

poverty, disabilities, access, and heteronormativity, that have a direct impact on students' well-being, not make it onto the list of perpetual grand challenges taken up by the North or with the same commitment? When they do, they are short lived, like fashion trends, to be discarded (as in the case of the 2015/16 #MustFall movements) before the next season. We know that poverty does not trend or sell well. It is not "sexy" enough to warrant research funding to mobilise, excavate and advance the eradication thereof. These pressing contextual matters are still current and critical to the wellbeing and survival of our students in the Global South.

Through such minimizing narratives, Moya (2011) claims that "the marginalised judge themselves to be less interesting, less significant, and more parochial than those who hold the power to institutionalize their views, judge themselves to be" (2011: 84). Imagine if we propagated our SoTL outputs in the public domain outside HE to raise global awareness, for example, about the plight of hungry students in our classrooms, with no food in their bellies and who cannot concentrate or focus on their studies long enough to enable them to succeed and change the inevitable poverty cycle for the next generation. Would we be able to shift the needle in a meaningful way if this is where we put our energy instead of focusing on agendas that do not always have a direct bearing on our context? It is easy to see how this could distract us from focusing on our own difficult problems and our own solutions while detracting us from addressing our present world challenges and the prognosis for our sustainable future.

To build on the above provocations, exploring the theme of Sustainable Futures seems highly relevant and critical, not only for the world in general, but also for our SoTL deliberations. It is plausible that the twin issues of sustainability and futures should be a concern for HE and SoTL as both command a respect associated with the responsibility, accountability and planning for an unknown future. Here again, an overarching focus on Sustainable Futures could easily occlude the underlying related and competing discourses linked to it, namely climate change, which subsumes a host of related issues such as carbon emissions, footprints, water shortages, energy crises and so on. Climate change emerged as a scientific, political and economic problem in the 1980s, and is now altering how the future is imagined along spatial, temporal, ecological and political lines in contemporary international politics (Death, 2022). As a discourse connected to the future, it is very much here and very present. It now ranges from "apocalyptic visions of a 'drowned earth' to more optimistic narratives of eco-modernisation and socio-technical transitions to a post-carbon economy" (Death, 2022: 8). In HE, themes like climate change and sustainability have enormous

purchase as we are also encouraged to work in innovative ways (which attract funding) to overcome the challenges facing us to shape a better future.

As I have written elsewhere (Behari-Leak, 2020), 'Futures Thinking' is an emergent but persistent discourse in HE and an area of scholarship which encourages us to innovate, redesign and modernise in tandem with the technological future of work, which now includes robotics and AI in various industries. While the world of work, industry, research and other stakeholders are propelling us into a new age of technology and non-human encounters and in a sense defining the future for us, we need to understand for ourselves when the future starts; how it relates to our present; what the future means from our own geographies and biographies; and what it means for SOTL in/from the Global South. Are we in a position to dream of an imagined future when present struggles are insurmountable and unimaginable, especially in the Global South? Here, the imagination should not be conflated with the imagined, where the former is situated and affected by the positioning of our gaze as individual mental inspirations (Death, 2022). Paradoxically, there is an important collective and social dimension to imagination which means "your imagination is never simply your own" (Moore & Milkoreit, 2020: 3). How people imagine their social surroundings is "carried in images, stories, and legends"; or by the "interdependent cognitive and social processes that create representations of present and possible future states of the world" (Moore & Milkoreit, 2020: 12). The term 'imaginaries' is thus preferred when referring to socially shared institutionally supported or stabilised mental pictures (Death, 2022).

When we bring a social imaginary gaze to university teaching and learning, we need to manage the tension between being able to imagine a future for ourselves while not losing sight of the systemic issues that prevent our imagination from becoming reality. If we come to this task with the aim of advancing our Global South goals in conjunction with our context, we could engage with what sustainable teaching and learning means on our own terms and what the future could look like for university teachers and students in the Global South.

Or could we? There are critical issues to consider here as well. Whether individual or social, it would be naïve to think that 'future imaginaries' will manifest as a utopian dream of the promised land just by our conceptualising it as such. As a field, it is profoundly political, restricted by a relatively depoliticised and linear future (Death, 2022) and policed and regulated by hegemonic forces. The work of decolonial scholars like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Steve Biko intersect with the Futures, Imaginaries and Sustainability discussions by foregrounding the African Anthropocene. By

decolonising imaginations of the future, the marginalised enter the discussion, for example, about the effects of climate change on their futures, by foregrounding issues that matter to them: questions of land and climate justice, loss and damage, extractive political economies and the racialised and gendered violence of contemporary capitalism globally (Death, 2022).

The whole point of my discussion on sustainable futures (above) is to question how much of what is regarded as important in the North or the world applies and holds true for us in the Global South, and against what timelines. By raising awareness about the importance of the spatial and temporal, which cannot be underestimated in how and when we respond to such issues, we are invited to be critically reflexive in how we, as SoTL writers in the Global South, interpret the grand challenges identified elsewhere. We need to also be circumspect in developing nuanced and well calibrated responses to highlight the grand issues of the Global South in our scholarship. In this way, we avoid being co-opted into compliance with trends, themes and discourses that are not always applicable to us in real time or in a real contextual sense. I have been advancing an argument thus far to advocate for us leaning into our positioning and positionality (context in/as the Global South) to amplify the issues we find relevant in our contexts. We should not fall prey to the imposed universalism in the agendas set by the world that dictate to us what we should be paying attention to and what thoughts we should have about grand topics. Taking this stand is critical in reminding the world that we, in the Global South, mediate grand and small challenges daily, because our lived reality is undergirded by contextual constraints instantiated through historical inequality and tensions, not always of our own doing or making. This is our locus of enunciation and should/could be a critical portal for activating a socio-cultural and geopolitical basis for knowledge production from the Global South. More importantly, this could mean a lot for a social imaginary of our own, where we set the agenda, identify our own grand challenges, work through our own solutions and interventions as they apply to our context and, in so doing, create our own knowledge and establish our sense of being. There might well be a space for (our) youth to dream, innovate, create and imagine a world that marches to its (our) own drum.

To summarise then, from a Global South perspective, the discourse of grand challenges begs the questions: grand for whom, and who decides on the grandeur or scale of these challenges? Are the challenges relevant to all contexts and who stands to gain from expanding SoTL research in this arena? These prompts are an invitation to SoTL authors to reflect critically on how we are implicated in 'grand' conversations and what we are being called on to explicate. The extent to which our complicity reproduces tropes set by a Global North agenda for the world, without really considering

how context and location matter or what 'grand' means for us, would be a grand oversight we cannot afford. We must also be clear about using the Global South as a locus of articulation and why this is/is not important for SoTL (and this journal).

The Global South as a Grand Challenge

Before we explore what knowledge production could look like for SoTL in the South, it is important that the nomenclature of the term 'Global South' is unpacked against its historical timelines to understand the global shift in geopolitics over the last few decades. Introduced in the 1960s by Carl Oglesby, the Global South only rose in discursive popularity after the Soviet Union's demise in 1991 (Picchi, 2023). It was used as a softer landing for the term "third world" which described countries as "developing," "less developed" or "underdeveloped" (Picchi, 2023), with a relatively low level of economic and industrial development, and typically located to the south of more industrialized nations with technology and resources (Heine, 2023).

Before the term 'Global South' became popular, 'South' referred to a historical and developmental set of meanings associated with the South geographically but soon became a geopolitical, historical and developmental concept (Jacob, 2023) to refer to those countries positioned in the South that shared common challenges ranging from economics to resources. From the early 2000s, the concept South began to be criticised so 'Global' was added to 'South' to articulate its position beyond its geography. The term 'Global South' was used to move away from the reductionist discourse associated with third-world developmentalist leanings (Kloß, 2017). The term Global South, however, is also a complex one not least because of the misnomer in its combined phraseology of 'Global' and 'South'. Even though the cartography of the world depicts distinct southern and northern hemispheres, the Global South is not simply the land below the equator and is therefore not a geographical term (Mignolo, 2011). Many countries, such as India, China and all of those in the northern half of Africa, are actually in the northern hemisphere, while Australia and New Zealand, both in the southern hemisphere, are in the 'Global North' (Rising, 2023). At face value, it would seem that the material location of countries is of secondary consequence to the resources these countries command and the economies they monopolise.

From a decolonial perspective, the Global South is seen as the provider of natural resources for imperial and colonial rulers of the Global North (Mignolo, 2011). African countries are the most tangible example of disenfranchised beneficiaries (Heine, 2023) that feed into the North's

preoccupation with production, consumption and wealth (Mignolo, 2011). The Global South is thus not only a material reality for those who live there but has also come to be associated with the concept of subalternity by addressing political, epistemic, cultural and economic inequalities and outlining epistemic inequalities and universalist tendencies in social theory (Kloß, 2017). Critical analyst Picchi (2023) avers that the Global South might be an outdated concept if the binary classification of North and South leads to an oversimplification of global dynamics and agents. The Global South has to be understood as something that is created, imagined, invented, maintained and recreated by the ever-changing and never fixed status positions of social actors and institutions (Kloß, 2017) and context. If not, the term 'Global South' will continue to be considered derogatory (Rising, 2023) because in the world political economy, who is at the centre (read North) and who is at the periphery (read South) still instantiates global hegemonic fault lines. Also, the term may no longer have any real purchase if used in ways that reduce contextual challenges or fail to capture the nuanced realities of global development (Picchi, 2023).

From a 'post-western world' perspective, however, Stuenkel (2017) claims that the 'mighty' West is slowly losing its capacity to set the global agenda, while the Global South (read East) is flexing political and economic muscles that the 'developing countries' and the 'Third World' initially never had. According to analysts like Stuenkel (2017), the re-positioning of the Global South has great potential to consolidate and empower the various agents and social actors in subaltern(ized) positionalities of global networks of power. This foregrounds the agency of the Global South in setting its own agenda and mandate, something already being asserted in different professional and disciplinary fields such as media and communication studies. Here, this disciplinary agency has resulted in more positive conceptualisations of the Global South in the production, consumption and circulation of media and in terms of the media's response, reaction and resistance to the North (Willems 2014: 5). In this way, scholars and media creatives contribute to a situated approach that is grounded in the everyday life experiences of ordinary people living in the Global South and advance knowledge generation in ways that uphold these values.

Putting the Global South firmly into SoTL in the South: How much does context matter?

SoTL should be fully embraced as a practice through which scholars can shape knowledge production in academic institutions, and through which new models are created and learned so that more balanced relationships in the global system of knowledge production are achieved. Much has been emphasised already in academia and through various HE public platforms (conferences, colloquia,

special issues, etc.) that context matters in HE in considering the students we teach, the curriculum we curate and the universities at which we work. Interdisciplinary journals such as *The Global South* also provide an intellectual space to focus on

> how authors, writers, and critics respond to issues of the environment, poverty, immigration, gender, race, hybridity, cultural formation and transformation, colonialism and postcolonialism, modernity and postmodernity, transatlantic encounters, homes, and diasporas, and resistance and counter discourse, among others, under the superordinate umbrella of globalization (Global South, 2023).

Similarly, the *SOTL in the South* journal is an online open source and peer-reviewed journal dedicated to fostering dialogue and research on teaching and learning in HE in the Global South, or about the Global South. It is an opportune avenue to channel, through our SoTL work, a dissemination of thoughts, ideas, beliefs and values based on contextualized teaching and learning problems, to the rest of the world. It is a chance to do it with the aim, among others, of letting the world know how we respond to grand challenges and other challenges arising from our own positioning, location and context. Going public in this way fulfils a mandate to not only raise awareness of what happens in university classrooms but also for HE to advocate through SoTL for a situated approach, grounded in the everyday life experiences of ordinary people living in the Global South.

SoTL work provides a space for disciplinary academics to expand their knowledge about teaching and learning. Through the morphogenesis of their own practice, university teachers can have a profound effect on the ultimate beneficiary, the student. By shining the torch on pedagogy and gaps, pitfalls and opportunities in disciplinary and transdisciplinary contexts, we have a corpus of solid scholarship on which to draw. SoTL scholars, who are well versed in their fields, are able to 'transform' and 'extend' their knowledge of university teaching and learning in different disciplines through peer-reviewed outputs which are shared widely. SoTL programmes also serve as professional development opportunities for those new to university teaching or those wanting to hone their disciplinary practice further. By affirming the importance of disciplinary expertise, SoTL writers extend HE into the public domain by sharing or making public how excellent and expert disciplinary teaching are practised in relation to two key questions of purpose: "Is what I am doing having an impact? And "What can others learn from the work I am doing?" (Bernstein & Lysniak, 2018: 123). From a Global South perspective, a qualifying segment needs to be added to both

questions: “Is what I am doing having an impact, here? And “What can others learn from the work I am doing, here?”

Our identity and agency are critical, especially in the Global South, in understanding the challenges that beset specific contexts, where generic responses or solutions that apply to teaching and learning challenges elsewhere feel like fitting a square peg into a round hole. That different SoTL journals have sprung up in different locations around the world demonstrates how contexts need to be accounted for and engaged with in SoTL. The challenge for SoTL practices globally is to contextualize Northern concepts appropriately for the Global South because we do not work, write, teach or learn in neutral, sanitised spaces. Teaching and learning is messy work and contexts count - they cannot be universalised. In Latin America, linguistic and cultural barriers are substantive and cannot be underestimated (Guzmán-Valenzuela 2017). When one considers the proliferation of SoTL around the world, we see how universal applications cannot apply piecemeal, for example in SoTL-Asia. In Canada, the *Teaching & Learning Inquiry (TLI)*, *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CJSoTL)* and *SoTL in the Margins: Teaching-Focused Role Case Studies* have all adopted SoTL to suit their regional needs. *Euro SoTL* provides a regional arena for European academics to share and discuss their scholarship focused on teaching and learning and to go public at the local level (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004), through papers, posters, or presentations that are shared locally with colleagues in seminars and faculty-based and university-wide conferences on teaching and learning. In South Africa, the growth of SoTL is integrated into the scholarship of academic development, where the concern has been with race-based inequality in society and in HE generally.

Here ‘more is more’ offers a wider berth for the scope and range of contextually relevant SoTL practices that illuminate how significant context is in advancing teaching and learning causes. Scholars have already asserted that our different locations and contexts infuse distinct meanings and implications in practice that characterize what SoTL means for us and how we must “do SoTL” by paying particular attention to local priorities and needs (Chng & Mårtensson, 2020). The meanings of SoTL from a regional perspective are therefore not homogeneous or undifferentiated and need to be central to how we generate knowledge in SoTL and in the Global South. For Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016), the meanings of the SoTL practices in each geopolitical location are conceived and engendered through the particular narrative or praxis that is constituted in those particular contexts.

If we are able to articulate and enunciate the issues of contextual complexity that impinge on our ability to be excellent teachers, or that prevent students from thriving in their classrooms, then we will be taking SoTL to the public to shine the torch on how Global South contexts are still playing catch up to the North because extenuating circumstances still obtain in the South. This is not to be naïve about poverty existing in the United States of America (US) or the United Kingdom (UK). As Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018:2) note:

> With our emphasis on SoTL in the Global South we do not wish to create the impression that there are no resource-constrained environments in the Global North, but we are arguing that the confluence of material and cultural factors requires particular attention to how SoTL is engaged with in the Global South.

Underlying the challenges explicated above is the coloniality of power, still resilient and steadfast in its ability to dominate funding resources and how these are allocated. We speak glibly now about the onslaught of neoliberalism and the 'uberisation' of teaching and learning on the HE knowledge production highway (Behari-Leak, 2016). My concern is that as SoTL writers we have internalised that that there is no way out and that it is easier to succumb. But if we are not sufficiently illuminating how our Global South contexts, ravaged by colonisation and other adversities, are often on the backfoot in asserting their prowess in the field of HE and elsewhere, we would have lost the battle before even starting the fight. We might argue that despite challenging contexts, in fact because of such, we have produced excellent insights about issues that matter to humanising HE, such as awareness about gender-based violence (GBV), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA), racism, etc., from which the world has benefitted. In historicising our context and providing a legitimate grounding for why we find ourselves on the back foot, we remind the world that the culpability for where the Global South and other marginalised contexts find themselves is a shared one. As scholar-activists, we have to reconcile the tension between the conditions under which we work and have to succumb to (salaries, etc.) with our moral obligation to use the very conditions that confine us, to raise consciousness about the injustices (social, economic, epistemic, cultural and political) that continue to control who we are, what we can do and what we can say, through our work.

Mexican Argentine decolonial scholar and philosopher Enrique Dussel (2016) has been vociferous in reminding us to lean into "Who we are and from where we speak". Dussel, one of the leading intellectuals of the Global South, who passed away in November 2023, argued that we need to cut

the proverbial umbilical cord with Eurocentric paradigms by critically considering "our own philosophies" without imitating and mimicking others (Hernández, 2016). More importantly, Dussel (2022) challenged us as intellectuals to be brave enough to take sides, especially since doing so makes what we do relevant, situated and embodied, with a far greater chance of effecting social change than by not doing so. In an exclusive interview with Enrique Dussel, journalist Rivara (2022) discussed the geopolitical moment, decolonisation, the role of intellectuals, the new evangelicalism, the right wing in the region and the challenges facing Latin America and the Caribbean in this historical cycle.

> Dussel: Today, a decolonial intellectual, a militant intellectual, must take sides with all these medium-term processes, thinking in the long term about overcoming capitalism, building an ecological society, overcoming the use of oil and non-renewable energies. We are in a time of great changes: philosophy and critical thinking must take note of these things. Also of the pandemic, which showed the failure of neoliberalism, handing over health to private capital. This reality urgent demands that we think about what is happening and requires a great intellectual and political commitment, of a militant kind. We must take up all our great ideals and apply them to attainable ends. This situation, I insist, gives us a window of opportunity to advance in a second emancipation (Rivara, 2022:).

I take up this challenge in this paper and respond to the society's claim that "SoTL has a huge role to play in the advancement of this goal". I encourage you to consider what our location in the Global South means (if at all) for the epistemology and scholarship we generate and whether our Global South context is superfluous or antithetical to the kinds of SoTL publications that respond to grand challenges like sustainable futures and sustainable development. More critically though, I am holding up the mirror for us to reflect on who sets the agenda for grand challenges and who slavishly takes them up; and at what cost.

Building on Dussel's work, Paula Moya, a professor of English at Stanford, who identifies as Chicana through her Indo-Hispanic ancestry, explores the political and epistemic significance of different kinds of identities in order to investigate how "Who we are and from where we speak" matters for the kind of knowledge we produce. Specifically, she has been concerned with how our identities predispose us to see or not see; listen to or not listen to; read or not read; cite or not cite; concern ourselves or not concern ourselves with specific Other peoples, issues and societal dynamics. In

working towards epistemic decolonization, Moya (2011) challenges us to first acknowledge and then examine the link between our identities, our scholarly practices and the knowledge we produce. The question of course is whether the parochial nature of such an approach would be too limiting and serve as constraints that interfere with humans' ability to understand the world more expansively. According to Moya (2011), scholars making the decolonial turn are interested in transforming our global society into one that is more socially and economically just; in epistemic decolonization, she claims we need to know how identities work in order to effectively work with them.

Are identity and situatedness the same thing, though? Donna Haraway (1988) sees all knowledge as situated knowledge and argues that social hierarchies through varied axes of social, political and economic power such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc. affect the production of knowledge and represent ongoing constraints to any achievement of universal knowledge. Particularly, she develops the idea of "embodied" knowledge and argues that knowledge production should begin at the scale of the "body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway, 1988: 589). The body, in this theorization, represents the material grounding of the subject in relation to structural relations of power. The body represents both the site for locating identity as well as the ground for extracting knowledge from real people, who occupy real places and who engage in social activities via their embodiment.

Socially situated knowledge, according to Harding (1993), is in direct contrast to what is regarded as "scientific enquiry". It is a paradox for scientists because according to what we have been disciplined to understand, knowledge is meant to be objective (Harding, 1993: 57). In other words, knowledge cannot claim to be objective/real and situated at the same time. In conventional ways of understanding objectivity (read as rigour in research), socially situated beliefs only get to count as opinions and not knowledge if they can transcend their original ties to local, historical interests, values and agendas. It seems that objective science is less concerned about how social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, than it is with verifiable evidence that validates scientific inquiry. Work exploring these tensions in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields found that the epistemological shift required for an appreciation of the value of qualitative and mixed methods approaches was difficult and tended to contradict more positivistic perspectives on research and evidence (Borrego, 2007). While rigour may conjure up feelings of epistemological bias, concepts such as trustworthiness exist within qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), that can provide a meeting point for quality in diverse disciplinary

approaches to scholarship. This is an important consideration for the SoTL movement to move beyond narrow definitions of objectivity, rationale, excellence, identities and bias in research.

If we expand the notion of socially situated to include intersectionality and positionality of the researcher and research participants, we would be able to create a dialogue between the centre and the margins, and the group and the individual, rather than a skewed overemphasis of the knowledge of the hierarchy and hegemony. The rationale for such an inclusion, according to Collins (2009), would be to see which axis has a privileged ontological position, or whether they each have an autonomous ontological basis and are irreducible to one another. Moya (2011: 84) asserts that this makes a compelling case for the adoption of realist conceptions of identity because "people with different identities are likely (although not certain) to ask different questions, take various approaches, and start with distinct assumptions. Insofar as diverse members of a research team conceptualize their shared social world in dissimilar ways, they may view a shared problem differently".

If we bring into focus the extant hierarchies of power in SoTL, it is clear that whatever the structure and arrangement at our universities, there are students who are well resourced with cultural capital (at the top of the hierarchy) and those who feel marginalized and alienated (students at the bottom). The traditional university does not recognize students' social capital linked to indigeneity and its value in the classroom. The experience and lives of marginalized people provide particularly significant problems to be explained (Collins, 2009) in the ambit of SoTL because their situatedness enables us as academics, university teachers and SoTL researchers to see problems and their solutions in pluriversal (not uni-versal) ways. This leads to an epistemically diverse range of research questions, methodologies and claims that serve to expand the repertoire of what is considered SoTL research. If we couple this with disciplinary diversity, we enable the field to be trans-, multi-, and cross-disciplinary in nature. Through these lenses, we then have a very powerful articulation of SoTL work that reaches into the traditional legacies of disciplines to bring them face to face with students' current lived realities.

I see this as a great opportunity to encourage disciplinary inclusivity while not losing sight of the need to create a specific signature methodology for SoTL, that enables it to stand out as a bespoke approach to teaching and learning research. This could extend to a more broadly defined range of SoTL publications that are epistemologically diverse and inclusive of, but not limited to, conceptual papers and commentaries on artistic installations, theatre and dance performances, musical

compositions, reflective essays, praise singer poetry, monographs, book chapters, editorials, conference papers, peer-reviewed articles, empirical papers and reporting of research findings. In this way we would be re-defining not only what it means to be a scholar, but also what this means in the Global South. This would additionally serve to increase the range of scholarly outputs that count towards ad hominem promotions.

If we take up the call by Löfgreen (2023) to think about SoTL as a sociocultural enquiry involving individuals and groups responding to contextual triggers and challenges, we will need to marshal our efforts towards establishing SoTL as its own kind of inquiry. Löfgreen (2023) encourages us to problematize the limitations of only strengthening disciplinary links to SoTL at the expense of establishing its own signature, decoupled from disciplinary influences. Regardless of the disciplinary context of SoTL (be it teaching and learning in chemistry, history, social work, or anything else), SoTL concerns itself with teaching and learning (social phenomena) in HE (a formalized system with a variety of cultural norms) (Löfgreen, 2023). Other scholars feel that if SoTL wishes to be accepted as a valuable practice in academic culture it should be seen as equal on the playing field with disciplinary research, by "ensuring its ability to retain its theoretical and methodological inclusivity while also asserting its standing as a fully-fledged field that produces scholarship on par with established disciplines" (McSweeney & Schnurr, 2023: 2). This means that it is a form of sociocultural inquiry, and its primary purpose is not just to add to disciplinary knowledge, but rather to yield practically relevant and applicable insights that improve teaching and learning in a given context. What would be the implications for SoTL authors if SoTL were delinked from the disciplines?

Conclusion

If we view this through a wide-angle lens, SoTL as social inquiry and social theory could serve multiple purposes. The most obvious is the epistemic purpose in how it contributes to knowledge generation on teaching approaches and student learning. This goal cannot be divorced from its ontic purpose (Löfgreen, 2023) as knowledge does not create itself. It is not just described but understood, interpreted, shaped and influenced by humans (and now even non-humans) and their sense of being. The onto-epistemic purpose further shapes methodological, teleological and axiological purposes as all research needs to be concerned with how research is done, the values inherent in the design and the ultimate purpose of the truth claims.

I draw on the leitmotif again: Who we are and from where we speak (Moya, 2011) is critical for the Global South SoTL work that we need to do to raise consciousness about our Global South context. We need to be scholar- activists for a future that is socially inclusive and morally just. In SoTL, if we take "speak" to mean "write", our authorial and discursive voice as authors is critical for articulating the struggles and opportunities of people in a specific context. It is very easy in a world of universalism to be silent or lose our voice, thereby (un)consciously and (un)critically reproducing tropes and grand challenges foisted on us by the North. We have seen these footprints in HE in the last 10 years, urging us to embed various grand challenges in our students' curricula. We need to question why we readily accept and assume that issues perplexing the North are also our grand issues, irrespective of how they relate to our context, marginalized people and ailing resources.

In a world where totalising realities occlude the plight of those on the periphery, is it incumbent on us as writers in the South to amplify the plight of our students, teachers and university settings in our SoTL writing. Through this, the rest of the world sees not only the struggles we endure, but the kinds of epistemic expansion that comes from being explicit about how contexts shape interlocutors' choices. I leave you with this plea: let us make it an obligation as SoTL scholar-activists in the South/as the South to advance and promote knowledge that re-centres our locus of enunciation and, through that collective voice, establishes our epistemological and ontological depth in our work in/for the Global South.

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