

Editorial

This December issue of *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* marks a significant moment in the history of our educational institutions, our country, and indeed the world, as humanity as a whole continues to confront the devastation wreaked in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has brought out the best in some, but also the worst in others. It has forced us to look inward, to become quiet and more thoughtful about what *really* matters and *why* it should matter in a world turned upside down. Covid-19 has inspired us to broaden our frames of reference on a global scale, amassing strengthened resilience, and renewed conviction in the fight against suffering and injustice.

At the same time, the pandemic has also focused our concerns on the local, on the communities we inhabit, and on those privileges we (hopefully) no longer take for granted. Covid-19 has forced us, in the very least, to acknowledge those communities differentiated by a lack of resources and historical invisibility. As a result of these multiple foci, our movements have not necessarily taken us forward but have instead become schizophrenic at times. We often found ourselves moving with clear direction, but the terrain has been unpredictable.

Rather than quick responses, our experience with uncertainty in our sector gave us reason to pause. Positioning ourselves in unpredictable settings and engaging through less known modes, prompted us to (re)consider our practices and to take stock in this climate of change and uncertainty. We have all come to appreciate the need to build networks through which to learn about and appreciate our increased sensitivity to issues of accessibility, transparency, and visibility. We have been reminded, in no uncertain terms, about the important work of practice-lead scholarship which challenges universal truths and disrupts the Eurocentric canon through a process of recentering and dialogue between diverse ways of knowing. This acknowledgement of 'other types of knowledge' and their contributions to the academic project, provides a platform for making informed decisions about what will work best in our particular educational contexts and our sector more broadly.

The contributions to this December issue are in line with the educational cartographies influenced by the pandemic, movements that have brought research and teaching into new productive relations. In this issue, we have seven articles with a focus on academic literacy, decolonising of the curriculum and social justice concerns. Aspects of social accountability, transformation and advocacy, are prevalent in all the contributions presented here. The focus on transforming dominant epistemologies forms part of the 'case for an "ontological turn" in HE' (Barnett cited in Jacobs, et al., this issue) and ties in with the need to think innovatively about our teaching practices so that we can be more cognizant of those whom we serve and the type of social impact our teaching needs to have, beyond the classroom setting.

In the opening article, 'A pedagogy of care: PGCE students' experiences of online learning during Covid-19' Jennifer Feldman generates insight into how PGCE students experienced what



we have come to call 'Emergency Remote Teaching' (ERT). This response and some of its contentious shifts during Covid-19 was jarring for both educators and students. Feldman extends our knowledge on negotiating issues of access, literacies, and needs identification, signalling the importance of these considerations in ensuring that our actions do not compound existing inequalities. Feldman holds these concerns, using an 'ethics of care' approach, to explore the perspectives of PGCE students' on online delivery during ERT. The contribution offers insight into how learning encounters in the online mode form relations of care in which needs and responses are never easily aligned. Locating the concept of care within this context allows Feldman to illustrate ways in which student well-being and engagement could be actualized, despite the sharp turns created by the pandemic.

The next paper, 'Building knowledge with theory: Unpacking complexity in doctoral writing' is a contribution by Kirstin Wilmot. Wilmot's paper adds to the scholarship which seeks to make visible the 'hidden' practices around doctoral education which are often backgrounded in favour of the discourse of academic induction, the transition to a professional identity and an assumed generic candidate. This dominant discourse underplays diverse access routes, and undervalues process approaches to writing, seeing writing merely as evidence of student output and throughput. This shadows the potential for reimagining the doctorate when thinking about the doctorate as a process of enquiry, knowledge making and becoming. Wilmot sheds light on theorising as central to a messy and subjective doctoral writing journey. Applying a 'clausing tool' to excerpts from a successful doctoral dissertation, Wilmot's work signals the language of theorising, offering snapshots of how one writer strengthens an identity as a knowledge maker by choices around organizing, connecting and creating meaning. The paper offers us the 'clausing tool' in order to materialise what would constitute contributing to a field of knowledge.

The third paper, 'Demystifying student plagiarism in academic writing: Towards an "educational" solution' by Hloniphan Ndebele, acknowledges our greater reliance on technology and the affordances of the online space, but cautions against the danger (and perhaps attraction) of overly technicist approaches to teaching and assessment. This contribution by Ndebele centers student writing, where the term 'plagiarism' has been deployed to mark a variety of writing choices and forms of expression. Plagiarism's constructing power inspires the cementing of thought and action through policies geared toward upholding academic 'standards', and functions to synthesise and simplify 'convention'. The article by Ndebele offers a critical take on the use of plagiarism to label both text and author and its tendency to smoothe over nuanced learning encounters. Ndebele calls on us to see both the intrinsic value and catalysing function in student writers' brought-along epistemological, discursal, and linguistic histories, and to consider these in relation to ways of knowing and meaning making in teaching encounters.

The contribution offered by Oliver Tafadzwa Gore and Melanie Walker, 'Conceptualising (dis)advantage in South African higher education: a capability approach perspective' revisits the conceptualisation of disadvantage. In policy, disadvantage seems to be an open signifier resulting in varied institutional definitions and practices. An institutional focus however, ignores transformation as a systemic issue. Gore and Walker argue that transformation interventions must

use the category of race in the conceptualisation of disadvantage, while acknowledging at the same time that there are dimensions of 'disadvantage' that cannot be fully contained by the category of race. Gore and Walker employ a capabilities approach to make visible multiple and related dimensions which enable and constrain student well-being. A focus on these dimensions allows for interventions that are informed and multi-faceted.

In the fifth paper, 'Using group work to harness students' multilinguistic competencies for a better understanding of assignment questions', Manduth Ramchander highlights a critical tension between the pressing need for adopting multilingual pedagogic approaches in the classroom and the predominantly monolingual competency of academic staff. Attention is drawn to the increasing number of black students for whom English is not a first language. This, it is argued, has highlighted the predominant use of English as a barrier to success for many of these students, thereby increasing the pressure on monolingual teaching staff to improve academic results. As such, this paper explores an innovative approach to teaching that increases agency in student learning. Ramchander interrogates the extent to which students' multilingual diversity can *and must* be used to facilitate learning. Employing a case study approach, Ramchander explores how the participation of multilingual students in group work activities gives rise to the practice of 'translanguaging'. Drawing on the critical reflection frameworks of Dewey (1933) and Larrivee (2000), Ramchander argues that the surfacing of 'translanguaging' in group work can serve as an invaluable pedagogical tool for ensuring better understanding of assignment questions and improved academic performances.

Iman Chafik Chahine's paper, 'Towards African *Humanicity*: Re-mythologizing Ubuntu through Reflections on the Ethnomathematics of African Cultures', offers broad-based, critical insights into how dominant Eurocentric mathematical knowledge systems have intentionally sought to silence and marginalise African contributions to knowledge in this field. Chahine argues that indigenous knowledge systems and the rich cultural domains that give rise to such systems of knowing, have much to offer in terms of designing, structuring, and capacitating the teaching and learning of mathematics, especially amongst African students. In this respect, Chahine offers a counter-narrative to dominant Western and European epistemologies with respect to what constitutes valid knowledge in mathematics. This counter-narrative is formulated through the concept of 'ethnomathematics', which draws on the richness of African ways of knowing and posits this as a legitimate and valid lens for teaching contextually embedded and relevant mathematics. Ethnomathematics promotes what the author calls an 'African *humanicity*', a concept that finds resonance in the African concept of 'ubuntu'. Chahine uses 'African *humanicity*' to reclaim the ethical and moral dimensions in mathematics knowledge. This paper, therefore, takes up the call to decolonise the curriculum and to validate Africa's contributions to knowledge-making in the academy.

The final contribution to this issue, 'Advancing a social justice agenda in Health Professions Education' by Cecilia Jacobs, Susan Van Schalkwyk, Julia Blitz, and Mariette Volschenk, is an urgent call to recognise the need for designing and putting into practice a transformative, critically aware and socially responsive curriculum in the Health Sciences. This qualitative study

draws on Higher Education (HE) Studies and Health Professions Education (HPE) Studies, and adopts a thematic approach towards interrogating the extent to which HPE teachers engage with the dual curriculum goals of producing health professionals who are 'clinically competent and critically conscious of the contexts' in which they work. The findings show that developing students 'critical consciousness' is something that *not all* HPE teachers are prioritising. In response, this paper argues that fostering 'critical consciousness' in the curriculum constitutes valid knowledge and is crucial for producing students who are 'change agents' in South Africa's vastly unequal healthcare system. In line with the calls by Ramchander and Chahine, the call here is also for engendering teaching and learning practices through the curriculum that bridge the gap between theory and reality. The paper concludes that both 'clinically competent and critically conscious' goals can only be reached through meaningful collaboration amongst all stakeholders in the curriculum transformation project.

We hope that you will be able to draw some inspiration and even some enlightenment from the contributions presented here. As we approach the end of 2020, we thank you for your continued interest in *CriSTaL* and look forward to your future contributions.

On behalf of the editors

Gideon Nomdo and Sean Samson