

Editorial

In this issue, we have the pleasure of presenting ten articles that problematise important empirical, theoretical, and epistemological questions for the scholarship of teaching and learning. The first five articles, part of a special issue on ‘Methodological insights from research on teaching and learning: COVID 19 and beyond’ have a strong methodological focus, while the remaining articles tackle important questions relating to the higher education project, from conceptual to disciplinary to the pedagogical; in the process, the authors raise critical questions around the role and purpose of universities, although this is sometimes implicit rather than explicit. An overarching theme in this edition is the focus on the changing contours of the forces that shape higher education research and practice, specifically in the era of pandemics and deepening socio-economic divisions. There is an overriding focus, moreover, on educational justice (cognitive and epistemic), with the contribution by McGarry introducing a related perspective, through the notion of “justness” . In addition to the focus on marginalised students’ academic experiences, there is a concern over gender bracketing, issues of inclusivity and reimagining/expanding the theoretical and philosophical dimensions of academia.

This editorial is also written in memory of, and as part of the legacy of, Prof Michael Cross who dedicated his academic life to building critical scholarship in teaching and learning. Michael passed away in June 2021, when he was Director of the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies (AMCHES) at the University of Johannesburg, and in the midst of many contributions to the higher education project, including one published in this issue with Logan Govender.

The first half (five) of the articles look at methodology / method. We have become accustomed to reading about methodology from textbooks or handbooks. Journal articles often address methodology and methods as a component rather than the primary focus. In many South African education journals, methodology or issues of method are seldom the focus of journal articles. The five articles in this issue make a distinct contribution by foregrounding the epistemological and technical elements of methodology, drawing on fieldwork experiences. The disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic have reminded us that methodology should always be questioned and reimagined. These articles offer valuable insights for researchers focused on teaching and learning in higher education in South Africa, and beyond. Two are focused on epistemology and two on methods. The last one straddles both epistemology and method. The three papers with a focus on epistemology remind us that teaching and learning do not occur in isolation or divorced from dominant political and social discourses and narratives. It thus challenges us to be constantly vigilant about how scholarship in teaching and learning can compound or disrupt past, present, and future narratives.



Cross and Govender examine past and present methodological discourses in the evolution of scholarship of higher education and student epistemic access in South Africa; beginning with the period of educational exclusion and economic liberalism in the 1960s and ending with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and turn to technology-mediated and online practices in social research from 2019 onwards. In so doing, they highlight the importance of social presence in researching the marginalised Other. They also show how the analytical discourses of access have largely reflected global theoretical influences, which do not address complex local contexts. A call for decolonial approaches rooted in epistemic justice that account for the contextual peculiarities of student agency and experience is made. They thus plead for epistemic vigilance as we continue to develop critical scholarship in teaching and learning.

McDonald and Motala continue the engagement with epistemological questions focusing on quantitative approaches that contribute to our understanding of teaching and learning in higher education. While Cross and Govender's emphasis is on how dominant discourses of marginalised students impact on scholarship, McDonald and Motala highlight how heteronormative discourses could be perpetuated via data collection strictures, with implications for understanding trends in teaching and learning in higher education. They call on researchers to reconsider how research design conventions might be contributing to socially unjust discourses.

In the three articles focused on method in this issue, the authors discuss research experiences and techniques that highlight innovative and creative methodological insights. The authors demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic presented researchers with specific challenges imposed by social distance with ensuing adaptations. By focusing on higher education students with disabilities, Ndlovu's article provides us with critical reflections about 'the barriers confronted by researchers when conducting interview[s] ... with students with disabilities in South African higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic'. She explains how, for students with hearing impairment, the 'pre-COVID-19 communication barrier has been exacerbated by the pandemic', accentuating inequalities in accessing education. Ndlovu argues that researchers ought to consider multiple ways of representing information, engaging with learning materials, taking action, expressions, and ensuring flexibility when conducting research. This article reminds us that research participants are always limited in the extent to which they can contribute to *our* research projects, whether we know of their limitations or not. As such, our conclusions about teaching and learning ought always to be tempered by this realisation.

Nyoni and Agbaje describe fieldwork circumstances and innovative practices that emerged during the COVID-19 crisis in relation to securing of consent from participants, the interview process, dynamics surrounding interviewer and participant encounters and how these might have impacted on the validity of data. The authors stress that while practical aspects of research activities are generic to all empirical research designs, access, and data collection for example, one can never take conventional niceties for granted. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was the catalyst for

reconsidering these generic aspects of research design, the forced adaptations provide lessons for any situation where a researcher is required to demonstrate flexibility. Mwanda's article expands the focus on empirical experience, focusing on the use of online platforms, specifically WhatsApp, as a data collection tool. She describes how the features of WhatsApp were used to respond to the needs of geographically dispersed research participants, and recommends that researchers need to be sensitive to context when using WhatsApp as a method.

The remaining five articles in this issue focus on how academic staff at universities engage with the diverse range of the knowledge project in higher education: being 'response-able', entrepreneurial yet socially relevant, reconceptualising Africanisation of the university, becoming an academic in a specialised discipline and usefully employing an academic literacy pedagogy. McGarry offers a thought-provoking essay, using artworks to illustrate how the 'suitably strange', linked to the notion of 'disruptive competence', creates spaces for invisible or unrecognised 'response-abilities' to engage with learning. He suggests that this tactile theory of being and doing, in drawing attention to familiar and normative paradigms that stifle meaningful transformation in higher education, can contribute to the development of proactive-cognitive justice or 'justness. In the process, new pathways of learning are made possible, with the potential for activism and decolonising the academy, through alternative methodologies and theory making. McGarry suggests that a suitably strange praxis can be a useful instrument in researching transformation; engaging with sustainable development; facilitating social learning and expanding our understanding of justice in times of ecological crisis.

In similar counter-intuitive vein, Garraway, Friedrich-Nel, and Dippenaar suggest that being entrepreneurial has social and transformative qualities, and need not be thought of in narrow, economic terms. Drawing on a theory of expansive learning, they assert that the change laboratory approach at university could be the basis for solution generating approaches within academic staff. This approach, they contend, may support the critical developmental and transformative role that universities can play in society and thus negate the more commercial thrusts often proposed by managing bodies. Being entrepreneurial thus entails that staff develop the sort of open-ended, problem-solving, and innovative solution-generating thinking underlying the concept.

While much has been written on Africanisation of the university, Hungwe and Mkhize's contribution is particularly helpful as it seeks to cut through the conceptual complexity that is often associated with it. They do so by expounding on humanity and rationality as philosophical principles to underpin the Africanisation of universities. They contend that these guiding philosophical principles can help mitigate perceptions that Africanisation may compromise the standard and quality of education. Moreover, they argue that by reclaiming the concepts of humanity and rationality from their disfiguration during colonisation, the process of Africanisation can help realise the social relevance of universities.

Cornell and Padayachee provide an autoethnographic account of a theoretical physics lecturer's journey to becoming a theoretical physicist. Drawing on a 'scientific identity' framework they analyse factors in the process that may enhance or constrain academic progression. While contributing towards the existing body of research on student identity development, the article raises critical questions on the impact of entrenched (and hidden) disciplinary norms, values, and practices on both epistemological and ontological access for diverse groups of students. The authors implore lecturers to engage in ongoing critical reflections on challenges and assumptions made about learning processes, with relevance for transforming lecturers' views of students as well as their praxis.

In the final article of this issue, Bertram, Johnson, and Dean Goldring argue that academic literacy can and should be mainstreamed by embedding it within disciplinary learning rather than as a marginal addition. They demonstrate how a particular pedagogy, Reading to learn (R2L), has been successfully employed at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. They claim that both students and academics develop crucial literacy competence by using this pedagogy, supporting academics to develop both knowledge of language and a clear methodology which can be adapted for other disciplines and levels. Moreover, the R2L approach can help achieve social justice through the provision of equal opportunities for academic success to all students, irrespective of their backgrounds.

Overall, the 10 articles and four book reviews in this 10th anniversary commemorative issue of *CrisTal*, offer a comprehensive and innovative interrogation of empirical, theoretical, and epistemological concerns that the higher education sector in South Africa, and the world, are grappling with. They help draw attention to the rapidly changing edifice of the global world order, characterised by pandemics, climate change and deepening social and economic inequalities. Ultimately, the articles remind us that the higher education sector, while not immune to the changing world order, has a particular role to play in shaping it, to the benefit of students, academics, and society at large.

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