

## Editorial

2017 has been an interesting and challenging year for South Africa, and for the rest of the world: Donald Trump's first year in office in the US; the continued fallout of Brexit and the Tory leadership crisis in the UK; and the unravelling of the state and presidency in South Africa, including damning research into alarmingly poor school literacy levels across the country, and continued efforts in higher education to address the legacy of coloniality and its echoes in the curriculum, teaching, assessment and the composition of university staffing structures.

Against this backdrop, this final issue of *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* for 2017 offers five articles and 2 book reviews. The articles address a number of interconnected topics, with a central core of critiquing and challenging the status quo.

Vivienne Bozalek, Arona Dison, Melanie Alperstein and Veronica Mitchell open the issue, and examine in their article the creation and sustenance of a community of practice to support individual and collective staff development across university contexts. Through examining their own involvement and learning in a small community of practice formed during their collective participation in a short course for academics in the Western Cape, they offer insights into the affordances of working collaboratively to develop the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Arguing against funding and rewards models in higher education that tend to discourage such collective endeavours, the authors argue that there is much to be gained, personally and professionally, from challenging individualistic notions of academic success through scholarship, and posit communities of practice as a viable vehicle for the collective creation of research and scholarly writing.

Picking up the notion of supporting and developing the SoTL, Sue Southwood looks critically at academic writing retreats, arguing that these can be structured to incorporate affective and intellectual development for academic scholars, and to encompass both individual and collective work. Using a 'case' in the form of structured writing retreats offered to academics researching their own teaching and their students' learning, Southwood examines what a structured retreat focused on affective and intellectual development and support can offer academic scholars. These insights challenge the dominant practice in universities of expecting academics to write and do research with little visible support or budgeted-for time; in fact, many academics use weekends and evening to do their research and write for publication. Southwood argues that creating enabling spaces for support and writing can enhance the personal, interpersonal and extra-personal dimensions of scholarship, and make academic writing a more visible, and supported, activity in the university.

Moving from academics to students, Kgaugelo Sebidi and Shannon Morreira tackle the issue of curriculum development and change in the context of current debates on 'decolonising' university curricula. Their paper provides a comparative analysis of the academic experiences of extended degree students registered on two first year courses, one of which drew on literature and sociological theory which was mainly Euro-American in origin, and the other of which attempted to situate sociological theory within local contexts. Data drawn from interviews with students, and comparing the academic performance in both

courses, indicates that the majority of students found the latter course more accessible and more ‘human’. Yet, there is an acknowledgement that students need to engage with the ‘canon’, understood as ‘powerful’ knowledge that gives students access to ways of thinking about and seeing the world anew, and more critically. This paper challenges the notion of the canon needing to be Euro-centric - indeed the canon can include a range of texts and viewpoints from different contexts and theoretical perspectives. The paper further highlights the tension that occurs between the need to make content accessible and relevant for students – particularly for first generation students – and the need to also give students access to the powerful knowledge that comes with familiarity with the theory-dense sociological canon.

Sibusiso Clifford Ndlangamandla picks up a related tension in his paper on literacy development in an MTech degree in Policing. Policing, like many fields students study in a university of technology, is a professional field. The professions and the university codify and use knowledge in different ways, and to different ends. At times these overlap, and at times they are in tension with one another. Looking at the work of two MTech students, both of whom were working in the field while writing their dissertations, Ndlangamandla probes the tension between professional and academic literacies, and the challenges that moving between these two spaces and their underlying ‘rules’ can present for students, especially when supervision and guidance in the university plays down or ignores the role of professional literacy practices. The paper usefully shows how difficult traversing these spaces can be for students, and offers suggestions for how academic literacy support, and supervision practices, can be enhanced to better acknowledge and connect the roles of both kinds of literacy within a professional education context.

In the final paper, ‘Mabokang Monnapula-Mapesela takes readers on a personal journey, seen through a social realist lens: that of a Black woman academic grappling with the enabling and constraining aspects of her immediate and wider academic environment as she endeavours to grow and develop as an academic leader. Women, particularly women of colour, are woefully under-represented in leadership in academia in South Africa and globally. Yet the voices of these women, and their accounts of their struggles, challenges and triumphs are often silenced, played down or marginalised. This silence may lead to an under-appreciation of the way in which women of colour, and women more generally, strive for success and recognition, often in the face of significant sexism, racism and detraction. This does academia a great disservice; if academia strives to both act as a mirror and a challenge to society - to do better, and be better, and learn from the research and practice it creates and shares - then women, and people of colour need to be fairly and visibly represented, supported and heard. This paper offers an insight into one woman’s journey, but raises many issues that need to be centred in conversations about making the university a more meaningfully shared, representative and transformed space for all academics and students.

*Sherran Clarence*

On Behalf of the Editors

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