

## Editorial Introduction

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Special Issue: Towards a SoTL Embracing Critical Southern Paradigms and Frameworks in Higher Education: Curriculum Innovations, Flexible Pedagogies, and Teaching and Learning Support Technologies from a Global South

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## **Editorial Introduction**

### **Chaka Chaka, Sibusiso Clifford Ndlangamandla, and Dumisile Mkhize**

In the aftermath of the *#FeesMustFall* student movement and in the face of the increasing calls for the decolonization of higher education (HE) in South Africa, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has come under sharp focus and constant monitoring. As a scholarly concept, SoTL has attracted kudos and criticisms alike. In the former case, some tout it as an initiative destined to bring about the much sought-after reciprocal parity between teaching, learning, and research, with none privileged over another, thereby resulting in the proverbial education for social justice (see, for example, Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016, 2018). In a similar vein, others argue that SoTL makes teaching and learning matter once more. They assert that it helps create cross-disciplinary communities of practice, or what Miller-Young and Yeo (2015) call a “SoTL Community of Practice” (p. 38) by reflecting “the ‘trading zone’ that is SoTL” (p. 38). SoTL also arguably fosters pedagogical innovation that makes teaching and learning exciting (see Draeger, 2013). Still, others maintain that SoTL needs to be inclusive and reflective of knowledge systems, schemas, frameworks, and theories of the Global South, while critiquing epistemologies, schemas, frameworks, and theories of the Global North (see Leibowitz, 2017).

In the latter case, there are scholars who heap criticisms on SoTL without mincing their words. They contend that despite the fanfare accompanying blockbuster SoTL conferences, and in spite of flagship SoTL journals such as the *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, there are glaring “gaping holes” in the body politic of SoTL. Prominent among such gaping holes are the following:

- SoTL is characterized by conceptual confusion and terminological vagueness
- SoTL means different things to different people
- Within the SoTL house, learning lives in the basement while teaching lives upstairs
- SoTL languishes at the periphery of university activities and discourses
- Academics’ commitment to SoTL flows and ebbs like waves (Boshier, 2009; also see Potter & Kustra, 2011).

To this effect, one can plausibly argue that in South Africa’s higher education institutions (HEIs), SoTL initiatives tend to be confined mainly to centers for teaching and learning or for higher education (what traditionally used to be referred to as academic development centers). In this sense, the absence of SoTL initiatives is conspicuous in most mainstream academic disciplines, where most academics might barely have an inkling of what SoTL is all about.

Notwithstanding all the points highlighted above, one of the crucial aspects that has not been intensely considered in terms of conceptualizing and debating SoTL is framing and articulating it from a critical Global South perspective: a perspective that critiques, problematizes, and polemicalizes dominant Global North framings of SoTL. Such a framing of SoTL is the focus of this special issue. Viewing SoTL from this non-essentialist standpoint entails deconstructing essentialist and hegemonic Northern theoretic-analytic frames currently informing SoTL in a quest for plural Southern epistemologies.

In view of the points highlighted in the preceding paragraphs, this special issue comprises eight papers: four from South Africa, two from Aotearoa New Zealand, and one each from the Netherlands and Botswana. The first paper, “Situating Some Aspects of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in South African Higher Education within Southern Theories,” by Chaka Chaka, Thembeke Shange, Sibusiso Clifford Ndlangamandla, and Dumisile Mkhize, frames aspects of SoTL in South Africa’s HE within Southern theories. Three instances of such theories are Southern decolonial theory, decoloniality, and transversality. Concerning the first theory, the paper argues that SoTL needs to question and critique dominant epistemic and scholarly practices underpinning curricula of Global South HEIs, through which students are framed. Pertaining to both decoloniality and transversality, the paper foregrounds the components of SoTL that are aligned to these two approaches in a way that dismantles their hierarchical relations, while promoting institutional curriculums that support development of the relationship between existing knowledge and “artisanal knowledge” (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 3). Any rift between knowledge systems, where African knowledges and research are undermined, fails to meet the demands of a decolonized university, resulting to what Waghid (2021) calls a “decolonized university of teaching-learning and research in waiting” (p. 3).

The second paper is by Muki Moeng and is entitled, “Towards a Scholarship of School-Based Teaching and Learning that Embraces Hope, Change and Social Justice.” This paper presents an argument for embracing a critical Southern paradigm and framework for a SoTL that advances decoloniality, social justice, and conscientization. Situated within a school-based learning placement approach, it calls for a SoTL that is generative and context-responsive, and that both embodies moral and pedagogical imperatives and can influence institutional and societal change.

The third paper, “Relocating English Studies and SoTL in the Global South: Towards Decolonizing English and Critiquing the Coloniality of Language,” by Sibusiso Clifford Ndlangamandla and Chaka Chaka, contends that despite policy narratives and rhetoric, English Studies as a discipline in South African universities still carries vestiges of colonialism and apartheid. In keeping with this contention, the paper characterizes the nexus between SoTL and the coloniality of language within South African higher education, critiques the coloniality of language and imperial English language paradigms as embraced by South Africa’s HEIs, and proposes a critical Southern decolonial perspective and a post-Eurocentric SoTL. Such a perspective will have to take into account the “absences of the other ways of thinking” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2022, p. 23), as it simultaneously draws on other perspectives, provided they are consistent with the values of a critical Southern decolonial perspective. This will not only allow for inclusion of “global human experiences” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 50), but it will also avoid essentialism, which might be problematic for the advancement of a critical decolonial framing.

The fourth paper, by Anass Bayaga, entitled “Bridging SoTL and Open Educational Resources/Practices (OER/P) through Tagore’s Southern Theory in the Era of a Pandemic,” argues that while both SoTL and open educational resources/practices (OER/P)-enabled pedagogy tend to occupy center-stage in higher education, they have hardly been treated and debated jointly. Employing a systematic review and appropriating Tagore’s Southern theory, the paper characterizes a tacit linkage between SoTL and OER/P in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. Equally locating its key points within the COVID-19 pandemic, the fifth paper, “Māori

Academic Challenges: Delivering Mātauranga Māori During COVID-19,” by Fiona Te Momo, discusses the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to academic programs at universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. It highlights how for Māori academics, who implement Mātauranga Māori as a pedagogy, it became theoretically and practically challenging for them to teach their classes online. This challenge, the paper argues, continued into the first semester of 2022, due to the outbreak of the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

The sixth paper, “The ‘Elephant in the Room’: Why and How Medium of Instruction and Decolonization of Education Are Linked,” by Bert van Pinxteren, contends that the content of education and the medium in which it is delivered are generally seen as two different things. For example, a curriculum requiring to be *decolonized* can still be delivered in a colonial language; similarly, a curriculum that is colonial in nature could in theory be delivered in any medium of instruction. Against this background, the paper argues that from a macro perspective, this belief is incorrect as in African settings (and probably also elsewhere), both the medium of instruction and the content of that instruction are intricately interlinked. It also maintains that for decolonial education, a change in the medium of instruction is needed.

The seventh paper, by Hamiora Te Momo, which is entitled “Building Indigenous Knowledge: Exploring the Pedagogy of Māori Knowledge in the Digital Computing Information Technology Tertiary Sector of New Zealand,” points out that in Aotearoa New Zealand’s academia, Mātauranga Māori is a body of Māori Indigenous knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation, stretching back to te ao marama (the natural world of life and light), and to the creation of the world (Sadler, 2007). It also maintains that the depth of Mātauranga Māori is embedded in the earth and waters that cover the lands (Royal, 1998). Within this Māori Indigenous perspective, the paper advances three arguments: building the academic capacity of people and for academic programs in information technology is necessary in order to make Mātauranga Māori relevant for Indigenous academics; navigating this pathway in the tertiary sector is mainly delegated to Indigenous academics, who are expected to take leadership in this discipline; and retaining leadership in the information technology space amidst cyber security threats, and where the representation of Indigenous experts is scarce in this industry is a challenge for Indigenous academics as, largely, knowledge transfer tends to be the responsibility of non-Indigenous academics, who end up leading capacity building initiatives.

Finally, the eighth paper is entitled, “Community Based Research: A Ladder of Opportunity to Engaged Scholarship in Higher Education,” and is written by Keneilwe Molosi-France. Framing its argument within Botswana’s higher education and drawing on community-based participatory research (CBPR), the paper argues that despite efforts related to a knowledge-based economy, voices of frustration about graduates who are unable to relate theory to practice in different contexts tend to question the quality of teaching and learning in the HEI sector. In addition, it contends that with its orientation toward collaborative inquiry, social action, and service learning, CBPR may provide a basis for an engaged SoTL that promotes engagement for higher education students in applied fields of study.

This special issue is about how scholars from the Global South conceptualize and problematize SoTL from their own contexts by giving priority to Southern theories as their epistemological imperative. The papers push back against the universalizing tendencies of SoTL as viewed from

the Global North, especially those advocated by Boyer (1990). The papers elucidate that the Global South is not a mere geopolitical location, but a metaphorical locus of enunciation foregrounding marginality, liminality, precarity, and problems that emanate from the locations and sociohistorical moments identified in each paper. As such, we, argue that the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), in particular English, is an additional layer that complexifies and compounds a long list of issues that SoTL addresses in the context of the Global South. Therefore, SoTL should be grounded and situated in Southern decolonial theory and transversal approaches. We desist from instrumentalist notions of both language and SoTL but rather locate their critique within culture, social history, and political economies. It is our hope that this collection of papers serves as an intellectual and academic activism for SoTL with regard to cognitive and social justice, Indigenous knowledge systems, epistemologies, and ontological concerns of the Global South.

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