



Editorial

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In July 2019, the University of Pretoria, in association with Wits, UFS, Rhodes, UKZN, UWC, Stellenbosch University and UCT, its partners in the Mellon programme titled ‘Unsettling paradigms: The decolonial turn in the Humanities curriculum at universities in South Africa’, hosted a conference on the theme ‘The decolonial turn and the humanities: Prospects, practice and interventions’. A number of papers were subsequently reworked as articles and submitted for peer review with a view to their publication in this second issue of the first volume of the *Journal of Decolonising Disciplines (JDD)*. The six articles selected for publication speak to some of the broad themes of the conference, but what binds them together is their shared focus on pedagogy, practice and interventions—some of the core issues underlying the quest for the decolonisation of the humanities curriculum.

The conference explored a number of broad philosophical themes, including:

- Histories and politics of knowledge production in the era of globalisation
- Knowledge production and decoloniality
- Critiques of the decolonial turn in curriculum transformation
- Students and curriculum transformation
- Technological (im)possibilities in teaching and learning
- Critical pedagogies and curricula to address bias and inequality
- Contradictions and prospects for curriculum transformation in a marketised global higher education sector.

The papers presented during the various sessions of the conference encompassed a number of practical concerns that spoke to the deeper philosophical themes underlying the ethos of the conference and focused on:

- The humanities curriculum
- Discipline, knowledge formations and epistemic (in)justice
- The meaning, nature and purpose of universities
- Knowledge and pedagogy
- Theories, methodologies and practice
- Global economy of knowledge
- Knowledge roles and the Global South
- Remaking of intellectual cultures
- Remaking textbooks for use in undergraduate and postgraduate syllabi
- Reforming institutional architectures and cultures and intersectional erasures

This volume of the *JDD* brings together six articles that, although they focus largely on practical concerns, are deeply tied to the philosophical themes that feed into the decolonial project as it evolves in the sphere of higher education. The authors featured in this issue are all emerging scholars who bring new enthusiasm and innovative ideas to debates on the decolonisation of the curricula for their respective disciplines. However, they do not remain in the realm of debate and critique, but illustrate their insights and innovations in how they discuss their respective curricula. What is presented in this volume does not consist merely of reflections and critique, but includes practical examples of a decolonised curriculum and the underlying values and outcomes of teaching in the context of the decolonisation movement in higher education.

Van Borek shares her experience of developing and teaching a pilot course designed as a site-specific, media-arts-based environmental module centred around water. In practical terms, the course is focused on the importance of healthy waterways, but it goes well beyond this to develop relational sensibilities and promote reconciliation among students. Several core concepts embedded in the scholarship on the decolonisation of the curriculum are covered in this article, namely knowledge ecologies, a hopeful social imagery and embodied ways of knowing. As in the case of Van Aardt's article, there is an emphasis on dialogue—the idea of education as a conversation, an act of inclusion and a process of reciprocity—in the process of remaking syllabi.

That the decolonisation of the curriculum goes beyond the humanities is illustrated in the article by Adams, Mupawose, Kelly and Moonsamy, who address

the need to transform and decolonise the clinical curriculum of students training as speech-language pathologists in the context of a skewed distribution of the availability of, and access to speech-language pathology services and resources. Based on interviews with clinical educators in speech-language pathology and their employment of a thematic content analysis, the authors identify a number of aspects that characterise the common experiences of these educators: the diversity of their students, their model of experience and cultural capital, and disruptive frames of reference and hegemonic practices. These aspects emphasise the complexities of transforming the clinical education curriculum. This article speaks strongly to the need for critical pedagogies and curricula that address bias and inequality in terms of teaching, learning and training—the challenge of knowledge roles in the Global South and the need to remake intellectual cultures.

In her article on gatekeeping and knowledge production, Ismail-Sooliman starts from the premise that ‘to know how to change, one must be able to acknowledge what one does not know’. To decolonise the curriculum, she argues, requires knowledge of and an inclination towards that which needs to be transformed. This article is concerned with the nature and quality of education: Education is politics, the author asserts, and in a way reminiscent of the problems interrogated by Adams *et al.* in the previous article, Ismail-Sooliman places strong emphasis on the importance of relevance, based on societal visions that speak to and reflect the reality of the Global South. For her, the decolonisation of the curriculum is intricately and inherently part of the struggle against the contemporary corporate university—a struggle that requires a robust intellectual project that is oriented towards the greater good of the public, which universities claim to serve. In order to build a relevant curriculum in the service of human dignity, which serves the public and societal good, it is necessary to understand the ways in which the corporate (or ‘traditional’, as some would say) university gatekeeps to protect itself from calls to transform.

One of the arguments often heard in decolonisation debates refers to the need for communication and interaction between teacher and learner, and, to some extent, a blurring of the stark divide between those who teach/lecture and those whom they teach. Debate and conversation, and active involvement in the decision on what constitutes knowledge, what is to be taught, and whose knowledge is important, are hallmarks of the methodologies and practice of teaching and learning in a decolonised, or, at the very least, decolonising environment. Van Aardt’s article on his experience of decolonising an academic literacy curriculum—the remaking, in

a sense, of a textbook—provides a practical example of and reflection on one such effort. Van Aardt set out to change the prescribed work set for a course aimed at improving the reading and writing skills of first-year students. Originally, students were required to use a text containing abridged versions of Western fiction. He introduced an initiative through which he encouraged students to write their own life histories, or short stories dealing with their own experiences, thereby contributing their own ‘prescribed’ texts for use in their academic literacy programme. In his article he reflects on the various stages in the development of the new curriculum, the challenges encountered, the lessons learnt, the changes required and the success and achievements of those students whose stories ended up being published, and who, through this programme, became co-designers and implementers of the syllabus aimed at improving their reading and writing skills.

The article by Brian Sibanda, which is included in this issue, provides a clear example of the value of decolonising the curriculum—how decolonisation contributes to a deeper, broader and intellectually richer experience when applied to the study of literature. Focusing on the work of the renowned African author wa Thiong’o, Sibanda sets out to illustrate the value of decolonial critical thinking in reading wa Thiong’o’s work. Coloniality, he argues, provides essentialisms and fundamentalisms that limit or constrain a critical evaluation of this author’s work, whereas decolonial critical theory enriches our understanding of wa Thiong’o’s work as embedded in decoloniality as a philosophy and an organising idea in his thinking. In essence, Sibanda illustrates how intellectual cultures can be changed to produce new and (echoing Ismail-Sooliman’s ideas) relevant knowledge beyond that which is gained through narrow approaches from the Western canon that do not speak to the lived experience of inhabitants of the Global South.

This issue of the *JDD* concludes with Stromback’s article that asks whose knowledge is considered to be knowledge. He uncovers and explores the hidden tension between post-Marxism and the philosophy of liberation and the decolonial critique. Post-Marxism, he argues, constitutes a universal foundation for truth claims that already exist in Western modernity, whereas the decolonial critique seeks to dismantle all universals connected to the myths of modernity. Stromback, in a sense, develops an agenda for further research to determine whether a real dialogue is possible between these two trajectories of thought.

The conference at which the articles in this issue were presented took place one year into the ‘Unsettling Paradigms’ programme mentioned above. Through

a range of projects that all form part of the overarching project, colleagues at the participating universities and their partners in the national higher education system have been investigating, interrogating and critiquing the decolonial turn. Some of these insights will be presented at the 2022 culminating conference which will assess and evaluate the achievements of the programme and chart a way towards decolonising the curriculum.
