

Editorial

University education in the 'global South': issues, challenges, opportunities and musings on the future

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“What does it feel like to be an indigenous person in Australia?”

This was a question posed by ABC journalist Richard Glover to his colleague Stan Grant – author, journalist and academic. In his acclaimed book *Talking to my Country* (2016) Grant reflects on this question, writing:

As I look for the words to try to answer Richard’s question, I seek the language of healing because we just can’t take any more pain.

I tell Richard how vulnerable we can be. I tell him of the little boy I once was who felt so ashamed of his colour that he tried to scrub it off. I tell him of the ache of poverty and how my family had roamed the back roads looking for a home in a land we had lost. I tell him of how a sideways glance or a snickering child could steal our souls. I tell him how we have learned to measure our words and lower our voices for fear of being howled down. I tell him that even now, despite carving out a place for myself, I could easily be crushed by rejection. And he listens. He gives me space to find these words and he lets them settle ...

As I speak, my mind reaches back through the years ... I am with my mother and father; I am seated ... with my grandfather ... I am flicking towels and dunking friends – black brothers all ... I feel them all with me and know that I am never alone and what I say speaks for them too.

My life has led to this point. A boy who grew up with a love of words ... was now being asked to speak to his country. I felt this responsibility and I had come to it reluctantly. But old wounds were being reopened. I had felt the legacy of Australian racism ... We – Australians black and white – meet each other across the gulf of history (Grant 2016:190-192).

This edition of *SOTL in the South* highlights many of the unique, and marginalising, concerns confronting tertiary education in the ‘global South’. The global South is not defined by geography: it is defined by struggles, inequalities and economic divisions. The experiences articulated in the excerpt by Australian Stan Grant, are shared by many in the global South. Accordingly, it is a community bound by pain, suffering, anger and a desire to be recognised.

Within the tertiary education setting, however, the global South might also be defined by the innovative ways that universities respond to their context in order to educate and empower the disempowered, oppressed and underprivileged. This requires rewriting history, changing conversations and re-evaluating the role of universities in order to restore justice.

This journal provides a space for voicing the unique challenges and opportunities facing the global South’s tertiary education sectors, showcasing alternative teaching methodologies and strategies, exploring different approaches to curriculum design and delivery and investigating ways of maintaining excellence despite dwindling resources. By sharing our experiences – good and bad – we learn from one another, identifying ways to improve the quality and impact of teaching and learning, locally and globally.

Universities in the global South play an essential role in restoring justice – giving voice to the voiceless and balancing public discourse using what Grant (2016:190) describes as “the language of healing”. This journal provides a space where inequities can be highlighted, exploring ways to engage with the global academy and bring educational issues in the global South into the spotlight.

In this editorial, I would like to discuss the future. What sort of university leadership do we need in order to bring the global South in from the margins? How are universities in the global South responding to disturbances and adapting to changing ecologies? I will return to this point later. Before embarking on this discussion, I will quickly outline what is in store in this issue of *SOTL in the South*.

This edition carries five academic articles that provide insights into how universities in the global South are claiming a unique space in tertiary education: a space that responds to context, a space that is responsive to dynamic change and a space that values diversity and tradition.

Alison Reedy and María Lucía Guerrero Farías highlight the “uneven” nature of scholarship in teaching and learning in Columbia, arguing that the lack of a consistent and agreed terminology for SOTL means that Colombian scholarship remains relatively invisible.

South African scholars Milton Milaras and Tracey McKay question the suitability of soil science textbooks from the global North for an Africanised curriculum. They urge scholars from across the global South to engage more critically before selecting textbooks, and call on them to produce their own texts.

Margaret Jjuuko and Joseph Njuguna analyse the impact of Rwandan tertiary education reforms on journalism education practices. They outline how the University of Rwanda’s journalism programme has maintained quality in response to policy reforms which require them to teach more students with limited resources – financial, human and technological. They provide examples of innovations and

pedagogical adaptations implemented in order to maintain quality whilst supporting a more diverse and larger cohort of students.

At a course level, Khaya Mchunu explores how the traditional Ghanaian Adinkra symbols have been used to promote a social justice-infused curriculum. Not only did these symbols expose students to new design processes, at a deeper level, they stimulated students to engage critically with concepts of social justice as they partnered with community workers and interpreted the meaning of the traditional symbols.

Our final article looks at new ways of teaching online journalism to ensure that students are ready to work in the realms of digital and social media. Njuguna and Jjuuko analyse how Rwandan students responded to experiential learning and multimedia journalism curricula, identifying ways students can take charge of their own learning.

In addition, this issue carries three thoughtful and engaging reflections. Clelia Rodríguez's powerful piece speaks of pain – the pain incurred through historical injustice; the pain of disconnection, invisibility and division – the pain of the hopeful living in a world of helplessness and disconnected pedagogies. Her message is clear: tertiary education (We) must change in order to save the world from humans – to support peaceful resolution of conflict, to value and help preserve our precious environment and to save humanity from itself.

Dina Zoe Belluigi, Andrea Alcock, Veronica Farrell and Grace Idahosa reflect on their research practices to expose the “hidden curriculum of higher education”. Their reflection recounts discursive processes in an attempt to “make sense” of “the modes of politics” in which they engage. They explain how their work responds to the “‘indeterminate, swampy zones of practice’ (Schön 1986:3) by developing a practice of artistry (Bleakley 1999) to grapple with the complexities of socially just research praxis”.

In the final reflection, I reflect on work, life, illness and the academy. Through this piece, I hope to generate a conversation about illness in the academy. For me, surviving illness was a learning experience in its own right: “Understanding how to ‘return to self’ after a life-altering experience is a form of knowledge everyone needs to develop, particularly in our ageing society. Accordingly, I invite others to share their experiences and learnings in order to value a unique form of knowledge”.

However, as I mentioned at the start of this editorial, understanding the issues is not enough. Universities need to put in place structures, strategies and resources in preparation for our unknown futures – this will require rethinking our understandings of students, community and, more importantly, our role.

In order to speak with authenticity about the future of universities in the global South, we have invited three academic leaders to discuss the opportunities and challenges we face. Former Aga Khan University Provost and Head of Academics Without Borders, Professor Greg Moran, emphasises the importance of respecting context, and the need to ensure that teaching and research respond to that context to provide “meaningful impact”.

Vice-President of Academic Affairs at the Universidad de Chile, Professor Rosa Devés, explains how her university is responding to change by moving towards a social justice agenda in order to “rehumanize” education. She observes three reasons for this, namely, increasing participation, accommodating diversity and responding to complexity. She calls for reflection and renewal in order to nurture trust through a commitment to holistic education, interdisciplinary institutional cooperation, and social connection and engagement.

Our final contemplation on the university of the future is presented by Professor Saurabh Sinha, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in South Africa. Professor Sinha talks about ‘the University for the Fourth Industrial Revolution’, highlighting the need for universities in the global South to expand their focus to “graduate students who are able to think differently and distinguish themselves in this way”. This has implications for the way universities approach learning – which is defined as “blend of teaching, research and innovation in an era where even the fundamentals are shifting”. Sinha concludes:

University graduates, therefore, have to be trained with a new level of digital astuteness, accessing multiple thought domains and in such a way that their mindset can aspire beyond the ordinary.

Academic Leadership for twenty-first century universities located in the ‘global South’

By Professor Greg Moran Executive Director of Academics Without Borders

Former Director, Special Projects at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario 2015-2017

Former Provost and Chief Academic Officer of Aga Khan University (AKU) from 2011-2015

Context, context, context

Although I have spent more than two decades in university leadership, only four of these were outside the ‘global North’. It may seem presumptuous, therefore, for me to speak to the challenges facing university leaders in the ‘global South’, and even more so to suggest solutions. I take some comfort, however, from the belief that effective approaches to leadership feature important universal features. Two of these involve respecting context.

It is, after all, a university

University leadership, to be effective, must take account of the academic context where members of faculty, those responsible for teaching and conducting research, must play a meaningful role in governance. This imperative does not imply a single model. An effective style, however, lies

somewhere between a hard-nosed authoritarian style that will inevitably lose the essential support of those one wishes to lead, and the pursuit of the perfect consensus within the academy, a guaranteed path to a governance paralysis stymying change and innovation.

The Harvard Yard folly

Whether a university in the global South struggling with inadequate resources or an aspiring institution in the more prosperous global North, there is a tendency to see the world's leading research-intensive universities as the standard, a model to emulate, a goal to pursue. I use the shorthand "Harvard Yard folly" because I associate a photograph of Harvard with stirring calls to action by leaders wishing to move a university towards the highest levels of excellence – but it could equally be an image associated with Cambridge, Oxford, Stanford, etc.

What leaders promoting this model fail to recognise is that a university's excellence is inherently context-specific, i.e., judged by the extent to which its educational programs, research and scholarship, and outreach meet what the community needs to build a healthy, prosperous, and stable society. Research-intensive universities certainly fill an essential niche but, in aspiring to replicate their accomplishments, universities in the global South run the risk of neglecting the needs of their communities.

'Research intensive' is also fiscally intensive and thus is largely unrealistic and wasteful in a context struggling with inadequate human and financial resources. More importantly, the research-intensive university model is a product of the twenty-first century's wealthiest countries and a poor fit for the needs of countries in the majority of the world. In short, university leaders must pursue academic excellence that aligns with their economic, political, social, and environmental context. University leaders in the global South must look away from the Harvard Yard and embrace a model that is attuned to local needs.

Learning-focused and research-led

Despite claims to the contrary, there are strong pressures in all research-intensive universities, and those pursuing this model, to value faculty research productivity above teaching and, thus, student learning. Instead, such universities have the opportunity to give unambiguous priority to the learning of their students, striving to see graduates leave with the skills that prepare them specifically for the indispensable roles they must play in their communities and use to pursue their own life aspirations.

A focus on learning does not, however, imply a neglect of research. To the contrary, the highest quality of research must be pursued but its focus must be the most relevant local challenges and opportunities, thus ensuring that the research has a meaningful impact on academics' communities and countries.

On the future needs of the universities in the 'global South'

By **Professor Rosa Devés** Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Universidad de Chile

The responsibility to evolve

The challenge of the future is not new for universities; they have been subjected to this tension for centuries and have been able to evolve without losing their essence. Although today's changes are faster, and new demands and possibilities emerge, their capacity for transformation and self-alteration remains a central part of their identity. This applies equally to the characteristics of their constituent communities, the exercise of the university functions, the structure and management, and their interactions with other institutions and the society. At the University of Chile, our main responsibility, therefore, is to nurture and preserve this capacity to evolve. We believe that this requires adherence to shared purposes and a public mission, free inquiry and criticism as a vital force, and a culture of cooperation and service at the individual and institutional levels. We share Simon Marginson's (2012:8) view that "when these institutions stand for nothing more, nothing deeper or more collective, no greater public good than the aggregation of self-interest (...) then the institutions are vulnerable".

The University of Chile: education as a social right

The University of Chile is the first public university in the country and since its foundation in 1842, a few decades after Independence, its commitment to perform the essential academic functions with excellence has been accompanied by the purpose to contribute "to the spiritual and material development of the nation". In each historical period the strong relationship between the university and the state has had important consequences both for the university and the society.

In recent years, the university has played a leading role in the defence of public education which has been under stress as a result of the neoliberal educational policies in the past decades. These policies have led to the socioeconomic segregation of children and young people within the educational system. In the case of the school system, the socioeconomically disadvantaged students are attending fragile public schools, whereas in the case of higher education, students with a more vulnerable context have found opportunities in massive and low-quality private institutions. Changes are taking place at a national level to reverse this situation, on the basis of the concept of education as a social right.

Thus, a central concern regarding the future is to move a social justice agenda for education within the university as well as in the country.

Progressing a social justice agenda

Accordingly, the university has undertaken several transformative initiatives to ensure the fulfilment of its mission in a new context and its contribution to social change and development. Here we will

focus on the commitment towards higher degrees of equity, inclusion and diversity in its formative responsibility, which is affecting the institution at multiple levels.

Three reasons are at the basis of this aspiration. First, we aim to increase participation in the educational experience of economically disadvantaged students attending public education, who face large barriers to enter the more selective universities; second, we are aware that a more diverse community and a more complex educational environment are necessary for the kind of education that we aspire to offer, and third we welcome the transformations that will be required to become a more equitable and diverse university.

The initial driving force for these changes was a special access program for the selection of students from disadvantaged sectors, specifically students with high contextual academic performance, that have studied in public schools with high vulnerability contexts. This lead initiative, called Priority Access System for Educational Equity, has allowed the access of over 2000 students since 2012 and has had a significant impact on viewpoints and practices on teaching and learning, mobilising at the same time substantial organisational changes in order to facilitate the cooperative work towards these goals. This first step, focused on socioeconomic disadvantages, has been followed by increasing attention to other forms of exclusion affecting members of the community with disabilities, indigenous origin, and different sexual orientations. The commitment to educate in a context of diversity is challenging us to improve teaching, enhance and strengthen our democratic practices and promote reflection about our role in society.

We are all aware that in the future global society we will need more knowledge and technical skills, but also that this kind of knowledge alone will not be able to respond to the most serious problems. These problems involve other challenges and to address them we need to embrace complexity, including a more holistic education, interdisciplinarity, more institutional cooperation and socially embedded institutions. This in turn requires greater integration across the university and part of our responsibility is to nurture the trust that we need to work collaboratively.

Humanising education

As we move along this path, institutional weaknesses and barriers that previously went unnoticed have been revealed. Among these, we can mention for example the tendency to place the responsibility of academic success exclusively on students, under a neutral and supposedly meritocratic approach. We have also become aware of rules that were generated under a different paradigm of education, which do not take into consideration the multiple factors that influence the academic success of the students. The exercise of considering the full circumstances humanises education and forces us to act consistently with the aim of achieving a more integral education.

The full development of these equitable and inclusive initiatives requires supporting and empowering students, while challenging institutional structures. We must strategically incorporate equity in the policies and practices of our institution: we must learn to educate with identity awareness, without fear of putting neutrality at risk, and recognise the potential and strengths of each university member. To achieve this, the commitment at the human level to each member of the university community is essential.

Higher education leadership in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

By Professor Saurabh Sinha Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa,

Former Vice-President: Educational Activities, IEEE.

This article is written in his personal capacity.

Universities in 4IR: a focus on Learning

It is a privilege to be leading a university in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Universities, like the University of Johannesburg, aspire to dynamically shape the future, and 4IR provides a perfect segue for this – our approach to the 4IR is a catalyst allowing us to graduate students who are able to think differently and distinguish themselves in this way. In particular, we have striven for learning that encompasses a blend of teaching, research and innovation in an era where even the fundamentals are shifting.

Through a process lasting nearly one year, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) decided to contextualise its 2025 strategy for global excellence and stature for 4IR. The strategic or catalytic initiative has wide implications for the university's business and in particular for the research-innovation nexus. The quest is to graduate students who are able to access and define new economic zones.

In addition to the physical or urban economy endeavour, South Africa, through Operation Phakisa ("hurry up"), has added the oceans economy and the digital economy. The latter brings about an opportunity for creating jobs in a virtual environment and to combat poverty in a new way. The digital economy has, however, been around for some time.

One could visualise the oceans and digital/data economy in an analogous way. As in the ocean, there is much water, but we are unable to access most of the water for (say) drinking. The digital economy similarly has much data, but we have not been able to access most of this data meaningfully – as computing and communication technologies have yet to converge in a sophisticated way. Sophistication refers to the inclusion of advanced artificial intelligence (AI) systems utilising machine and, in particular, deep learning. The latter includes data fusion from various man-machine sources and this will have privacy, security and other secondary implications. Advanced systems, such as traffic networks, may face the complication of hijacking and individual data breaches would routinely occur. Using technologies, such as AI, in a multipronged way, refers to 4IR and would allow for accessing and utilising data beyond offerings of the "traditional" digital economy (the third industrial revolution). In the analogy of the oceans, it would be like accessing water (data) or aspects of the ocean (digital economy) that are yet to be harvested in a sustainable way.

However, the digital economy has the potential for deepening inequality unless the aspect of digital equity and equality is included as an “initial specification” to the 4IR education and economic scenario. In the education scenario, inclusiveness must be an endeavour in project and programme initiatives.

Fortunately, the generation of millennials and beyond is a majority in the ‘global South’ and their energy, combined with 4IR, could bring about a new kind of global renewal to achieve equality. In the economic scenario, government must play a role in redefining taxation and driving economic stimulus, for instance, by incentivising 4IR with productivity gains gradually being taxed. As initiatives progress in parallel, education-economic thinking for inclusiveness would need to be central to the graduate’s paradigm of thinking.

University graduates, therefore, have to be trained with a new level of digital astuteness, accessing multiple thought domains in such a way that their mindset can aspire beyond the ordinary; 4IR provides a perfect platform for this.

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