

# Situating Some Aspects of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in South African Higher Education Within Southern Theories

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## Abstract

This paper discusses aspects of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) in South African higher education (HE) and locates it within what it calls Southern theories. Three examples of such theories that the paper advances are Southern decolonial theory, decoloniality, and transversality, which it frames from the Global South standpoint. Concerning the first theory, the paper argues that SoTL, both as a notion and as a practice, needs to be problematized, critiqued, and contextualized according to the Global South HE settings in which it is applied. One of its key points in this regard is that SoTL has to question and critique the dominant epistemic practices and scholarly practices underpinning the curricula of Global South higher education institutions (HEIs), and through which students are framed in these HEIs. With reference to both decoloniality and transversality, the paper foregrounds components of SoTL that are aligned to these two approaches in a way that dismantles their hierarchical relations. Most importantly, it contends that transversality is capable of decentering Western truth claims in favor of polycentric epistemologies, frameworks, and methodologies that resonate with and that have applicability to the Global South.

## Introduction

Numerous debates by scholars from both the Global North and the Global South have been published on the notion of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Consequently, there have been strong views advocating acknowledging the importance of context and not to understand SoTL in decontextualized ways (Looker, 2018). In this paper, we argue that to better understand SoTL within the Global South university environment, especially in the African context, it is important to revisit the notion of an African university, which is different from a

university in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2017). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) contends that the African university must be committed to understanding the dynamics of the politics of knowledge production for the advancement of African people without necessarily excluding Euro-American epistemologies. In this regard, the African university must decenter Euro-American epistemologies and center the epistemologies of the African people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; cited in Omanga, 2020; see also Waghid, 2021). Of significance, this process should go beyond simply including knowledge systems that were previously undermined; it should also be about providing alternatives to the canonical epistemological frameworks and paradigms (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). In this paper, we contend that centering African epistemologies should be grounded on and be informed by a decolonized mindset or a decolonial thinking – a term adopted by Latin American scholars.

While knowledge decolonization might mean different things to different people, we maintain that at the center of decolonization of knowledge in an African university, there should be “rethinking thinking itself” – to use Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2017, p. 51) phrase, which is a process characterized by distinguishable innovation of knowledge that is largely grounded on African issues and challenges, though within the context of global knowledge production and other socio-cultural, political, and economic realities. Such a process, we contend, should be defined by a constant and a continuous interrogation of knowledge and the tools for knowledge understanding and analysis, such as frameworks and methodologies. This is particularly important because there is often a colonial gaze embedded in most frameworks and methodologies in global knowledge production, which to a large degree, is sustained by a *black box* perspective (Looker, 2018), where local perspectives and experiences are downplayed and sometimes excluded (Banda & Banda, 2017). In this paper, we assert that to address this situation, universities need to be open by encouraging a wide range of voices where “deliberation, agreement and dissonance” (Waghid, 2021, p. 3) become acceptable practices in general, and more so, in knowledge production.

Before we proceed, we would like to explain our identities and positionality in relation to this paper. All four authors teach at the institution mentioned under the indicated affiliation above. This is the biggest open and distance e-learning (ODEL) institution in the African continent. We all teach both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Department of English Studies. We have expertise in Applied English Language Studies, Academic Literacy Studies, and Linguistics. To a large degree, our involvement in teaching and doing research in the above-mentioned fields, including our interest in SoTL, especially within the African context, is what motivated us to write this paper. Through this paper, we want to share our perspectives on the significance of situating some aspects of SoTL in higher education in Southern contexts in general, but with a focus in South Africa. We argue that approaches to SoTL should be consistent with a decolonial thinking and attitude if SoTL is to contribute to Southern theories and pedagogical practices in Southern contexts and possibly beyond.

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate some aspects of SoTL in higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa within the context of Southern theories. The first part explains SoTL in general. The next section explains SoTL within the South African context. This is followed by a discussion of transversal approaches and how these may contribute to advancing Southern

theories that are useful in interrogating SoTL in Southern contexts, especially the South African context. We then conclude by recommending that transversal approaches in SoTL, especially in the African contexts including South Africa, should be grounded in decolonial thinking and attitudes if SoTL is to challenge colonial gazes that continue to inform theoretical assumptions, methodologies, and epistemic practices in these settings. This will not only challenge scholarship about global knowledge production and dissemination, where *global* tends to favor the geopolitical Global North, but it will also benefit the Global South, especially the geographic South, by putting knowledge production and dissemination in these contexts at the center away from the periphery.

### **Framing SoTL from the Global South**

It is our contention that as stated by many SoTL researchers, such as Boyer (1990), Eady et al. (2021), Hoon and Looker (2013), Huber and Morreale (2002), Kwo (2007), Looker (2018), and Reano et al. (2019), there cannot be one overarching definition of SoTL. One of the drawbacks of providing a definition for a concept such as SoTL is the risk of being too prescriptive or too broad, or of getting bogged down in definitional contours in pursuit of definitional precision. Concerning the last point, Looker (2018) maintains that after three decades, SoTL is still characterized by definitional opaqueness (also see Huber & Morreale, 2002; Miller-Young & Yeo, 2015). At the same, there are continuing debates not only about SoTL's definition but about its theories and methodologies as well (Looker, 2018; Sheridan, 2019). Amidst all of this, the present paper aligns itself with multiple views of SoTL: the contention that SoTL encompasses a multiplicity of perspectives and not just one universal definition. An integral part of such a perspectival diversity is that it should acknowledge the grounding of SoTL in the global spheres such as the Global North and the Global South, in which it is practiced in HEIs.

Aggregating the classical views of SoTL is worthwhile here. Such an aggregation is, though, impossible without historicizing and locating SoTL within Boyer's (1990) views of scholarship in academia. Boyer's (1990) views of scholarship serve as an anchor point for much of what SoTL entails and are frequently referenced by most SoTL scholars in varying degrees (e.g., Booth & Woollacott, 2015; Huber & Morreale, 2002; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Hutchings et al., 2011; Kern et al., 2015; Looker, 2018; Major & Braxton, 2020; McKinney, 2013). As is a well-known fact, Boyer (1990) proposed four interrelated and interdependent variants of scholarship: the scholarship of *discovery*, the scholarship of *integration*, the scholarship of *application*, and the scholarship of *teaching* (p. 16). Summed up, these variants refer to *research*, *synthesis*, *practice*, and *teaching* (p. 16). For Boyer, scholarship is the lifeline of the profession in academia. As pointed out above and elsewhere in this paper, there has been a lot of positive and negative evaluation of Boyer's (1990) four-pronged view of scholarship, a bulk of which has been of SoTL. In this instance, Boyer's (1990) SoTL was specifically addressed to the American professoriate. As such, it is quintessentially North-American-centric and, by implication, Western-centric or Northern-centric in its orientation.

In many of its permutations, SoTL is constructed as: an inquiry-based approach to what, how, and why students should be taught the curriculum they need to learn; a classroom-based inquiry; occurring naturalistically and being theoretically innocuous; and unproblematically validating

teaching (Looker, 2018). The first two instances imbue SoTL with an instrumentalist sense in which cognitive success tends to be given primacy over the socio-historical and politico-cultural conditions of the students for whom it is intended. This instrumentalist orientation is informed by and feeds into the discourse of student success in disciplinary or academic modules for which students enroll in higher education (HE). This discourse is so pervasive in this sector of education. While there is nothing wrong with embracing student success per se, this is not all there is for SoTL. The same applies to the last two instances in which SoTL tends to be constructed.

In this regard, this paper seeks to briefly critique the construction of SoTL as delineated above. It does so by locating SoTL within the Global South and by building on views expressed on the Global South by SoTL researchers such as Leibowitz (2010) and Samuel (2017) (see also Chaka, 2020, 2021). The contention of this paper is that the construction of SoTL as provided above tends to conceal challenges obtaining in most HEIs located in a Global South region such as South Africa. This is particularly so because of the material and sociocultural circumstances prevailing at some of the HEIs situated in South Africa as a part of the Global South and owing to the geopolitics of knowledge practices in these HEIs (Chaka, 2021; Looker, 2018; Mignolo, 2002; Samuel, 2017). In this context, the Global South is a conceptual category more than just a geographic location. It refers to the epistemological orientation and scholarly practices embraced and appropriated by scholars who find themselves at the periphery of “hegemonic, Northerncentric epistemologies” (Chaka, 2021, p. 31). Or, it refers to scholars whose epistemic thoughts and practices are ignored and marginalized by “hegemonic, Western-centric epistemologies” (Chaka, 2021, p. 31). Pertaining to SoTL, epistemic thoughts and practices that are ignored relate to the marginalization and misrecognition of disciplines and fields of study such as Indigenous knowledge systems, as well as of teaching and learning practices peculiar to certain Global South HEIs.

With reference to the first two instances mentioned earlier concerning how SoTL is constructed, it is necessary to deconstruct and critique Eurocentric views embedded in the curricula taught at HEIs in South Africa, which often tend to disregard and denigrate epistemic worldviews of the local settings in which these HEIs are located. In order to deconstruct and critique Eurocentric views, it is necessary to decolonize the higher education (HE) curriculum. Most importantly, it is necessary to decolonize SoTL practices. In the former case, the first salvo was fired not by academics but by students in 2015. Initially, under the banner of #FeesMustFall, HE students, especially undergraduate students, organized themselves into this hashtagged student movement to demand reduced or no fees for university education. Immediately thereafter, they embarked on nation-wide campaigns calling for the decolonization of the HE curriculum (Booyesen, 2016; Greeff et al., 2021). Since then, academics have produced scholarly papers on the #FeesMustFall movement and on the decolonization of the HE curriculum in South Africa (see, for example, Chaka et al., 2017; Chikoko, 2016; Costandius et al., 2018; Le Grange, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Ngoepe, 2020; Omanga, 2020). The #FeesMustFall student movement, which subsequently metamorphosed into campaigns for decolonizing the HE curriculum, had an immediate impact and instantly caught the national psyche. It did so more than scholarly papers did, which traditionally have a slow trickle-down effect. Even though this was the case, the #FeesMustFall student movement, nonetheless, seems to have gradually subsided, thereby

leaving the HE curriculum status quo more or less intact. In this sense, this movement, together with its curriculum decolonization campaigns, seems to have proven that one cannot change institutions without changing the social structures underpinning them. In crude Marxist terms, this is a view that the superstructure (ideology) cannot be changed without changing its base (economics), even though the two Marxian concepts do not mechanically and unidirectionally feed off each other (Ford, 2021).

HE curricula in South Africa are not value-free as they are often projected to be; they are influenced by the geopolitics of knowledge production and circulation (Chaka, 2021; de Sousa Santos, 2014; Lazar, 2020; Looker, 2018; Mignolo, 2002; Samuel, 2017). They also tend to have elements of the null curriculum built into them and, as such, they require decolonization in the sense of Fanon (1963), which works against assimilationist tendencies, and instead promotes epistemic de-linking, as espoused by Mignolo (2010). But, above all, they need deparochialization (Chaka et al., 2017). Moreover, South Africa's universities, their curricula, and their epistemologies and ontologies are collectively embedded in Western colonial institutional culture that is both hostile and domineering to Black students, who comprise the majority student population in these universities. Therefore, the #FeesMustFall student campaign that erupted in 2015 was not only about high university student fees, nor was it about decolonizing the HE curriculum alone. It was also directed at other aspects of university education, such as epistemologies and ontologies, dubious pedagogical approaches, hostile and alienating academic and institutional environments, low pass rates, high dropout rates, and insufficient student accommodation, all of which are a legacy of racism, colonialism, (Badat, 2016), Whiteness, and heteropatriarchy. All of these sore points need addressing and resolving alongside efforts to decolonize the HE curriculum if SoTL is to make any significant contribution.

Furthermore, the language through which curricula are mediated to students in most South African HEIs has to be taken into account and concomitantly critiqued. For example, since one such a language is English, then, the coloniality of the English language (Chaka, 2021; Veronelli, 2015) needs to be foregrounded in SoTL debates. This aspect becomes more relevant when considering that in the Global South, especially in South Africa, the majority of students for whom HE curricula are mediated through English are not mother-tongue English speakers. Yet, these are the students at whom SoTL and student success are targeted. What is often ignored is the potential for tapping into students' multilingual repertoires in mediating HE curricula to them, as most of these students are multilingual speakers. That is, they are native speakers of one of the nine official African languages in addition to English. This means that SoTL initiatives in South African HEIs should employ translanguaging as an approach to mediating HE curricula for their students alongside English. In doing so, such initiatives will be embracing translanguaging as a decolonial approach by unsettling the coloniality of English (Chaka, 2020; Ndlangamandla & Chaka, 2020; Takaki, 2020). Employing translanguaging as a decolonial approach entails recognizing the multilingualisms or the multiple linguistic resources that students have, and flexibly applying these existing repertoires together with English (see Ganuza & Hedman, 2017; Slaughter & Cross, 2021). Doing so challenges and unsettles an Anglonormative, colonialist, monolingual ideology of English. Another related decolonial approach is for South African HEIs to encourage and use an African language of their choice as

a language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in addition to English in their SoTL initiatives. This would be a radical departure from the current setup in which one African language – and in a few cases more than one African language – and English are regarded as official languages at universities, but only English is used as a LoLT. It is this persistent coloniality of English that this paper challenges and critiques in relation to SoTL.

Concerning SoTL as a classroom-based inquiry, the very notion of a classroom, together with the attendant material and sociocultural conditions prevalent in the classrooms of HEIs in South Africa, needs to be considered and duly interrogated (see Looker, 2028). HE classrooms under which SoTL occurs vary considerably, and they are determined and shaped by prevailing dominant pedagogic ideologies and practices that are underpinned by English monolingualism. These are the variables that have to be factored into SoTL debates in the Global South.

In relation to the last two instances highlighted earlier about how SoTL is constructed, this paper argues that SoTL – in its practices and in its methodologies – does not occur naturalistically on an innocuous theoretical plane. Instead, it is embedded in and influenced by existing dominant theories and epistemic postulates that frame teaching, learning, and students in particular ways. Therefore, SoTL cannot unproblematically validate such framings of teaching, learning, and students when those framings tend to exclude and marginalize other related framings, such as multilingual framings. If the SoTL continues doing so, it runs the risk of perpetuating misframings (Chaka, 2021).

Given all what has been said thus far, this paper argues for a SoTL conceptualized from a Southern decolonial theory. It is necessary to attempt to define and contextualize decoloniality, something that is better done by juxtaposing it with concepts such as colonization, colonialism, decolonization, and coloniality. The reason for this juxtaposition is that trying to define decoloniality often entails invoking these four other concepts. Latin America scholars, such as Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2018), Mignolo (2007) and Quijano (2007), have attempted to define these five concepts and to differentiate between them (also see Grosfoguel, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Schubring, 2021; Tembo, 2022). In this paper, we only provide a synthetic approach to defining these concepts. Colonization is a process in which European imperial and colonial countries conquered certain parts of the world with a view to exploiting their lands and extracting their natural resources. Another colonial motive was to impose administrative, political, economic, and education systems of the colonizing countries on the colonized countries. In many instances, colonization led to establishing colonial borders in the colonized regions so as to separate one colonized state or nation from another. In this setup, colonialism is a situation in which a colonized sovereign state or nation is under the control of an imperial power (FutureLearn, n.d.; Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Tembo, 2022).

In this context, decolonization refers to dismantling all colonial systems established during colonization and the subsequent liberation or independence of colonized countries. Coloniality, for its part, exists as modernity and is sustained by power, knowledge, economy, being, gender, and culture. It has a tendency to exist well after colonialism has ended (Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Ricaurte, 2019; Tembo, 2022). Lastly, decoloniality

refers to ways of knowing, thinking, doing, and being that undo structures of race, class, heteropatriarchy, and gender, which tend to exercise control over knowledge, thought, spirituality, and life in accordance with Western modernity and global capitalism. It critiques Western rationality as the sole framework and mode of analysis, thought, and existence (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018; Schubring, 2021), or “hegemonic Western abstract universals” (García, 2020, p. 304). There is decolonial pluriversality and pluriversal decoloniality (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018), which, respectively, refer to decolonial diversity and plural decolonialities.

There have been critiques of Western thought before decoloniality came into existence in its current form, as Schubring (2021) and Walsh and Mignolo (2018) point out. One such a critique is Hegelian tetradic dialectics comprising thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, which is often referred to as dialectical idealism (Adegbindin, 2015; Samson, 2019). However, Hegelian dialectics, and the whole Hegelian scholarly enterprise, does not serve as a point of reference nor as an anchor point for decoloniality as used in this paper. For one thing, when Hegel conceptualized his binary between West and East, he mentioned and identified four historical worlds (also civilizations): Greek, Roman, German, and Oriental. So, his historical worlds not only omitted Africa but also ignored Africa’s existence. This means that Africa was and is not among Hegel’s four classical civilizations or cultures. This, in turn, implies that for Hegel, Africa was undeveloped, uncivilized, ahistorical, and therefore, unworthy of being regarded as having any culture. Further, Hegel’s view was that there was a justification for a European colonization and enslavement of Africa for purposes of civilization (Adegbindin, 2015; Kuykendall, 1993). Moreover, there are instances in which the Hegelian philosophy of history is seen as one of the anchor points of Eurocentrism and systemic racism (Tibebu, 2011). Based on all of this, our paper’s decoloniality cannot be associated with any form of Hegelianism.

Given all that has been said thus far, this paper argues for a SoTL conceptualized from a Southern decolonial theory. The latter is decoloniality informed by, as Chaka (2021) points out, Southern epistemologies (de Sousa Santos, 2014) or Southern perspectives (Lazar, 2020). While decoloniality and Southern epistemologies are not new notions, what is fresh is the Southern decoloniality from which SoTL is framed. So, from this framing, SoTL, both as a notion and as a practice, needs to be problematized, critiqued, and contextualized according to the Global South HE settings in which it is applied. The same applies to Boyer’s (1990) four variants of scholarship discussed earlier: research, synthesis, practice, and teaching. That is, framed from Southern decoloniality, SoTL should:

- interrogate and critique the geopolitics of knowledge production and circulation prevalent in the Global South HE settings in which it is applied;
- question the dominant epistemic practices and scholarly practices underpinning the curricula of Global South HEIs, and through which students are framed in these HEIs;
- foreground and critique the coloniality of language (be it English, French, or Portuguese) through which SoTL is mediated in Global South HE settings;
- utilize the often marginalized Southern epistemologies and theories that are appropriate to the respective Global South HE contexts in which it is practiced;
- unpack and interrogate the resources and technologies through which teaching and learning are mediated in these Global South HE contexts; and
- recognize that each Global South HEI is unique, and that it needs to be treated as such.

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Only then will we be in a position to dig deeper into and challenge the academic and intellectual architecture on which classical SoTL is founded.

### **SoTL Within the South African Perspective**

The next section explains SoTL within the South African context. In a country like South Africa, which, historically, has had a segregated education system, there has been a wide interest in writing about SoTL. This is a view echoed by Leibowitz (2010), who states that education in South Africa is a resource whose very shape and hue is affected by the vestiges or ravages of colonialism and apartheid ideology. With this background in mind, many researchers in South Africa have explored the notion of SoTL from different perspectives. A few scholars like Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016) have advanced SoTL from a social justice perspective. In this view, these authors argue that teaching, learning, and research should be discussed in relation to social justice principles. This is important for a context like South Africa, whose history of SoTL has been riddled with inequitable learning conditions and lack of academic success from mainly Black students. To address these inequalities and differences at an individual, disciplinary, and institutional level, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018) argue for a conceptualization of SoTL that will take into account the key conceptualizations of scholarship raised by Boyer (1990). In the view of Looker (2018), cited by Hlengwa and Naidoo (2018), socially-just teaching and learning is characterized by an acute awareness of the political, social, cultural, and material contexts that influence learning.

To address SoTL from a South African perspective, one needs to acknowledge that the context may be mired in meaning ambiguity (Pitso, 2013). In the view of Booth and Woollacott (2017), as cited in Vorster (2020), it is necessary to be explicit about the context when conceptualizing and writing about SoTL research. If one looks at the South African system of higher education, one notices some unique factors that have negative impacts on universities. For instance, Vorster (2020) asserts that there are three contextual conditions in South African higher education that adversely affect student success, namely: the influence of massification on universities in South Africa, a university system that is failing many of its students, and a mismatch between student expectations and universities' institutional purposes. This paper argues for the use of a transversal approach and Southern decoloniality as frameworks to better understand and explain the dynamics of SoTL in Global South university contexts, especially with special reference to the South African context and its inherent diversities. These two approaches are deemed suitable for universities in the Global South as they address their unique contexts. Hlengwa and Naidoo (2018, p. 1) emphasize the importance of context and of not understanding SoTL in decontextualized ways.

### **(Decolonial) Transversal Approach to SoTL**

A transversal approach to SoTL is about applying different conceptual approaches that intersect with or transverse one another, and that have the potential to integrate different lines of inquiry (Gordon, 2012). As Gordon (2012) points out, such a transversality is missing in SoTL. To this end, he suggests a list of “so called” transversal concepts, such as:

- innovation;



- power;
- agency;
- professionalism;
- competencies;
- transformation;
- identities; and
- engagement.

On the other hand, Meyer, Land, and Baillie (2010) classify transversal insights by grouping them into three parts: extending the theory, conceptual transformations, and ontological transformations. Based on these researchers' assertions, transversality may be understood as comprising many systematic and theoretical institutional approaches. Regarding one of the conceptual frameworks on SoTL, Kong, Lai, and Wong (2017) propose a holistic conceptual framework, taking into consideration the higher education institution, teaching staff, and students. Their framework covers four important themes: (a) staff professional development; (b) enhanced student learning experience; (c) assessment; and (d) digital technology. Based on this framework, they put emphasis on learning and digital technology, and they call it SoTL.

Clearly, Kong et al.'s (2017) model puts emphasis on *learning*, rather than on *teaching*. This is a departure from earlier conceptualizations of SoTL, where teaching was at the center. Not only are the complex components of SoTL, as briefly discussed above, consistent with transversality, which promotes dismantling of hierarchical relations between different components of SoTL, but the complexity is aligned to decolonial thinking as explained earlier and below. From this perspective, it could be argued that transversality is not a clear-cut, neatly packed concept. Rather, it is something that educationists can use to keep on interrogating their epistemic practices, their theoretical perspectives, and their methodologies.

In Cole and Bradley's (2018) words, transversality is "an important route to enabling consistent activism in the face of an increasingly homogenized capitalist shutdown of alternative modes of thought" (p. 8). This understanding of transversality is consistent with *rethinking thinking itself* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2017), where this process calls for scholars, African scholars in particular, not only to interrogate and reflect on Euro-American canonical knowledge but also to broaden knowledge production itself by taking into consideration experiences of varied groups, such that knowledge production is no longer an exclusive prerogative of certain groups, like academics. In Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) words, this involves

taking full account of African subaltern groups as knowledge producers, think *with them*, learn *from them*, rather than thinking *about them* and *for them* – collaborating with them in the long process of becoming free human beings and agents of African developments. (p. 51)

This entanglement between transversality in SoTL and decoloniality has been observed in some studies (Banda & Banda, 2017). Bradley (2018), in his study of philosophy in the aftermath of students calling for the end of racism at the SOAS University of London, explains that transversality is a tool for critiquing "non-inclusive curricula" (p. 67). He prefers to view transversality as a geophilosophy of education. He makes two important distinctions between transversality as an experimental means of institutional analysis, as proposed by Guattari (1984),

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and transversality as a philosophical problematic heuristic. His view is that the concept can serve both. He further explains that transversality decenters Western truth claims in favor of “polycentric and correlative” (p. 17) epistemologies, frameworks, and methodologies. He makes the point that a decolonized education and curriculum “would address the voice, beliefs, and philosophies perceived as excluded from the canon of a particular discipline” (p. 71).

In brief, Bradley (2018, p. 72) aptly states that transversality is a diagonal movement. This is read against an observation made by Guattari (1984) that “transversality is a dimension that tries to overcome both the impasse of pure verticality and that of mere horizontality; it tends to be achieved when there is a maximum communication among the different levels (in an institution)” (p. 18; see also Evans, Harrison, & Rousell, 2021, p. 3). Bradley (2018) goes on to say that epistemologically, transversality is meant to transcend Eurocentric prejudices and to contest Western notions of universality. In our view, this is similar to Southern theories, and by extension to some conceptualizations of Southern decoloniality. It is in this respect that transversality cuts across epistemologies and ontologies and extends beyond the confines of SoTL. In fact, student movements in South Africa have shown that transversality is a diagonal movement, as aptly stated by Bradley (2018). Such a transversality connects to students who question power relations in knowledge production and other social justice issues, such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student groups in South Africa.

Focusing on language issues in relation to transversality, Evans, Harrison, and Rousell (2021) add an important dimension of rethinking language in a Guattarian-Deleuzian sense, that in the pragmatics of universality, language no longer functions as a stable “mediating” factor between a thinking subject and an externalized social world. Instead, language is encountered on the immanent surface of experience where intensive, extensive, and virtual forces meet, as a transversal movement (or “agencement”) that shifts dynamically, in continuous variation, through encounters with the world. (p. 3)

This Guattarian-Deleuzian use of a linguistic analysis is critical to SoTL. Our view of approaching transversality as an institutional and philosophical analysis is based on Ubuntu as a philosophy that is neglected by SoTL, but which has somewhat featured strongly in debates about decoloniality, and which has implication for teaching and learning (e.g., Ramose, 2020; Waghid, 2018). Ubuntu is defined as: “I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1970, p.141). Broodryk (2002) describes it as “a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values” (p. 13). According to Letseka (2013) Ubuntu is an Indigenous concept that “can be said to articulate our communal interconnected-ness, our common membership to a community” (p. 339). It has been said that Ubuntu is a human philosophy that favors communalism rather than individualism (Takyi-Amoako & Assie-Lumumba, 2018). Many different African languages have expressions of the Ubuntu philosophy. This philosophy can potentially inform SoTL, but currently it does not necessarily do so, as observed by some scholars (Cook, 2020). For example, “the Ubuntu philosophy and ideals must be made central to Africa’s education policy processes, systems, and agents’ actions, and must be evoked for an effective re-visioning of Africa’s education” (Takyi-Amoako & Assie-Lumumba, 2018, p. 10). Takyi-Amoako and Assie-Lumumba further observe that the detrimental effects of this disconnect has resulted in “an incongruent link between who Africans are as a people and the

educational systems that are meant to help unlock and develop their talents and potential for socio-economic development” (p. 10).

Southern decoloniality challenges the notions of human alienation, in relation to the coloniality of being, power and knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2018). Decolonial scholars have gone on to argue that instead of universalizing knowledge production, there should be pluriversality. With respect to pluriversality in a decolonized African university, Mbembe (2016) argues that the task of such a university “involves a radical refounding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions” (p. 37). Transcendence of disciplinarity or “disciplinary decadence” (Gordon, 2014, p. 86) denounces the compartmentalization of knowledge into small manageable chunks or boxes, which often results in oversimplification of issues in one’s own discipline at the expense of real life challenges of people, especially those from Southern settings. To counter this, Gordon (2014) calls for a suspension of disciplinarity to create a space for the investigation of real problems affecting Southern people; this involves re-evaluating assumptions about one’s epistemological, theoretical, and methodological suppositions within one’s discipline, as well as in relation to other disciplines. It is this broader knowledge and understanding in SoTL that Miller-Young and Yeo (2015) call scholars of SoTL to take into consideration if SoTL is to make a meaningful contribution to education.

Missing in the scholarship proposed by Miller-Young and Yeo (2015) is the link between knowledge and social justice issues that affect Southern communities. As some SoTL and decolonial scholars argue, there can be no knowledge or cognitive justice without social justice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2017; Postma, 2016). In recent times, nowhere has this been more evident than in the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements in South Africa. As students called for the dismantling of colonial curriculum, they also raised issues with the exploitation of workers by neoliberal forces. Using Nancy Fraser’s (2008, 2009) framework on the economic, the cultural, and the political dimensions core to social justice, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016), in a study on a collaborative SoTL project between five universities in South Africa, showed that there can be no participatory parity, an important aspect of social justice, among the academics from the institutions unless the economic and the cultural dimensions have been addressed equitably in all the institutions.

Since 2015, numerous publications have been produced on decolonization and decoloniality. Unfortunately, these publications have not resulted in any significant institutional changes; neither have they impacted SoTL. None of the said principles, ambitions, visions, strategies, and approaches of decolonialization/decoloniality seem to be evident in any SoTL or any education institution in South Africa. This calls for more engagement at the institutional and philosophical levels. The lingering persistence of coloniality is evident in the power and neoliberal structures of higher education. For example, many South African universities prize scholarly publications in more prestigious academic journals over those in less-known academic journals (Lee & Simon, 2018). Effectively, South African HEIs are driven by a neoliberal orientation by which students and academics are subjected to corporatized systems where knowledge commodification is at the center (Cole & Bradley, 2018; Postma, 2016; Soudien, 2014). This commodification tends to promote quantifiable outcomes, which are usually measured through a focus on academic ratings and institutional rankings, producing a culture of consumerism, which in turn

undermines cognitive and social justice, including environmental justice (Postma, 2016; Waghid, 2021). It is this kind of neoliberal capitalist competitiveness that transversal approaches to education challenge. For transversal approaches, education is fundamentally a public good that should promote critical activism because “anything straightforward would be easily swallowed up, regurgitated, and repackaged as the latest in learning environments” (Cole and Bradley, 2018, p. ix). From this viewpoint, there should be a continuous evaluation of the relationship between corporations and education (Watson, 2018, p. 22). Transversality in education therefore discourages oversimplification of issues into “good or bad, right or wrong, left or right” (Cole & Bradley, 2018, p. 5). Rather, transversal approaches are about inclusion and alternative knowledge systems as they are about dismantling binaries and dichotomies in education.

For the African university, in particular, alternative knowledge systems are about realizing that the fight against epistemological hegemony of the Global North does not necessarily require one to throw away the child with the bath water, where the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the Global North are completely discarded from conversations about restoring marginalized and displaced African knowledges. Rather, doing so should be about sensitivity to the “production of African-centered knowledge that contributes to the global knowledge economy while solving African problems and has global appeal and reach” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 50).

In order to frame our positionality, we draw on both Southern and decolonial theories and coin the epistemic position of Southern decoloniality. Southern theories (Connell, 2007) are conceptual and theoretical approaches that originate from postcolonial, excentric contexts as a counter argument to the Western grand narrative that excludes some of these contexts in the global knowledge production. Lazar (2020) describes Southern theories by “elaborating on the South as an ‘ex-centric locus of enunciation.’ In this respect, Southern praxis provides a critically reflexive and transformative lens” (p. 8). Resende (2021) adds that the decolonization of knowledge ought not to be simply about jettisoning Northern theories either, but rather to learn from them selectively where it is useful, and exercise a “critical watchfulness” in regard to the validity and application of these normative theories. Thus, a Southern praxis is about critical (self-)reflexivity as much as it is about being invested in epistemological transformations. Arguing from a critical Southern decolonial orientation, we maintain that transversal decoloniality is a possible analytical theory to serve both the institutional and philosophical analysis in higher education.

The discussion in this section is an attempt to illustrate the complexity of transversality in education in general and more so in SoTL, with particular attention to showing how some aspects of transversality align to decolonial thought, which is central to Southern theories. Based on transversal approaches discussed in this paper, we argue that SoTL needs to avoid Gordon’s (2014) disciplinary decadence. We contend that SoTL needs to be skeptical of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological confines if it is going to make a meaningful contribution to Southern theories for the advancement of teaching, learning, and research in Southern settings, especially in Africa. Drawing on scholars such as Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016) and Postma (2016), who contend that cognitive justice and social justice are entangled, an argument that is consistent with a decolonial thought (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2017; Macdonaldo-Torres, 2018), we assert that SoTL needs to treat the interaction between knowledge and social justice issues as

inextricably intertwined in order to inform Southern theories in a way that addresses higher education challenges in Southern settings, and specifically in African contexts.

### Conclusion

The reflection on the interaction between some aspects of SoTL, decoloniality, and transversality presented in this paper highlight the significance of situating SoTL within Global South universities such as South African universities, presuming that universities in South Africa are not simply universities in Africa but African universities in the sense explained by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 2017). In this respect, if SoTL in South African universities is to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge production that is grounded on the epistemologies, ontologies, frameworks, and methodologies of their contexts, it has to take full consideration of the historical, socio-cultural, and economic realities of the students and faculty, while being sensitive to global realities. As this reflective paper has shown, simply focusing on the cognitive dimension of teaching and learning at the expense of the harsh historical and socio-economic realities of students and faculty is not enough. In this sense, SoTL in South African universities should be sensitive to a wide range of voices at these universities, taking into account historical inequalities and inequities in these institutions. So, SoTL in South African universities should not be merely about theorizing about knowledge production for its own sake, where such knowledge is largely produced by academics, but it should also be about listening to and embracing less-heard voices – those of the students, in particular. This seems to be missing in the current SoTL efforts. In this respect, future studies should pay attention to this missing link in SoTL practices.

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