

Introducing open learning as a means towards social justice in post-school education and training

Tabisa Mayisela, Shanali C. Govender & Cheryl Ann Hodgkinson-Williams

Introduction

Worldwide, there has been a long-standing need for economically affordable, culturally inclusive and politically representative education. This has been foregrounded globally in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 that calls for “inclusive and quality education for all” (United Nations, 2015)¹. The COVID-19 pandemic² has exposed and exacerbated multiple axes of disparity, foregrounding the entanglement of inequalities along intersectional axes of class, gender, race, language and place³, and affirming that neoliberal policies have failed to deliver on their promise of improved access to opportunity and/or quality of life for the majority of people.

The South African education system has not escaped these conditions. Extensive education inequities remain massive challenges for the post-apartheid South African dispensation 28 years after the official demise of apartheid. In the South African *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) envisions “a transformed post-school system” that is hoped to “improve the economic, social and cultural life of its people ... to bring about social justice, to overcome the legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, and to overcome inequity and injustice whatever its origins” (DHET, 2013, p. 75). Policymakers are tasked to govern extremely diverse Post School Education and Training (PSET) institutions under their remit, while seeking to offer ‘access, quality and success’ (DHET, 2017) to eligible school leavers. But what *constitutes* ‘access’, ‘quality’ and ‘success’, along with *how* to pursue these goals, requires more discussion.

Against this backdrop, DHET has identified seven barriers students face when wanting to learn in PSET, including:

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

² https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/COVID19_Human_development_on_course_to_decline_for_the_first_time_since_1990.html

³ <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/black-lives-matter-wba-and-the-sdgs-blog-series/>

1. geographic isolation from campuses or learning centres within reasonable proximity;
2. lack of reliable access to digital infrastructure, adequate bandwidth, the internet and ICT⁴;
3. inability to take time off from work or family obligations for structured learning;
4. discrimination [by institutions] on the basis of physical disability, gender, age, social class or race;
5. a lack of qualifications considered necessary as requirements for admission to particular programmes;
6. financial constraints and an inability to meet the cost of studies; and
7. past experience of content-based, transmission-type pedagogy and assessment that restrict accessibility, alienate the learner or contribute to a loss of confidence. (DHET, 2017, p. 367)

In response to these barriers, DHET proposed the notion of 'open learning' as a framework to inform existing and future PSET policies. The vision for this approach is expressed primarily in the draft *Open Learning Policy Framework* (OLPF) (DHET, 2017), as discussed below.

While the draft OLPF received responses from various quarters of the PSET sector (e.g., Goodier, 2017; USAF, 2017), at the time of publication, it had yet to be interrogated or promulgated by Parliament. Also, initial training was offered to TVET lecturers and administrators over the course of 2019, reaching 200 staff and focusing on advocacy and capacity-building⁵. During consultations for feedback on the draft, amongst various PSET institutions and stakeholders, questions arose about how 'open learning' as a concept is understood, mediated, taken up or resisted within the sector (M. Adendorff, personal communication, October 2019).

This uncertainty prompted DHET to commission research by members of the University of Cape Town's Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) on the understanding of 'open learning' principles amongst actors in the PSET sector (including managers, lecturers and students), along with any evidence of open learning in PSET institutions' practices. The CILT research project, Cases on Open Learning (COOL) was mandated with: (1) building the capacity of young researchers (of which at least 60% are Black, Coloured or Indian South African) who were to conduct 16 case studies on open learning initiatives in an African context; and (2) sharing each of the case studies produced as a chapter in an openly licensed edited volume (*this book*), and as an abridged booklet in the Cases on Open Learning Knowledge Collection.

Since "open learning ... is driven by a concern for social justice" (DHET, 2017, p. 412), the COOL project investigation focused on the relation between open learning and social justice, both as it is understood and enacted. How open learning might enhance social justice (as defined by Fraser [2005, 2009]) – if at all – is of interest, and forms the central axis of the research presented in this volume. Findings from the research suggest potential ways in which institutional open learning practices could help address economic inequalities, socio-cultural marginalisation and political misrepresentation, as well as uncover challenges and barriers to transformative social justice aspirations at various levels of the PSET sector.

⁴ Information and Communications Technology

⁵ DHET. (2019). The Bulletin: Bumper 2019 Year End Edition October – December 2019. Internal publication by email from M Adendorff. Mr Adendorff is the former DHET Project Manager: Open Learning for Lecturer Development.

The chapter begins by describing the South African PSET landscape, then provides a description of open learning and the cluster of principles that inform it to present “an ideal or goal rather than an absolute, all-or-nothing imperative” (DHET, 2017, p. 373). Having addressed DHET’s open learning agenda, the chapter then outlines Fraser’s (2005, 2009) social justice theory and how it is used in this volume to interrogate the notion of open learning. Finally, the chapter closes with a brief synopsis of the case studies that constitute this volume.

The South African PSET landscape, past and present

DHET currently oversees the diverse PSET sector which comprises “all education and training provision for those who have completed school, those who did not complete their schooling, and those who never attended school” (DHET, 2014, p. xi). Figure 1 attempts to capture the broad church of PSET in South Africa.

The South African PSET sector currently consists of three types of institutions: 26 public universities (including traditional universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technology [UoTs]), 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, and Community Education and Training (CET) colleges⁶.

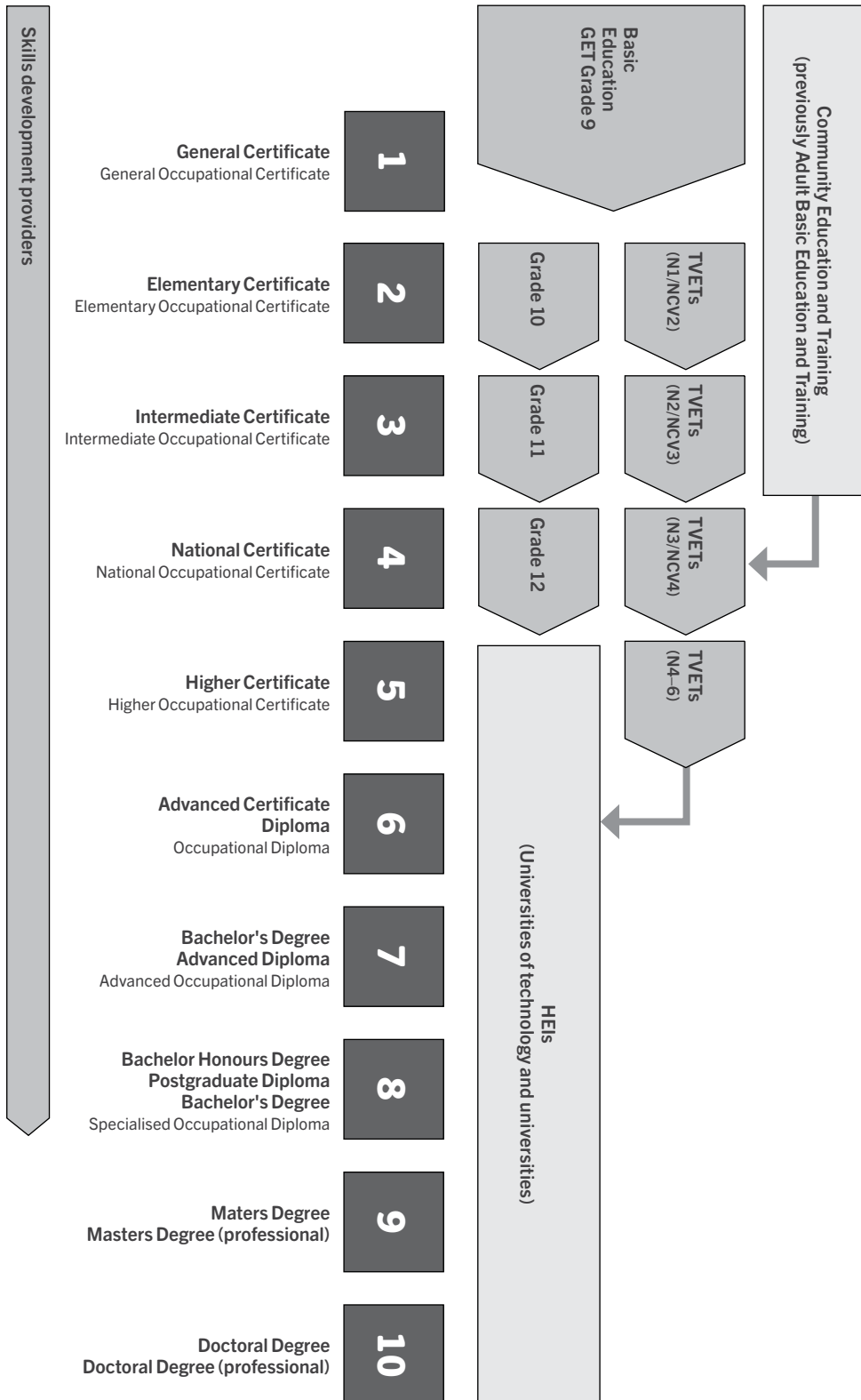
Participation in the PSET sector occurs at a number of entry points. Learners who are successful in the General Education and Training (GET: Grades 1-9) phase either enrol for Further Education and Training (FET: Grades 10–12) or TVET qualifications. Of learners who complete the FET phase, approximately 36% attain sufficient grades to apply for a bachelor degree at university level⁷. The other 64% might qualify for access to a UoT or TVET qualification, or might not be eligible for any form of PSET enrolment. Enrolment in TVET colleges reached 673 490 in 2019 (DHET, 2021), which was a 2.5% (16 357) increase on 2018. Although the National Development Plan (NDP) indicates that headcount enrolment in TVET colleges should reach 2.5 million by 2030, the rate of enrolment has varied between 2010 and 2019 (DHET, 2021). Meanwhile 1 283 890 students were enrolled at public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 2019, with the majority of enrolments in public institutions (1 074 912). While the NDP seeks to enrol 1.6 million students in public HEIs by 2030, completion rates at public universities remain alarmingly low, averaging in 2017 at 20.3% (Essop, 2020).

The PSET sector also includes other more specialised structures such as the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), the National Skills Fund (NSF) and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Additionally there are regulatory bodies responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in the post-school system, namely the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and three quality councils: the Council on Higher Education (CHE), Umalusi, and Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). These different structures in the system are at various stages of development and maturity, with some remaining essentially unchanged for decades, while others are relatively new organisations, and some are planned structures, such as the South African Institution for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET).

⁶ The cases in this volume do not address the CET institutions charged with assisting those who are perhaps the most educationally marginalised, i.e., those who have not even completed the GET phase of education. Nonetheless, as part of the PSET sector, they significantly broaden the remit of DHET.

⁷ <https://www.sabcnews.com/the-class-of-2021-has-performed-exceptionally-well-motshekga/>

Figure 1: An overview of the South African PSET landscape



The focus of the case studies in this volume are South Africa's public universities and TVET colleges. What follows describes historical and contemporary issues that affect these institutions specifically.

Historical and contemporary factors shaping universities and TVET colleges in South Africa

Historically, South African TVET colleges and universities have followed differentiated development pathways, being managed by different government entities and targeted at different demographics and regions. The higher education landscape, consisting of universities and 'Polytechnique' universities (locally known as 'technikons'), was significantly restructured between 2003 and 2007, when the historically fractured and racially differentiated sector was overhauled into a more unified system through a series of 'mergers' intended to break the "structural embrace" (Hall, 2015; cf. Badat & Sayed, 2014) of the apartheid-era. Thirty-six institutions were merged into 23 universities and universities of technology, affecting more than 62% of the higher education population (Hall, 2015). On the vocational side, 150 public technical colleges administered by provincial authorities and/or Bantustan⁸ administrations prior to 1994 were merged into 50 Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in the period 1994-1998 (Jansen, 2004) spread over 364 campuses (Wyngaard & Kapp, 2004, p. 187), and later renamed as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

The outcomes of these mergers have remained contentious (see, e.g., Baloyi & Naidoo, 2016; Hall, 2015; Jansen, 2003; Mfusi, 2004; SASCO, 2009 for a sample of differing perspectives). In both types of institutions, the lingering effects of such restructuring is of interest when studying open learning principles and whether organisational arrangements support said principles. But in addition to these mergers, reconfigurations also occurred later at the administrative level. In 2009, the Department of Education was divided into the Department of Basic Education (in charge of public schools from Grades R-12) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (in charge of universities and certain training functions taken over from the Department of Labour) (Kgobe & Baatjes, 2014). In 2014, TVET colleges were also transferred from the remit of provincial education departments to the national DHET in Pretoria, thus centralising this sector across provinces (DHET, 2013, p. 12). As a result of these changes, previously separate post-school systems now sit awkwardly in relation to each other and face discernible differences in social justice challenges.

The institutions examined in this volume exist within these histories of educational privilege and disadvantage. Some, such as the University of Cape Town, enjoy historical and contemporary advantages economically and spatially. Others, including TVET college campuses established in rural areas formerly governed by Bantustan administrations under apartheid (e.g., some of the more remote campuses of Elangeni and Motheo Colleges), suffer plural forms of *disadvantage*, including historical under-development (especially regarding infrastructure), widely spaced campuses creating spatial barriers to institutional cohesion

⁸ The term 'Bantustan' was used as a pejorative to mock the apartheid government's 'separate but equal' system of balkanising Black land ownership and residence into ten homeland territories that effectively made up only 13% of the total of South Africa's land area. To indicate derision and resistance, these euphemistically named 'homelands' were termed 'Bantustans' by many who resisted the apartheid regime.

and synchronicity, as well as attracting and enrolling students of vulnerable socio-economic status.

Further, PSET institutions receive and amplify inequities from the basic education sector, and many of the ideals outlined in the OLPF such as recognition of prior learning (RPL) or student support are exacerbated by – yet indispensable to ameliorating – the prior education inequities that students bring to their post-school endeavours.

Key policies informing the PSET landscape

Most chapters in this book draw explicitly on the *Open Learning Policy Framework* (OLPF) for PSET (DHET, 2017), and the *White paper for post school education and training* (DHET, 2013a). The White Paper aspires to “a transformed post-school system” that seeks to “improve the economic, social and cultural life of its people . . . to bring about social justice, to overcome the legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, and to overcome inequity and injustice whatever its origins” (DHET, 2013a, p. 75).

In addition, various chapters draw on the *Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in TVET* (DHET, 2013b), *Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in Higher Education* (CHE, 2016), *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy Coordination Policy* (DHET, 2016), *Department of Higher Education and Training’s Position on Online Programme and Course Offerings* (DHET, 2017), *Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the PSET system* (DHET, 2018), and the *TVET Colleges’ 2020 Student Support Services Annual Plan* (DHET, 2020). While detailed policy analysis and critical policy study are not possible here, the chapters in this volume understand policy as a contingent, interpreted and political tool of the state, with differentiated reach, varied authority and often riddled with contradictions.

Open learning

What is construed as ‘open’, ‘opening’ or ‘openness’ in an educational context is specific to the international and national economic, socio-cultural and political fabric of society at a particular point in time. Broadly speaking, openness in educational contexts has historically exhibited two main trajectories: (1) *open learning* which focuses on the removal of barriers to learning in the formal context (Caliskan, 2012); and (2) *open education* which endeavours to provide access to education in informal and nonformal settings through open educational resources (OER) and open educational practices (OEP) (Conole & Brown, 2018). DHET’s notion of open learning is a rather complex amalgam of the older concept of open learning and the newer concept of open education.

The notion of open learning originated from the United Kingdom’s Open University’s (OU) conception of ‘open’ in the 1970s which was interpreted as prospective students not being subject to special “*entry requirements* [but] only exit standards” (Gourley & Lane, 2009, p. 57, emphasis added), thereby opening up learning to those who would not normally have been allowed access to traditional universities. Initially this type of open learning was conducted at a distance, first as paper-based correspondence courses, but later through online learning. Open learning in the OU context has sought to reduce barriers to entry, enable flexible learning in terms of time and place, provide learning support, construct

learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed and maintain strict quality assurance of materials and systems.

The open education movement (Conole & Brown, 2018) has in the past 20 years actively encouraged the opening up of education for all, which has been partly realised through the creation, adaptation and re-use of free and legally shareable open educational resources (d'Antoni, 2007), open textbooks (Feldstein et al., 2012), and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Rambe & Moeti, 2017) which are all inherently underpinned by OEP (Cronin & MacLaren, 2018).

Similarly to institutions such as the OU, DHET operates within the ambit of formal education and holds that:

Open learning ... is driven by a concern for social justice and therefore motivated by the need for redress, equity in access to opportunity, flexibility and choice, and by an equal concern for quality and real success in learning. (2017, p. 412)

The Open Learning Policy Framework

The OLPF works with a definition of 'open learning' from the *PSET White Paper* (DHET, 2014), which itself draws on the original *White Paper for Education and Training* (DoE, 1995) that was outlined by the government of national unity at the dawn of South African democracy. The definition of 'open learning' offered in the OLPF emphasises that it an 'approach' that seeks to remove barriers to 'access' and 'success' for students across the sector:

an approach which combines principles of learner centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that the learner can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems. (DHET, 2017, p. 363)

The OLPF includes terms that warrant scrutiny: terms like 'access', 'quality', 'support' and 'success' that are far from self-evident and may take on different meanings for different actors and contexts. In particular, 'success' is premised on 'access and quality', and 'quality'⁹ is then folded into 'meaningful access'; that is, the idea of 'access' is where the OLPF's theory of change is grounded. The definition of open learning in the OLPF points to a composite of ideals that might be categorised as quality standards or 'good pedagogy' (e.g., learner centredness, believing that students can succeed, student support, etc.), open and distance learning (ODL) (flexibilization, online and e-learning), assessment practices such as RPL and micro-credentials, and the use of OER as a cost-saving strategy (DHET, 2017).

As reflected in the chapters in this volume, there are broadly speaking three groups of 'open' in connection to *student learning*: (1) entry to those who would, under usual circumstances, not be admitted to a formal educational institution (e.g., recognition of prior

⁹ Biesta has argued elsewhere (2015) that the term 'quality' is a classic floating signifier in education policy, signalling everything to everyone, and hence nothing to anyone.

learning); (2) free or low cost of tuition and materials (e.g., OER and open textbooks); and (3) the inclusion of students' voices in the materials. With regard to *educators*, the concept of 'open' pertains to: (1) free access to OER, open access (OA) journal articles, open data and free images; (2) the legal re-use and adaptation of OER; (3) the legal re-distribution of OER, OA journals and lecture notes/presentations using free images and/or open data.

Additionally, the OLPF appropriates strategies from the open education movement and indicates that OER be used wherever possible and be curated on DHET's nascent National Open Learning System (NOLS). The OLPF also indicates that recognition for credit of prior learning experience should be provided for those successfully completing MOOCs or other certified online courses.

In order to make visible the ways in which open learning principles may or may not be understood, accepted or implemented in the PSET sector in South Africa, we have drawn upon the social justice theory of political philosopher Nancy Fraser.

Fraser's theory of social justice

Fraser understands social justice as participation in society as peers, what she refers to as 'parity of participation' (Fraser, 2005, p. 73). She conceives of 'participatory parity' both as an *outcome* where "all the relevant social actors ... participate as peers in social life" and a *process* in which procedural standards are followed "in fair and open processes of deliberation" (Fraser, 2005, p. 87). According to Fraser, both outcomes and processes can be socially unjust in three ways, which she terms: (1) economic maldistribution; (2) cultural misrecognition; and (3) political misrepresentation. It is, however, critical to note that economic inequalities, cultural inequities and political misrepresentations, while analytically distinct, are in practice enmeshed and, hence, always co-present and simultaneously in play. The analytical distinction assists in anticipating the tensions between different claims-making strategies and apprehending the overlaps as well as the gaps that would need to be addressed in practice (Fraser & Naples, 2004).

Economic maldistribution, redistribution and restructuring

With respect to economic injustice or *maldistribution*, Fraser explains that "people can be impeded from full participation by economic structures that deny them the resources they need in order to interact with others as peers" (2005, p. 73). Here the key financial inequality is that of the "class structure of society" (Fraser, 2005, p. 74) and the "economic disadvantage" (Fraser, 1995, p. 69) or "economic subordination" (1995, p. 73) that it engenders.

Connecting this to open learning principles, this implies that students in the PSET sector in South Africa may be impeded from full participation by, for example, the lack of access to geographically convenient campuses, unaffordable travelling costs, unaffordable registration fees, unaffordable tuition fees, expensive accommodation rentals, expensive textbooks, and in TVET colleges, insufficient workplace placement positions to complete their qualifications in time. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students shouldered additional economic burdens such as the expense of internet enabled devices and high data costs. These types of hurdles, following Fraser, indicate "distributive injustice or maldistribution" (2005, p. 73) and need to be addressed through economic redistribution or economic restructuring.

Fraser refers to economic *redistribution* as an “affirmative” change, where actions taken to address inequitable processes or outcomes provide ameliorative adjustments and advance “*re-formation rather than radical (getting to the root of what matters) trans-formation*” (Zipin, 2017, p. 68; italics in the original). Examples of open learning as an affirmative response, or what Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter prefer to call an “ameliorative intervention” (2018, p. 207), would include, for example, the availability of affordable full-time or part-time, in-person and/or online tuition, the use of free OER (e.g., open textbooks) and flexible submission sites and times for assessments.

Whereas economic *restructuring*, which is a “transformative” response, would directly address the “*root of what matters*” (Zipin, 2017, p. 68, italics in original), such as through fully state-funded PSET, supported by commerce and industry and state-sponsored open textbooks which could be customised by staff and students to better suit local settings. These types of transformative remedies would therefore directly aim at “correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative frameworks” (Fraser, 1997, as cited in Nilsson, 2008, p. 33) and encourage procedures that support the deliberation of the curriculum by those most affected, namely the staff, students and even local industry.

Cultural misrecognition, recognition and re-acculturation

In relation to cultural injustice, or ‘*misrecognition*’, Fraser points out that “people can also be prevented from interacting in terms of [participatory] parity by institutionalised hierarchies of cultural value that deny them the requisite standing” (2005, p. 73). Cultural inequities include all forms of discrimination that privilege some and disrespect, stigmatize and/or diminish others along, for example, gender, race, language, ability, nationality, religious and/or ethnic lines.

In terms of open learning, this means that PSET students may be deprived of participatory parity due to challenges faced by groups historically marginalised under colonial and then apartheid rule, the scars of which remain today in challenges faced by formally racially segregated PSET institutions. This manifests particularly with respect to the prevalence of Western-oriented epistemic perspectives and educational resources such as textbooks which ignore local knowledge and alienate or estrange students (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018). Moreover the language of teaching and learning, which is predominantly English, may unwittingly disadvantage other South African languages even while it provides possible access to potential international prospects. Likewise, students with disabilities continue to face hurdles in participating on an equal footing in the PSET sector.

Counteracting cultural inequality or misrecognition with ameliorative modifications or symbolic change would, for example, assist in valuing local knowledge and languages, as well as esteeming various cultural perspectives and interpretations. This type of ameliorative cultural *recognition* would, for example, involve students having educational materials translated into the language of their choice and for those with disabilities, not only having these mediated through various assistive technologies, but having administrative and academic support offered in sign language and experiencing the educational environment as welcoming and non judgemental.

As Lockett and Shay suggest, a “transformative approach would involve dismantling the power relations, social hierarchies and cultural hegemonies that currently underpin

the canons, the assumed norms and values of inherited curricula and setting up processes to reimagine more inclusive ways of participating in curriculum and pedagogic practices” (2017, p. 3). A fully transformative approach would involve what Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter (2018) refer to as “*re-acculturation*” which is seen as a process of automatic inclusion of marginalised groups and resolutely acknowledging and valuing other cultural perspectives (e.g., epistemic, ethnic, religious) and mainstreaming of a disability-friendly culture.

Political misrepresentation, reframing

In terms of political inequality, or “*misrepresentation*”, Fraser explains that this “tells us who is included in, and who is excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition” (2005, p. 75). Fraser distinguishes two levels of misrepresentation: (1) decision-making and (2) boundary setting.

The *decision-making aspect* is an issue when the “political decision rules wrongly deny some of the included the chance to participate fully, as peers” (Fraser, 2005, p. 76) and is what Fraser calls “*ordinary-political misrepresentation*” (Fraser, 2005, p. 76, italics in original). With respect to open learning principles in the PSET sector, denying student and staff input into economic matters (e.g., infrastructural and/or equipment requirements, financial arrangements for bursaries), cultural matters (e.g., curricula, institutional norms) and political matters (e.g., institutional governance, national policy) can be seen as ordinary-political misrepresentation.

The *boundary-setting aspect* is a “matter of social belonging” where the primary “injustice arises when the community’s boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its authorised contests over justice” (Fraser, 2005, p. 76). For example, in order for OER to be legally shared optimally, alternatives to the existing fully copyrighted laws need to operate at an international level, not only at a national one.

Entanglement of economic, cultural and political dimensions

Although analytically distinct and not reducible to one another, in reality these economic, cultural and political dimensions are intertwined or ‘imbricated’ (Fraser & Naples, 2004) with one another. Issues of economic class are entangled with one or more cultural differences including, but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, epistemic perspectives and identity, as well as with historical and current power and privilege. Understanding the root challenges to open learning analytically can assist in planning for or understanding the variable uptake of open learning.

Cases on open learning

The COOL research team at CILT invited 10 young South Africa researchers (with 70% comprising DHET’s target group) to research one or two case studies for the project. They were supported and mentored during the research and writing process by seven CILT academics. Significant focus was placed on researcher development activities in which the researchers were able to engage extensively with the academics and their peers. COOL

conducted nearly 70 60- and 90-minute long research related webinars, hosted a researcher reading group, provided six 3-hour slots for group writing and support (where researchers were invited to write their chapters and have intermittent discussions with a group of mentors), and four 90-minute engagements to help researchers prepare presentations on their work for the 2021 DHET Research Colloquium on “Open learning: Flexible and Blended Learning in Post-School Education and Training”.¹⁰

The 16 studies produced from the research are published both as booklets and as the chapters in this book. The book is structured according to five parts, each focusing on a different theme: Access, Pedagogy, Support for Success, Institutional Vision, and National Aspirations.

The first section, *Focus on Access*, comprises three cases supporting access to learning, through examining RPL, embracing alternative forms of student financial support, and enabling flexible learning opportunities. Barriers to accessing PSET education are often related to entry requirements and financial obstacles. Chapter 1, drawing on research undertaken with national experts as well as engagement with national RPL policies, asserts that while RPL policy at a national level is robust, inadequate national and institutional funding for the implementation of RPL, and the inherent complexity of RPL for access and/or credit, result in weak implementation at institutional level. Chapter 2 discusses a cluster of activities undertaken at the University of the Western Cape, including an annual alumni phonathon, a staff pledge campaign, corporate fundraising events, and the #NoStudentWillBeLeftBehind campaign, designed to respond, at an institutional level, to help financially precarious students and remediate barriers to access. Access to learning can often be improved through strengthening flexibility, as Goldfields TVET College demonstrates in Chapter 3, allowing students who have failed a course to repeat it via a flexible learning approach so that they can continue with their studies (though without NSFAS funding support).

The second section, *Focus on Pedagogy*, shares three chapters that describe digitally innovative approaches to pedagogy – examining an instance of blended learning, one of online learning, and another of online assessment. Chapter 4 draws on the experiences of Northlink TVET College in Cape Town to examine how an inclusive approach to blended learning can be understood through a social justice lens through considering stakeholder experiences before and during the pandemic. Turning next to the experiences of the Durban University of Technology (DUT), Chapter 5 explores how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated DUT’s engagement with online learning, discovering how economic inequalities and cultural inequities require the attention of national and institutional players respectively. Online assessment remains a substantial challenge for institutions. Chapter 6 investigates this through the experiences of students and staff from the Open Learning Unit at Tshwane North TVET College in relation to continuous online assessment. This chapter points strongly to the need for policy changes at a national level that currently hamper the opportunity for TVET colleges to make use of different modalities of assessment.

The third section, *Focus on Support for Success*, discusses four different interventions that respond to barriers to student success in four different institutions. Through exploring the experiences of a centralised Student Support Service unit at Elangeni TVET College, Chapter 7 highlights the need to take a multi-organisational social justice approach to supporting

¹⁰ <https://www.dhetresearchcolloquium.co.za/>

students, along various stages of the student journey. Similarly, Chapter 8, which looks at the work of Motheo TVET College in addressing the needs of students with disabilities (SWDs), recognises that educational institutions remain only one of many government entities, including municipalities and health services, which must adopt social justice approaches to create conducive learning conditions for SWDs. Chapters 9 and 10 consider the potential of OER adoption models and OER small grants, respectively, to respond to economic, cultural and political instances of injustice. Chapter 9, after examining a number of OER adoption models available online, recommends a coordinated, aggregate model, locating a range of responsibilities at national and institutional levels to optimise DHET's developing National Open Learning System (NOLS). Chapter 10 focuses on the impact of the provision of OER small grants, through an examination of two programmes at two Western Cape universities, noting that even relatively modest funding acts as an incentive for the creation, adaption and adoption of OER, and in so doing, results in the production of locally relevant, free and legally shareable resources.

The fourth section, *Focus on Institutional Vision*, offers three chapters which consider how three specific institutions respond to economic, cultural and political inequities through adopting a range of open learning interventions. Each institution is located at the confluence of particular contemporary factors and is simultaneously rooted in and shaped by particular historical trajectories. For example, the management practices of False Bay College, the focus of Chapter 11, viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, emerge as historically and contextually specific, and by no means a 'silver bullet' solution to leadership challenges experienced at other colleges and in the broader PSET landscape. Similarly, Chapter 12's exploration of the influence of leadership on the early adoption of e-learning at Gert Sibande TVET College suggests that visionary and socially just leadership practices contribute to increasing e-learning implementation. Chapter 13 explores instances of openness at the University of the Free State (UFS) through tracing the history of five long-term initiatives that individually and collectively work towards enacting the institution's vision of creating more enabling conditions for transformative shifts towards opening up education.

The final section of this book, *Focus on National Aspirations*, offers three cases that function at a national level to address issues of staff development and the structures that enable innovative approaches to credentialing. Chapters 14 and 15 examine specific interventions, supporting teaching staff in the TVET context. Chapter 14 explores the design and development over time of the Lecturer Support System (LSS) and what the findings suggest for how staff are imagined in professional developmental endeavours. Chapter 15 turns its attention to work integrated learning as a mechanism for strengthening lecturers' professional identities and, in so doing, to improve teaching and learning. Chapter 16, our final case, investigates work done on microcredentialing, both internationally and at the North-West University, demonstrating that this practice can address systemic inequities through recognising alternative accreditation mechanisms.

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