

PREFACE

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Universities South Africa (USA) is a grouping of the Vice-Chancellors of public universities (<http://www.hesa.org.za/>)¹. Since 2005, the organisation has provided leadership and an authoritative voice to the newly transformed public university sector after the mergers. In addition to the HESA Board, comprising Vice-Chancellors, the organisation has set up structures to anticipate debate, and influence and respond to policies, trends and complex challenges that affect higher education nationally and internationally. The Teaching and Learning Strategy Group (TLSG), led by a Vice-Chancellor, is one of those structures. The TLSG harnesses sectoral expertise to carry out its work. It also, from time to time, appoints task teams to work on particular themes.

One of the focus areas for the TLSG for 2014 was learning with technology. A great deal of hype surrounds technology that, combined with the speed of change, complicates a complex phenomenon to the extent that it can become difficult to make decisions about the best technology choices for South Africa in general and each institution in particular, given the historical legacy of material conditions at each university. When finances and other resources are constrained, universities need to decide on the best investment in technology to promote student learning in their mainstream qualifications and for their strategic goals. As universities, the guiding principle must be student learning and not technology as such. Theories of learning become a map for how the student engages with technology. The objective of the study is to enable Vice-Chancellors to take the document to the executive leadership at their universities and discuss a change management strategy on the integration of education technologies into their universities, given their educational mission and their individual contexts, enablers and constraints.

The TLSG therefore decided to bring together experts to write position pieces on a number of issues to serve as input for Vice-Chancellors to guide decision-making at their institutions. These experts had to:

- be working in the field of educational technology in South Africa as academic, academic development or support staff;
- have a national reputation for the area of expertise; and
- be knowledgeable about international trends, but able to contextualise them for South Africa.

It is understood that the publication would need frequent updating given the dynamic nature of technological development.

It is intended that each piece will adopt a critical, theoretical stance that engages with the matter of learning, while being clear and simple; give a clear explanation of the technology and its affordances; discuss the current trends internationally and their applications in different South African contexts; broadly outline costs of licensing, infrastructure and personnel; and provide resources for further reading. However, some pieces are of a more theoretical nature to provide pedagogical insights into the use of technology in education and map discourses around technology-enabled approaches to learning.

The TLSG approved the publication of the document under a Creative Commons licence as an open educational resource for use by other institutions. It also agreed to the writers being allowed to expand the publication into a research publication.

Educational technology is a broad focus at all levels of education in South Africa. For the university sector, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) provide strategy and policy.

The DHET's publication, *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training – building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system* (DHET 2013), starts with an emphasis on social justice. Section 7 deals with 'Opening learning through diverse modes of provision' and section 7.4 deals with 'Equitable access to appropriate technology'. The publication is cited in various contributions to this volume. The DHET has promised to 'elaborate a concrete development plan for the period up to 2030' (DHET 2013:7).

The CHE has focused on the quality imperatives around burgeoning online technologies used for distance provision and, in 2014, launched its publication *Distance higher education programmes in a digital era: Good practice guide* (CHE 2014). A focus on the quality of teaching with technology and on its impact on students' experience and success is an approach supported by the TLSG.

This publication deals with clusters of issues:

Contexts

Vivienne Bozalek and Dick Ng'ambi deliberate on learning with technology in the South African context and the reasons why it is so important to enhance the access and skills of students from disadvantaged backgrounds possibly entering universities where, for historical reasons, infrastructure is not optimal.

¹ This URL will change to accommodate the change of name of the organisation from Higher Education South Africa to Universities South Africa.

Teaching approach/ model

A number of articles deal with this theme from different perspectives:

Alan Amory discusses some models to support learning and teaching with technology. A team comprising Antoinette van der Merwe, Vivienne Bozalek, Eunice Ivala, Lynette Nagel, Marí Peté and Cassim Vanker explore the concept of blended learning.

Distance education has played a significant role in higher education in South Africa and Maria Madiopé and Devan Govender go into supporting technologies for open distance learning (ODL), focusing mainly on the University of South Africa (Unisa), but also acknowledging that many other South African universities offer forms of distance education as well. Underpinning the ability to teach or learn with technology are digital literacies, which Cheryl Brown and Tabisa Mayisela discuss.

Just as learning to teach is important, so is professional development for teaching with technology. Detken Scheepers gives pointers on this topic.

Openness

The concept of open education is an altruistic one: creating and sharing objects or courses with people and higher education institutions that might not have the capacity to produce such resources on their own. Open educational resources (OERs) are considered by Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams and Glenda Cox. As an extension of the OER concept, the notion of massive open online courses (MOOCs) has arisen, and Laura Czerniewicz, Andrew Deacon, Mary-Anne Fife, Janet Small and Sukaina Walji discuss the rise and implications of MOOCs for education.

Devices as 'windows on the network'

We did not start our review with technology. Planning a curriculum involves focusing first on outcomes, content and assessment and then on the technologies that will help achieve the outcomes, that will best support student learning and the creation of more self-directed learners. However, Cheryl Brown and Nicola Pallitt discuss personal mobile devices (PMDs) and laptops as learning tools.

Trends

A number of articles survey trends in learning with technology. Daniela Gachago and Eunice Ivala explore Web 2.0 and social media: essential tools for contemporary teaching and learning; Nicola Pallitt, Sonja Strydom and Eunice Ivala write about e-portfolios; and Dennis Kriel writes on gamification. Working online allows for easy tracking of student activity within a module, and learning analytics (LA) is explored by Dolf Jordaan. However, we need to be aware of ethical considerations in using student data, as Paul Prinsloo and Michael Rowe warn.

References

Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2014). *Distance higher education programmes in a digital era: good practice guide*. Pretoria: CHE.

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2013). *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training – building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system*. Pretoria: DHET.