

Editorial

Special issue: ‘Ethics, care and quality in educational development’

This special issue draws on the contributions from the 2016 International Consortium of Educational Development Conference (ICED) hosted for the very first time on African soil. The Higher Education Learning Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) co-hosted this conference in Cape Town, South Africa, with the theme, ‘Ethics, care and quality in educational development’. The contributions to this special issue of CRiSTaL focus on the conference subthemes that explore various aspects of our practice through the lenses of ethics, care and quality enhancement. As much as the contributions tackled these conference themes, the authors enrich this edition with articles that are well researched and with a focus on innovative and reflective as well as practice-based focused approaches to teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning has particular responsibilities with regard to ethics, care and quality enhancement in higher education because of the nature of its practice and the benefits it seeks to take to faculty and students. Academics and educational developers, in faculties and in teaching and learning centres, have encountered many challenges around ethics, care and quality in the daily practice of their profession. Institutions have commonly understood ethics, care and quality as separate functions, rather than as integrated practice, and have tended to delegate these responsibilities to research ethics committees, Human Resource departments (custodians of institutional codes of conduct), or to Quality Managers. Contributions to this special issue by Pool and Reitsma (South Africa) about ethics and the scholarship of teaching and learning, and Santhanam, Ashford-Rowe and Murphy (Australia) about student surveys to monitor whether universities are meeting their social good missions, suggest how activities involving ethics, care and quality can be undertaken across these functions, rather than as they at present, due to bureaucratic and managerial reasons, administered – if not policed – by different offices. Colleagues working in these offices tend to have the dispositions of ‘bounded professionals’ – those who see themselves as working ‘within clear structured boundaries’ (Whitchurch, 2013: 8). If we are serious about marrying concerns with ethics, care and quality, we need to work across boundaries, and in collaboration with staff from various offices and committees, alongside academics.

Ethics, care and quality have global and local dimensions. The question then arises, whether ethical practice in one university could be unacceptable in another. The value of international conversations about these themes, is that one can at least begin the conversation, about whether these concerns are ‘universal’, in that they are assumed to be the same in all settings, or whether they might be ‘global’ but with contextual or local dimensions at the same time, a distinction that Santos (2014) draws to our attention. In order for this question to be addressed more forthrightly, we submit that researchers and academics should foreground the social class and geo-political perspectives from which they are working and producing their findings, than is currently the case.

The contributions reflect how heterogeneous both ICED and HELTASA are as organisations, in terms of epistemology and ontology. The field of educational development is a ‘broad church’, with developers espousing different ideologies and attitudes towards the higher education establishment (Leibowitz, 2014). They also have different views of what constitutes ‘development’. Here the contributions by Zembylas (Cyprus) and Dalglish (Japan) espouse a more critical and resistant stance towards higher education worldwide, and its neo-liberal underpinnings. Zembylas argues that notions of ‘educational development’ should be infused with demands for ethical and political significance. Dalglish takes issue with teaching and learning regimes, and how in current neo-liberal times teaching approaches that encourage an engaged, rather than passive student, is required. Engaged teaching is thus the ‘flavour of the month’, as it were. Rather, he maintains, teaching and learning regimes call for an ethical relation with the student.

The contributions of Dahl-Michelsen and Groven (Norway), and Stewart (United States of America) reflect what are more typically regarded as teacher-as-researcher, research on teaching in the disciplines, or the scholarship of teaching and learning. Writing about physiotherapy, Dahl-Michelsen and Groven argue that the curriculum must encourage ethical sensibility as well as critical reflection. Stewart maintains that during the era of the Trump presidency, educating students requires a different approach, one in which the scholarly and the emotional are merged. She maintains that digital storytelling is a useful means to advance this.

Thus whilst all the contributions explore the relationship between aspects of ethics, care and quality, they do so from different ideological perspectives, and are located in different geographical – and probably different geo-political - locations: North America, Europe, Africa and Australasia. This is the strength of international organisations such as ICED as a platform for intercontinental sharing and dialogue. HELTASA is proud to have been associated with this first ICED conference to have been hosted in the global South. It would be useful, to add value to the heterogeneity of educational development organisations, if the potential and challenges of geo-political locations in the global North or South, and of their relationships, could be explored more deeply in relation to ethics, care and quality.

Brenda Leibowitz and Amanda Hlengwa

Guest editors

References

- Leibowitz, B. 2014. Reflections on academic development: What is in a name? *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19(4): 357 – 360.
- Santos, B de Sousa. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
- Whitchurch, C. 2013. *Reconstructing Identities in Higher Education: The rise of third space professionals*. London: Routledge.



This publication is covered by a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. For further information please see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.