

Book Review

Dison, L., Prozesky, M., Ferreira, A., Essien, A. & Giorza, T. 2024. *Pedagogic Innovation Beyond Disruption*. Stellenbosch: SUNPress.
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COVID-19's Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was a catalytic moment for academics in Higher Education (Hodges et al., 2020). This idea is explored across five interrelated themes in the book titled '*Pedagogic Innovation Beyond Disruption*'. In my role as an Educational Technology Project lead, with the experience of helping academics teach with educational technologies before, during and post ERT, I was reassured by the book that while initially a crisis response, ERT exposed fundamental and underlying issues affecting student learning. In other words, what were previously underlying issues affecting teaching and learning became apparent during ERT. In this book, the authors contend that ERT provided a unique opportunity for academics and HE institutions to critically reflect on pedagogical practices. In most cases, as discussed within each theme, the authors share and demonstrate how they responded to ERT as academics. The reflections shared in this book remain relevant across time as they provide insights into how pedagogic innovation remains central to effective teaching. Below, I highlighted and discussed the main insights from each theme.

Care, compassion, and community in Emergency Remote Teaching

The theme of care, compassion, and community in ERT foregrounded that the pandemic was a period of survival. For instance, Brenner, Bernberg, Duncan, Dison, Boterere, du Preez, Hart, Hlophe, Mkhize, Molongoana, Phakela, Reid, Valley, and Wittstock (Chapter 1) posit that the period from 2020 to 2021 was focused on survival and connecting with students. This led academics in disciplines that are highly practical, such as Film, Visual and Performing Arts and Clinical Training, to develop a 'community of practice' to support student learning despite the lack of face-to-face interactions. This community-centred approach provided critical emotional and pedagogical support to students, highlighting the development of pedagogic resilience in the face of significant challenges affecting teaching and learning. Academics had to be innovative, as demonstrated by Coutts (Chapter 2), and utilise strategies like peer learning through the LMS, using resources like YouTube videos and written case studies to provide students with practical examples of certain disciplinary concepts when they could not meet face-to-face to conduct physical practicals. In my view, this leveraging of social resources to help students make connections between theory and practice through educational technologies is key to enhance epistemological access.

Coutts (Chapter 2) highlights how shifting pedagogies to online platforms was a daunting task for some academics particularly those who were teaching clinical skills in speech-language



pathology. It was difficult to reproduce on digital platforms the social interactions necessary for students to gain a comprehensive understanding or develop clinical skills without face-to-face interaction. Similarly to my forthcoming PhD research on academics' decision-making processes, most academics in the Science faculty found translating hands-on lab work to online platforms difficult and labour-intensive during ERT. This challenge was critical for some faculties i.e. Pharmacy that they were granted an exemption to resume in-person practicals during the pandemic.

While the first segment of ERT was on survival, the following theme demonstrates how some academics across HE institutions reconsidered their pedagogies to be deliberate in helping students engage with the curriculum during ERT.

Discovering reflexivity at the heart of pedagogy

The second theme, tackled by Ndlovu (Chapter 3), Vuuren, Khutsoane & Gitelson (Chapter 4), and Matshedisho (Chapter 5) addresses the issues of care and how academics utilised lessons learnt during ERT to adapt their teaching strategies. The key insight in this theme is that the authors demonstrate that a pedagogy of care is not just a personal quality but a pedagogical strategy that needs to be systematically observed, documented, and researched to understand its full potential in a digital context. It became apparent to some academics that creating a safe and trusting environment was essential for genuine critical reflection to occur. This was evidenced by pedagogic approaches of some academics who developed deliberate teaching strategies during ERT. To develop deliberate pedagogic strategies, Matshedisho (Chapter 5) alluded to Shulman's 'signature pedagogy' as a powerful tool to make sense of one's own professional distress during a crisis. I agree with the author that developing signature pedagogies would help academics move from a state of anxious and reactive teaching to a more intentional and philosophically grounded praxis. In my experience, colleagues who had already adopted the LMS for teaching before ERT were able to pivot their pedagogic strategies to the LMS relatively well, as they had the experience to build on. It is through the development of teaching strategies based on previous experiences that the mentioned signature pedagogies emerge, which directly translate to deliberate, informed, and calculated strategies to enhance student learning experiences.

In this vein, the third theme below discusses how the authors in their role as academics shifted dialogue to writing through online platforms.

Online dialogue through writing

The absence of in-person seminars made it difficult for some students to negotiate meaning through dialogue during ERT, especially in writing-intensive courses as exemplified by Joffe, Ngwatle and Ngwenya (Chapter 6) where dialogue is central to learning. Gerrand and Pillay (Chapter 7) confirmed that the process of 'talking back what you have written' is a critical part of learning, and they find that a variety of authentic, context-driven writing tasks can help to replicate this dynamic in an online setting when teaching writing-intensive courses, i.e. social

work education. As a result, academics in social work education utilised 'writing fellows' to support first-year students to learn through each other in a digital environment or on the LMS. On the other hand, Mupawose and Masuku (Chapter 8) demonstrated that their clinical training is a hands-on field, and they had to devise strategies, such as writing activities including weekly paragraphs, peer feedback, and debriefing sessions, to support student learning. Similarly, in my experience of helping academics teach with the LMS as a member of an EdTech team, some colleagues utilise the LMS workshop tool to facilitate peer learning, as was the case with my colleague who taught Politics in an extended curriculum program. Nevertheless, the innovation demonstrated by colleagues in Chapter 8 highlights the importance of creating opportunities for peer learning. These opportunities can take the form of social resources, i.e., social interactions with knowledgeable others or peers, as emphasised by neo-Vygotsky scholars, including Daniels (2008) and Edwards (2015).

Possibilities for critical dialogic pedagogies

Andrews (Chapter 9), Godsell (Chapter 10), and Ferreira (Chapter 11) demonstrate that it is difficult but possible to foster critical dialogues through online teaching. The key insight is that while simple discussion forums can encourage dialogue, they also present challenges, such as students being less engaged or reluctant to discuss sensitive topics due to the public nature of the digital platforms. I concur with the authors; colleagues at my institution alluded to how low levels of confidence inhibit some students' articulation of opinions on public platforms such as forums. In my view, low levels of confidence have been underlying students' engagements with academics and peers. This theme underscored that ERT exposed what used to be underlying issues affecting student learning. For example, the unequal uptake of opportunities to communicate on the LMS forums highlighted the existing low levels of confidence that have been affecting the learning experiences of some students. By recognising how prior socialisation shapes diverse student preferences, academics can design more inclusive and effective communication strategies.

In Chapter 10, Godsell discusses how the inability to include students' voices in her podcasts made them 'fundamentally anti-dialogic.' With this awareness, she contended that face-to-face dialogues are essential for truly transformative learning, suggesting that podcasts can be used to supplement the dialogues. Likewise, Ferreira (Chapter 11) argues that even seemingly simple tools, such as narrated PowerPoint videos, can be designed to promote the critical dialogue necessary for active learning. The key insight is that by leveraging multimodal affordances, such as visual design, chunking or content breakdown, and colour to organise information, academics can effectively model critical reading and analysis even through basic educational technologies. This insight highlights the importance of selecting and sharing content or learning activities not just as information and activities, but also deliberately considering the sequence and visual appearance to enhance student learning experiences.

The following theme of the book highlights the implications of the above-discussed insights, pointing out considerations for how academics can continue to utilise their ERT experiences to shape their post-ERT teaching strategies.

Beyond the here and now

Prozesky, Ferreira, Dison, Giorza and Essien (Chapter 12) conclude with a crucial insight that while a 'pedagogy of care' is important, it must not be overly personalised, as this can obscure structural inequalities and lead to teacher burnout. They advocate for ongoing 'critical dialogic pedagogy' and collaboration among academics, with students, academic developers, and HE institutions to build agency and foster the critical adoption of educational technologies. The book emphasised the importance of understanding the implications of various teaching initiatives and strategically deciding when and how to utilise educational technologies (e.g., the LMS), as well as knowing when and how to rely on essential face-to-face interactions. This experience with ERT encouraged academics to consistently evaluate the impact of their teaching strategies and consider the students' learning circumstances. Overall, this book offers a vital framework for navigating the shifting landscape of HE, particularly amidst the rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence. While rooted in the lessons of ERT, its insights transcend that specific period to demonstrate how continuous pedagogical innovation serves as the bedrock of effective teaching, regardless of the disruptions and issues affecting teaching and learning experiences in the post-pandemic arena.

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