Editorial

As the managing editor and editor-in-chief of the journal *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* (*CRiSTaL*), we have, for some time, been eager to get the editorial board together to engage with the concept of 'critical', since, for us, it is such a central focus for the journal. Because the notion of criticality means different things to different people, we noticed that as editors, we sometimes struggle to share our own understanding of criticality both with each other and with the authors who submit articles to us. We thus decided to send out a call for papers for a special issue on criticality where we - as editorial team - would have an opportunity to unpack our understandings of criticality within our fields and disciplines. This special issue includes papers from some of the editorial board members who responded to this call.

As the managing editor and editor-in-chief, we are often sent manuscripts from authors whose work on first perusal we have to reject because there is no indication of criticality which is required from submissions to the journal.

On our website the focus of the journal is described in the following way:

The journal aims to provide a stimulating and challenging forum for contributors to theorise, trouble, reconfigure and re-imagine higher education teaching and learning practice. We promote an understanding of knowledge creation that is situated, which challenges hegemonic thought, and is sensitive to intersecting positionalities, histories and inequalities. We encourage work that moves beyond boundaries, such as methodology, discipline or location. We invite authors to be creative, take risks, think "otherwise". Contributions should be framed by a sensibility towards social justice.

From our perspective, many aspects of this focus hold clues for what we might be looking for with regard to *criticality* for the journal - words such as 'stimulating' and 'challenging' come from such critical perspectives. To 'theorise, trouble, reconfigure and re-imagine higher education teaching and learning' would be really difficult to do without some form of criticality about what is currently on offer in higher education pedagogies. Reconfiguring and re-imagining teaching and learning in higher education would first require troubling hegemonic discourses including practices which are currently popular in the field.

The encouragement to situate knowledges, comes from Donna Haraway's essay on situated knowledges, where she criticised the impartiality of universalised 'view from above, from nowhere' (1998: 589), which under the guise of neutrality actually portrays the perspective of a white, eurocentric, unencumbered, heteronormative, neurotypical individual male author. She refers to this as 'the god trick 'enacting a conquering gaze from nowhere' (1988: 581)'. Criticality from a situated knowledges point of view would involve writing from an ethical and political sensibility which is embodied and accountable to what matters. Careful attention needs to be paid to power relations in the writing process and in the creation of knowledge. An

acknowledgment of the hauntologies of colonial histories, the complexity of positionalities, and different types of inequalities would be important for engaging in a critical practice.

Moving beyond disciplinary boundaries might also bring fresh perspectives for writing about higher education pedagogies. Using diffractive reading where texts, theories, ideas, or oeuvres are read through rather than against each other, in order to produce new understandings and insights into an issue. Even journals which do not require criticality are generally looking for contributions which offer something novel to the body of literature. It is thinking-with the entanglement of differences - across discipline, theory, location, which creates opportunities for new ideas and perspectives to come into being.

However, it also involves more than just troubling but engaging in the creative work of reconfiguring teaching and learning or pedagogy in higher education - as Deleuze and Guattari point out: 'Those who criticize without creating … are the plague of philosophy' (1994:28). Creativity is therefore an important component in taking criticality further in imagination and practice. The offer to prospective authors by the editors of the journal 'to be creative, take risks, think "otherwise"' is a genuine invitation to engage in new forms expressing themselves in their manuscripts, such as using multimodal formats, but also challenging the traditional paper structure or format. The journal provides a space to use videos, drawings, photographs, as well as alternative forms of writing. It helps that the journal is an online one, as this makes it more possible to incorporate such forms of multimodality.

As editors, we also consider a commitment towards social justice to be important for a critical perspective, as with social justice comes a discernment for what matters in teaching and learning in higher education, and why it matters.

Our editors' contributions in this special issue show the richness of possible engagements with and understandings of critique and criticality from South Africa, but also the United Kingdom and Latin America.

Bozalek and **Romano** in their paper "Immanent critique and diffractive reading" take a feminist new materialist or posthuman approach to critique and criticality. They argue that conventional views of critique are influenced by unexpressed assumptions that what is needed is an authoritative expert, who, from a position of superiority and distance, diagnoses and pronounces on the inadequacies of the text. Consequently, critique is frequently experienced by authors who receive it as epistemologically damaging, where their ideas are insufficiently engaged with, dismissed out of hand, and judged as irrelevant or outmoded. This article explores more generative approaches to critique and criticality, such as immanent critique and diffractive methodologies. They suggest that in order for immanent critique and diffractive methodologies to be made possible, sensibilities such as attentiveness, response-ability, accountability, generosity and curiosity are necessary. The final section of the paper uses these sensibilities examine how these can be put to work for an immanent and diffractive criticality and critique in academic practices of reviewing, writing, reading, pedagogy and conferencing. These academic practices are provided as some instances of how to do academia differently which could be helpful for readers, authors, reviewers, and editors of this and other journals.

Similarly, **Taylor** and her colleagues **Cranham, Hewlett** and **Hogarth** in their paper "Towards a more capacious, kindly and caring criticality: Some possibilities" share with readers how the words criticality, critical and critique can often summon up painful, exposing and difficult experiences. In a higher education system shaped by hierarchical cultures, abuses of power, performative metrics, and competitiveness, many of us are often positioned as (and internalise a sense of ourselves as) lacking. This imputed sense of 'lack' begins early in our educational careers and its affective intensity often stays with us. As PhD students, we are required to subject ourselves to critique in order to pass confirmation processes; as article authors, our work stands or falls at the critical hands of journal reviewers and editors who, as gatekeepers, decide which of us is 'accepted' or 'rejected'. The authors of the paper write as four members of the larger *Get Up and Move!* Collective, using the special issue call from CriSTaL to explore criticality, critical, critique, to revisit their own contested entanglements in/with criticality in higher education. The authors deploy the methodological approaches of compositing and composting to ponder the inimical conditions, negative behaviours, and ill-judged peer review comments that give rise to damaging modes of critique. From their work in the Collective, they consider what a more capacious, kindly and caring criticality might look, feel and be like. The article ends with *A Post-Critical Manifesto for Ethical-Relational-Creative Reviewing*, which outlines a praxis for doing criticality differently.

Agherdien's article "Engaging criticality and care' continue the concern around Joan Tronto's ethics of care by providing an account of one higher education teacher's views on the notions of criticality and critique within the context of continuous professional learning spaces for academics and in which the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is central. She presents an account of enacting SoTL practices through criticality and (with) care. Included is an account of SoTL engagements with academics, a process that takes time, courage, patience, and hope. She argues that withholding critical care – which includes attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness - is part of injustice. Hence, contestation, criticality, and critique with care must remain key SoTL activities. A twin argument is that (self) criticality is a precursor to critiquing others. The article concludes with implications of enacting criticality with care, in SoTL and beyond.

Nomdo's paper "Unpacking the notion of 'criticality' in liberatory praxis: A critical pedagogy perspective" is informed by the field of socially just pedagogies. Moving away from a focus on the academic, the paper employs a critical pedagogy perspective grounded in a transformative and liberatory praxis. The paper discusses why the notion of *criticality* forms a fundamental part of how we should be engaging in the classroom space to challenge systems of dominance and to promote transformative learning. The author focuses on a particular orientation of the term within critical pedagogy. The argument presented here is that the application of *criticality* ushers in a *humanising classroom pedagogy* that facilitates the development of dialogic relationships which centers student agency and promotes critical social consciousness. This research draws on qualitative data extracted from two courses, which deal with concepts of black student identity, borders, and migration. A qualitative case study

methodology is employed. A critically reflective pedagogical gaze is adopted to examine the ways in which criticality has been embedded in these courses and the impact thereof on perceptions of social justice and transformation when considered within a historically white South African university context. The author shows how the notion of criticality, when embedded in dialogic praxis, impacts the development of students' agency, and helps promote critical awareness of creating a socially just society. This understanding of criticality also highlights teachers' responsibilities for being agents of change through creating mutually constitutive ways of teaching and learning.

Guzman-Valenzuala and **Chiappa's** paper "Critical thinking in LATAM" continues in the same vein as Nomdo's in promoting a critical pedagogy approach to specifically Critical Thinking (CT). It does this by challenging the Western notion of CT in higher education (HE) - conceived as a higher-order thinking skill concerned with (i) whether it constitutes a general skill or specific to individual disciplines, and (ii) whether it is context-neutral or context-specific. Through a systematic literature review of articles published in the last decade and a content analysis of 32 articles published between 2020 and 2022, this article maps the scholarship on CT in HE in Latin America (LATAM). Findings point to a local character of the research on CT in LATAM that heavily relies on cognitive psychology traditions. It is proposed that the scholarship on CT in LATAM is characterised by *an epistemic disjuncture*. Theoretically, this scholarship favours theories produced in the Global North overshadowing well-recognised traditions of critical pedagogies and Freirian ideas in the Latin American region. And, methodologically, there is a disproportionate use of instruments to measure CT that were produced in the Global North and that hardly acknowledges the cultural limitations of such instruments. The authors conclude that research on CT in the region is missing an opportunity to develop powerful features framed by critical pedagogies that are especially fitting for LATAM's geo-historic context where Freire's ideas have a long-standing tradition.

Winberg, Garraway and **Engel-Hills'** paper "Critical reflection in professional education and research: a conceptual paper" shifts the gaze to universities of technology and their particular place in South African HE. The paper addresses potential authors in technical, vocational, and professional higher education who would like to publish their educational research studies in *CRiSTaL*. The roots of universities of technology can be traced back to technical colleges, which required compliance with industry standards and the rule of labour markets. Universities of technology thus entered the university space largely without an established critical tradition in teaching, learning, and research. This issue is important as universities of technology in South Africa are increasingly taking on the mantle of professional education, particularly in the fields of health, engineering, and applied sciences. In this paper, the authors discuss examples of published educational research that critique some of the 'taken-for-granted' ideas that have shaped the practices and aspirations of universities of technologies. The examples show that by judiciously drawing on traditions of critical reflective practice, and by bringing new ideas, concepts, and theories into educational research studies, further critical concepts can evolve. These new critical concepts will be of interest to the readers (and reviewers) of *CRiSTaL*, but more

importantly could inspire universities of technology to reaffirm their connection to practise and begin to create a critical space for their own scholarly – and critical – identities.

Finally, **Gachago, Pallitt** and **Agherdien**, in conversation with other editorial board members, reflect on what criticality might mean in the field of Educational Technology research. Based on their experiences with overseeing the review process and reviewing papers for CriSTaL, they share what they look for in critical EdTech papers, namely recognising the established field of critical EdTech research and joining this conversation, building on existing topics and offering novel ideas, encouraging nuance and criticality, employing rich methodological approaches, recognising context and positionality, and linking theory to practise. Using six articles recently published in CriSTaL they show examples of how these concerns are applied in practice.

As editor-in-chief and managing editor of CRiSTaL, we are excited that this special issue of the editorial board members' ruminations on criticality and critique will be published. We hope that we have opened up a space grappling with these notions and that the readers and future authors who submit to the journal might have a better idea of some of the ways that criticality has been applied to teaching and learning in higher education. We also hope that this special issue encourages ways of thinking otherwise, of experimentation and play from which readers and future authors may get some inspiration. We are committed to an affirming and developmental approach to scholarly work, including reviewing, and issue an invitation to future authors to take advantage of the space we are aiming to create with our journal 'to do things differently'.

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