

Proposal – HELTASA 2021

Critical Dialogue

What does it mean to critically engage with epistemic access?

Facilitator: Prof Daniela Gachago

Participants: Drs Mlamuli Hlatshwayo, Logan Govender and Zahraa McDonald

Abstract

Participants will engage in a dialogue format with each other and others about the manner in which we might think about epistemic access. Introductory remarks will be made around two topics; **‘The raptures in our rainbow nation: Reflections on teaching and learning practices in the time of #RhodesMustFall’** and **‘A social-justice informed approach to Epistemic Access in Higher Education: Student agency or Institutional structures’**.

With the increasing demand for higher education, particularly in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution and the decolonization movement, student participation, access, retention and success, have become critical areas of concern in both government and academia in South Africa. With the provision of free higher education for students in need of financial support in South Africa, has the question of formal access has been significantly addressed and is it a question of epistemic access within a framework of epistemic justice that continues to pose challenges?

In other words, the dialogue will engage with whether there is a need for South African higher education to re-conceptualize the theoretical understanding of “access” to higher education from contemporary understandings that position academics as ultimately responsible for enabling access to the “knowledge goods” of the university to students. Also, how would the adoption of a classical understanding of epistemological access enable progressive engagements between academics and students in both having respect for and a critical understanding of the different disciplines and knowledge in higher education.

Perhaps by re-turning to Morrow's classical conception of epistemological access we will not only be able to begin to make the necessary "repairs" to the rainbow nation but will also be able to, as academics better respond to the progressive and innovative calls in teaching and learning that contemporary South African higher education demands of us.

The critical dialogue begin with the participants, draw in the audience, move to breakout rooms and come back to the main room to collectively harvest any insightful moments.