



Curriculum studies scholarship in the context of contemporary world crises

Shan Simmonds,¹  Suriamurthee Maistry² 

¹*Education for Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, North-West, South Africa*

²*School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

Corresponding editor, email: shan.simmonds@nwu.ac.za

Geopolitical conflicts have been a constant feature of human history. The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are two contemporary events that have gripped the attention of the world for various reasons, despite the existence of at least ten other major conflict zones where human atrocities and ensuing ecological degradation and devastation are evident. The subtext is that hierarchy exists even in the world of conflicts.

Globally, decades of war have left people traumatised, with dislocated refugees deprived of basic rights, and adversely affecting the cognitive development of young children (Hazer & Gredebäck 2023) who are denied the opportunity to attend school. Intense, perpetual military conflict has resulted in systemic scholasticide (Giroux, 2024; Dader et al., 2024), the destruction of educational infrastructure and the disruption of education systems, often with oblitative effects (Buheji & Buheji, 2024; Alawadhi, 2024).

This special issue raises the question as to the role of the world's academic community in the face of such crises, with a particular provocation to teacher education and curriculum scholars.

In the lead article of this special edition, Steven Friedman sets the scene for the understanding of international and national crises, arguing that democracy is on the decline and under pressure in major Western countries, where democratic values have been the hallmark of such societies. He notes that Western governments' uncritical support for the Israeli government's actions against the Palestinians and their rights to freedom and democracy. He laments the demise of a fair and just international order and cautions

about the crisis conditions that such disarray has caused.

Shifting the gaze to epistemology, Seehawer engages with discourses on integrating indigenous and Euro-Western knowledge systems in the curriculum. She argues for a holistic rather than tokenistic integration – one that re-quires examining epistemological assumptions and revisiting basic questions such as why, what, and how to integrate indigenous knowing. This requires (re-)installing Ubuntu as an overarching rationale for integrating knowledge systems. The need to decolonise in terms of digital transformation is raised by Hoosen and co-authors. They argue for the need to decolonise artificial intelligence in response to technological crises in terms of ethical use, cultural relevance, and epistemic consequences. As part of a Pan-African academic collaboration that critically examines AI from a decolonial perspective, the article focuses on multilingualism, assessment, and pragmatic application in universities. The need for foregrounding a uniquely African, multilingual, and decolonial approach to AI in higher education calls for sociocultural embeddedness of AI and innovation that is ethically grounded and locally relevant. Yet another perspective on technology is presented in an article that focuses on empirically informed responses to the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolutions and beyond. Khoza reports on a study of twenty research supervisors as they navigate the challenges and opportunities that present with technology-enhanced user interfaces in the research supervision enterprise. Drawing on a rich pragmatist approach, using a range of data production instruments, he argues for what is described as a semi-structured supervision

curriculum that might better respond to crises presented by technological innovation.

Besides responding to the crises of Western forms of knowledge and rapidly advancing technologies, Venter urges deep thinking on the aftermath of colonial violence and the corresponding scholasticide. She alludes to how practitioners in education in South Africa and worldwide metaphorically suffer educational wounds. Using artmaking, she believes, can enable a deepened awareness of the particular wounds we carry. Her article emphasises the necessity to open up discussions regarding our pedagogical beliefs and what such beliefs can make possible for curriculum and education practice in teaching and research. Recognising that curriculum is deeply entangled with the environment and sustainability, Masemene and Mahlomaholo turn attention to ecological crises. These authors remind us that as global citizens, we are confronted with the urgent task of rethinking our approaches to sustainability, aiming to cultivate an inclusive and broad-minded perspective that embraces collective responsibility. By adopting Global Citizenship Education as an approach to greening the TVET colleges' curriculum, green skills content and programs have been integrated to increase sustainability and foster transformation.

Looking into past crises/pandemics to learn for the future, Ramaila and Dhurumraj, in a review of extant literature on curriculum responses to COVID-19, offer insights into how education systems, in particular, might better prepare for and respond to crises that are likely to present in the future. They contend that an inclusive system has to have a vision in which there is equitable access to technology, support for mental health, and responsive pedagogical practices. Thinking back to forge the way forward, the COVID-19 pandemic raised national concern about the persistent high levels of gender-based violence. President Ramaphosa declared that gender-based violence is the other pandemic in South Africa (Ramaphosa, 2020). In their article, Sikhwari advocates for adapting the school curriculum to help reduce the impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on education in conflict-affected primary

schools in South Africa. To mitigate these crises, a gender-responsive curriculum is proposed.

Another curriculum perspective is that of Rossouw. She introduces the concept of 'curricular scholasticide'- the deliberate destruction of educational opportunities through systematic knowledge exclusions that deny LGBTQ+ students access to essential content. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine LGBTQ+ content in South African Life Orientation Comprehensive Sexuality Education Scripted Lesson Plans (SLPs) for grades 8-12, Rossouw reveals how systematic exclusions and representations of LGBTQ+ content in this curriculum constitutes curricular scholasticide, which is intensified during crisis periods when comprehensive information becomes essential for student well-being. Drawing on the experiences of teachers teaching such curricula, Eagle, Jacobs and Oriola trouble the discomfort and disengagement of teaching comprehensive sexuality education. Their findings call for a rethinking of how transformative learning and ecological models are adapted to settings where collective cultural forces may outweigh individual reflection. In particular, they promote an African perspective that situates transformation not only within the individual educator but also within communal and cultural systems that mediate every layer of CSE delivery. The final article in this special issue is also on sexuality education but centres primarily on the experiences of gay male youth who actively participate in the "Secrets in the Gay Hive" Facebook page. Brown and Haitembu use a queer theoretical framework and Afro-queer epistemologies to examine user-generated content and show how online activities challenge heteronormative educational systems. Their findings stress that the dependency on anonymous online forums for fundamental information on sexual health, identities, and relationships highlights the failure of formal educational institutions to cater to LGBTQ+ learners' needs.

References

- Alawadhi, H. 2024. The effects of war on the quality of higher education in Yemen: Scholars' perspectives. *International*

Journal of Educational Development
108:103058.

- Buheji, M. & Budoor, B. 2024. Mitigating risks of slow children development due to war on Gaza 2023. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 14 (1):11-21.
- Dader, K., Ghantous, W., Masad, D., Joronen, M., Kallio, K. P., Riding, J., & Vainikka, J. 2024. Topologies of scholasticide in Gaza: education in spaces of elimination. *Fennia-International Journal of Geography*, 202(1), 1-12.
- Giroux, H. 2024. Scholasticide: Erasing Memory, Silencing Dissent, and Waging War on Education from Gaza to the West.

CounterPunch.

<https://www.laprogressive.com/education-reform/scholasticide> Date of access: 4 November 2024

- Hazer, L. & Gustaf, G. 2023. The effects of war, displacement, and trauma on child development. *Humanities and social sciences communications* 10 (1):1-19.
- Ramaphosa, C. 2020. Gender-based violence is South Africa's second pandemic. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-18-gender-based-violence-is-south-africas-second-pandemic-says-ramaphosa/> Date of access 3 September 2025.