

The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) is a professional organisation concerned with staff, student, curriculum and institutional development in higher education. HELTASA strives to mobilise a broad spectrum of tertiary educators, including academic developers and disciplinary academics, through a series of teaching and learning focused projects. Working with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), HELTASA advises on policy, quality-related ideas, structures and practices pertaining to teaching and learning nationally. As a professional network, HELTASA recognises the need for academic development in RSA to be re-conceptualised in relation to context and students and for more deliberate and considered professional development programmes to be created for academics as scholarly teachers.

Executive Committee

The executive team continues with its vision of engaging academics through Critically Reflective Practice as a key methodological lens for its activities. In the last year, HELTASA made significant strides and gains in becoming a strong voice in the national higher education sector in Southern Africa, especially during the pandemic this year.

1. Teaching and Learning in the time of Corona Virus-19

In March 2020, after the announcement of national lockdown, HELTASA launched a national call for academics to write short-and-sharp-and-socially-aware (SASASA) pieces to share perspectives on responding to the COVID-19 crisis in relation to teaching and learning. We used these pieces to have a national conversation on what it means for the academic and teaching project to go online and how this affects academics, staff, students, workers, the community, the national and the world as a whole. We had a phenomenal response to the call locally 37 and internationally (7 pieces). Please see the link here <http://heltasa.org.za/sasasa-responds-to-covid19/> that shows the breadth and depth of perspectives covered. This has served as an important vehicle for increasing the visibility and reach of HELTASA, at a time when academics needed a community of support.

HELTASA Conference and Membership

HELTASA's main event is an annual conference hosted and convened by a different university each year. See <http://heltasa.org.za/heltasaiced-conference-2016/> for example. The HELTASA exec team has presented papers and facilitated numerous workshops at our inhouse conferences. From each conference, HELTASA draws its annual membership, through which it generates funds for its operational costs. Based on conference registration, annual membership averages approximately 350-400 academics, drawn from the 26 universities nationally, as well as a small number of HEIs in the Southern Africa region. In 2020, we diversified our membership options to include institutional and group membership. Last year the conference was held at Rhodes University under the theme Pedagogies in Context. This year, it will be convened in online mode but the Central University of Technology.

Special Interest Groups

The HELTASA executive team launched a Special Interest Group (SIG) dedicated to Directors and Teaching and Learning Leaders in the field of Academic and Educational Development. This SIG engaged in an online *puisano* (Tswana/Sotho word for conversation/discussion) hosted by the HELTASA executive committee in June 2020. The goal of the *dipuisano*

(conversations) is to create opportunities for the HELTASA executive committee and academic development (AD) leaders to reflect on their experiences and to respond to key questions critical for HELTASA and AD right now in the context of COVID-19 and online teaching.

Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs)

HELTASA's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were reconstituted as Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs) in the November 2019 Conference where naming and framing of the SIGs was discussed. It was decided to focus on collaborative and relational communities of practice that were subsumed under three overarching themes: Professional development; Student support and curriculum development. During COVID 19 and the national lockdown in particular with social distancing regulations in place, HELTASA's Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs) used the opportunity to engage members as well as interested and concerned higher education and educational stakeholders in dialogues at a time of loss, confusion and anxiety. Various modes of engagements were planned to support academics in their quest to make the unforeseen and rapid leap from face-to-face teaching and learning contexts to emergency remote platforms. Four interactive webinars were successfully hosted and attracted, in total, about a thousand participants locally and internationally. These webinars covered a range of topics, namely Thinking beyond technology when teaching remotely; Remote teaching: Curriculum considerations; Care and Connection: Understanding the lived experiences during COVID-19 and Assessment for Emergency Remote Teaching.

Special Projects

1. HELTASA/DHET PhD cohort programme

On 29 April 2020, HELTASA proudly launched its historic HELTASA/DHET PhD cohort programme with accepted onto the programme as PhD candidates and they will design and execute a study addressing the overarching research question below: How could AD theory and practice reimagine and recontextualise itself to respond to persistent inequality and social injustice in contexts facing challenges? The PhD programme is supported by a team of experienced supervisors and mentors who facilitated the two-day retreat and engaged with a range of topics such as reflecting on the difference between a masters and PhD study; the concept of philosophising about a theoretical argument, conceptualising a PhD study, being a PhD student/supervisor, choosing a mentor, generating new knowledge, locating the study, making links between the study and the thesis and self-care, and doctoral research from an African-centred framing. Two further retreats are planned for July and September 2020 as candidates prepare their concept notes and draft thesis proposals.

2. ERASMUS PLUS-HELTASA PROJECT

Prof Isaac Ntshoe from the Central University of Technology (CUT) is the HELTASA representative in an Erasmus PLUS Project on SDGs and Capacity Building/Staff Development. His rich research expertise will be supported by the Exco's commitments to this project.

3. Teaching Advancement at Universities (TAU)

A revised version of the TAU-3 programme will be launched on 13 August 2020. TAU is a special project of HELTASA and focuses on Teaching Advancement for Established Academics in HE through a teaching fellows programme.

4. DHET: National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers

The HELTASA executive team is making bold gains in positioning itself as a key professional and academic development organisation in the sector. HELTASA features prominently and substantively in the DHET National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers. We are now represented on the National Co-ordinating Committee (NCC) and

Management Committee; two strategic committees focused on the implementation of the framework across the 26 universities.

5. CHE-DHET-USAf-HELTASA National Teaching Excellence Awards

The CHE-DHET-HELTASA National Teaching Excellence Awards, a special project of HELTASA, takes a 'gap-year' this year: there will be no national award in 2020. HELTASA will use this year to lead a reconceptualisation of the awards in line with a concept note written by DHET-CHE-USaF-HELTASA.

6. Publications

As we continue to engage critically with stakeholders such as the DHET, CHE and USAf, as well as international networks such as ICED, we build important partnerships and we continue to influence the national discourse on the following: # who teaches matters, #who they teach matters, #how they teach matters, #what they teach matters and #where they teach, matters. These are reflected in scholarship undertaken by the executive and members since 2018.

HELTASA 2018 Special Issue in SAJHE

Behari-Leak, K, Chitanand, N. Vorster, J.E., Ganas, R, Padayachee, K, Masehela, L and Merckel, V (2018). How to be or not to be? A critical dialogue on the limitations and opportunities of academic development in the current higher education context. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 32(6), 401-421. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/32-6-2993>. ISSN 1753-5913

HELTASA Conference Special Issue in CRiSTaL:

The HELTASA Special Issue in 2017 drew on the contributions from the 2016 ICED/ HELTASA conference through a focus on Ethics, care and quality enhancement. 2017: CRiSTaL Vol.5, No.1 (2017): pp. i-iii. DOI 10.14426/ cristal.v5i1.113

ICED Conference 2018 Atlanta

Behari-Leak et al., 2018. Who We Are Counts: Inserting our Personal and Professionals Selves in Organisational Spaces. The International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) Conference 2020, Atlanta, Georgia USA

Opinion Editorials

Behari-Leak, K. 2016. <http://heltasa.org.za/can-resist-onslaught-uber-isation-universities-stronger-social-pedagogy/>

Behari-Leak, K., Masehela, L., Marhaya, L., Tjabane, M. & Merckel, N. 2017. Decolonising the curriculum: it's in the detail, not just in the definition. *The Conversation*. March 10. <https://theconversation.com/decolonising-the-curriculum-its-in-the-detail-not-just-in-the-definition-73772>

<http://heltasa.org.za/sasasa-responds-to-covid19/>

Behari-Leak, K., et al (2020). <http://heltasa.org.za/on-leaving-no-one-behind-students-on-a-pgdip-masters-course-in-higher-education-studies-reflect-on-dimensions-of-difference-for-socially-aware-teaching-in-remote-emergency/>

Behari-Leak, K. (2020) <http://heltasa.org.za/deep-dialogue-rich-reflection-and-authentic-action-needed-as-we-move-towards-the-truncated-curriculum-in-response-to-the-covid-19-crisis/>

Behari-Leak, K. and Ganas, R. (2020). Going online – What cost to the social justice agenda? *University World News*. 02 April 2020
<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200402072608864>

Behari-Leak, K. (2020). <http://heltasa.org.za/message-from-the-heltasa-executive-team/>

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