

Reintegration after Disruption: Editorial for Themed Section

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As memories of the COVID-19 pandemic begin to recede, its impact on higher education remains. The global disruptions forced institutions to reimagine teaching, learning, and support systems, revealing both resilience and systemic educational inequities.

Despite ongoing debates about the publishing crisis in academia—ranging from accessibility and publication costs to the proliferation of predatory journals—publishing research in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals such as *Progressio* remains the most effective way to inform policy, enhance practice, and foster meaningful dialogue among academics and practitioners.

This special issue of *Progressio*, themed “Reintegration after Disruption,” examines how lessons from the pandemic can inform a more inclusive and sustainable future for higher education. It reflects the focus of the 2022 Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR) annual conference, which explored the concept of reintegration following significant disruption. The conference highlighted the need to restore balance and cohesion in a fragmented higher education landscape, reporting on valuable insights from lessons learned during the pandemic.

The six research articles in this issue offer diverse perspectives on navigating post-pandemic challenges:

“Navigating Source Code Plagiarism Challenges: Strategies to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19 Disruptions” examines the prevalence of source code plagiarism among first-year computing students in South Africa during emergency remote teaching. **Du Plessis and Smit** explore how the pandemic amplified this challenge and propose strategies to address it, especially as new artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT introduce fresh concerns about academic integrity.



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Bester's "Curriculum Inquiry as a Contextualised Social Practice within an Activity System" reconceptualises curriculum development as a dynamic, socially embedded process rather than a linear task. She uses Activity Theory and Legitimation Code Theory to identify contradictions in a specialised sustainability-focused master's programme, providing insights into how curriculum design can better support professional expertise in climate change and sustainable development.

"Hitting the Sweet Spot in the Next Normal: Innovative Response to Disruptive Change" critically examines the lasting implications of the pandemic on teaching and learning. **Engelbrecht** argues that in order to remain relevant and resilient in the post-pandemic era, higher education must move beyond superficial approaches to pedagogy, addressing gaps in deep learning, quality assurance, and alignment with labour market needs.

In "Student Learning Experiences and Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic at the University of Free State," **Pillay, Kriel, and Magaya** present findings from a large-scale survey exploring the impact of the pandemic on students' well-being and learning experiences. They identify vulnerable groups, such as young female students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and suggest targeted interventions to enhance mental health and engagement as universities shift to blended learning environments.

The article "Challenges of Teaching and Learning under Lockdown at Wits University: Implications for the Future of Blended Learning" reflects on the barriers faced by both students and staff during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching. Using surveys and interviews, **Wagner, Masango, Moch, Krull, Wagner, Dison, and Grayson** highlight key challenges, including poor internet access, power outages, and psychosocial pressures, as well as offering strategies to foster a sense of belonging and improve the effectiveness of blended learning.

"Developing a Business Intelligence Strategy to Support Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: The Virtual Business Intelligence Competency Centre (vBICC)" explores how the University of Cape Town's Data Analytics for Student Success (DASS) project enabled evidence-based decision-making during the pandemic. **Sithaldeen, Kefale, Galant, Mudavanhu, Sebothoma, and Marquard** propose a virtual Business Intelligence Competency Centre as a sustainable framework for leveraging data to enhance student success and institutional resilience.

The pandemic underscored both the fragility and adaptability of education systems. Reintegration is not merely a return to the pre-pandemic status quo, but should also strive to address longstanding inefficiencies and inequities. As this issue demonstrates, reintegration must balance innovation with inclusivity, ensuring that higher education continues to drive individual and societal transformation.

Disruption in higher education is not a once-off event but a recurring reality. While COVID-19 demanded an unprecedented shift in teaching and learning, future disruptions—such as those precipitated by the rapid development and availability of AI tools like ChatGPT—are already on the horizon. We hope that the research published in this issue will contribute to a continuous critical evaluation of our response to new challenges and a rapidly changing environment.