Technological innovation (4IR) in law teaching and learning: *Enhancement or drawback during Covid-19?*

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Preface

When Covid-19 struck and the country was plunged into a hard lockdown, universities rallied to continue with online teaching and learning – Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) as it was called at the time. The challenges were many and varied; yet we tackled them one by one and overcame many obstacles and hurdles, finally emerging from the pandemic with new insights, and energised to reimagine teaching and learning in a new, hybrid environment.

While the pandemic brought a myriad of new challenges on all fronts, existing inequalities in our South African society were exacerbated through job losses, as well as the death of breadwinners in families. In the education sphere, lack of internet access and internet-enabled devices, which were crucial to successful online teaching and learning, threatened to halt teaching and learning indefinitely. Universities and the private sector stepped up and assisted as far as possible to ensure that no student was left behind. Still, there were other factors that affected the online environment, such as load-shedding, which lecturers and students had to deal with on a daily basis. Suffice to say, we lived in a state of perpetual uncertainty, through several waves of the pandemic, unsure of what would happen even the very next day.

I believe that our humanity pulled us through. I believe that the pandemic forced us to reconnect with that central value that makes us human beings and to acknowledge our fellow human beings – in our case, lecturers and students – and to meet them where they found themselves during the pandemic. Maybe the pandemic provided us with a context that was often brutal and uncompromising – a timely wake-up call for all of us. We now have a very different understanding of the space, be it virtual or in person or hybrid, within which teaching and learning take place. We also know that this process does not reside with faculty alone – it is a joint endeavour between teachers and learners where participation by everyone is crucial to ensure success.

The pandemic also gave rise to renewed research on teaching and learning, as this volume of contributions shows. In order to get to grips with virtual teaching and learning law teachers had to engage with the

science of this new type of teaching and learning. We became innovative and explored and experimented – we shared stories, designed games, and connected in different ways. Interestingly, in some instances lecturers and students felt more connected online than when they were on campus. On the other hand, many lecturers and students missed contact class interaction and found the virtual platforms frustrating. Going forward, we must consider all these experiences in our bid to make teaching and learning accessible, stimulating, inspiring and rewarding for all.

Finally, the pandemic forced us to focus on well-being. Around the world, workload, work-life balance, flexible working and studying became serious topics of discussion. We now understand that all our efforts to produce the best teaching and learning materials for a number of different platforms will be in vain if we do not address the factors that impact our well-being. Teaching and learning do not happen in a vacuum – it happens within the context of our lived realities. In reimagining teaching and learning, we will have to be agile, flexible and creative to ensure that we produce the best teaching and learning experience for lecturers and students, and that we embark on this journey together.

Professor Elsabe Schoeman
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