REVIEW OF THE STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING POLICY
RE-CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

PURPOSE
This text suggests and brings about renewed thinking and practices about teaching, learning and assessment interactions and processes in the curriculum context at Stellenbosch University (SU). These suggestions are literature-based and in support of the collective knowledge, practices and experiences at the institution.

INTRODUCTION
Words can influence our conceptual frameworks, our reasoning and our perception of reality (Strauss & Feiz, 2013; Postman, 1977). It is also known that the way we refer to constructs often shapes the way they are experienced and written about. It also conveys meaning. For instance, when words relate to each other with a hyphen, it suggests that these words form a unit of meaning (Sun & Baayen, 2020). When we refer to teaching-learning-assessment in a 'hyphened' way, the conceptual thinking is different from when separating the constructs by using 'and' between the words (Korzybski, 2000). Such a small shift could potentially influence our thinking, practice, and experience around the symbiotic relationship and interactions between teaching, learning and assessment.

CONSIDERING THE CONSTRUCTS OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMING
Teaching: Teaching practices are guided by the purpose of providing students with the best possible opportunities to learn. Various authors (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Whetten, 2007) argued that to substantially improve student learning we must move away from the view that it is the job of teaching academics to teach students, to one that argues that teaching academics should design and create opportunities for students to learn. Instead of beginning the conversation on student learning with the question "How should we teach students?", we should rather ask "How should we help students learn?" (Barr & Tagg, 1995). One way to do this is to prioritise student engagement. Leibowitz et al. (2017:5) for example, defined teaching as "engagement with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, concepts and processes, including design, content selection, delivery, assessment and reflection."

Learning: The 2018 SU Teaching and Learning Policy already adopted a holistic understanding of teaching and learning, which includes both individual and social understandings of these constructs. With social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) as a theoretical underpinning, learning is seen as a collaborative, social and cultural process of knowledge building that occurs in the context of human relationships and activity and is not only a cognitive activity of individual students. Learning as a social process also does not merely refer to the location of learning (i.e., physical spaces), it affects how people learn (through interaction and participation in social and cultural activities), what is learned (social practices including the curriculum) (Preistley & Philippou, 2018), and becomes an integral part of their own and others' learning processes (Dudley-Marling, 2012). The individual and/or psychological learning processes are therefore not independent of the sociocultural context but are constituted by the context of which they are a part of (Cole 1996; Gee 2008 cited in Dudley-Marling, 2012).

SU promotes a learning-centred approach which should not be conflated with a learner-centred approach. The former steers away from teaching as an activity led by a teaching academic through critically considering "how and how well students are learning" (Blumberg, 2016:303). This type of approach asks teaching academics to rethink core aspects such as the positioning of knowledge, the joint responsibilities of students and teaching academics; the reasoning behind the choice of assessment activities, and the subsequent power relations between students and teaching academics (Blumberg,

2016). Focusing on a learning-centred approach, the emphasis is placed on the process of learning and knowledge building [by the student] rather than on the transmission of knowledge [by the teaching academic] (Von der Heidt & Quazi, 2013). With such a view in mind, role-players acknowledge that students contribute to the teaching-learning-assessment process. Students are thus viewed as self-assured individuals that should take responsibility for their own learning by playing an active role during the teaching-learning-assessment process. Coates (2005:26) writes that "the concept of student engagement is based on the constructivist assumption that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities." A learning-centred approach reiterates the importance of establishing "the balance between [teaching academic's] leadership, [students'] development and [student] initiative" (O'Brien et al., 2008 as cited in Von der Heidt & Quazi, 2013:250).

Assessment: It is well documented in the educational context that assessment forms an integral part of the educational process (Miller, 1990; Norcini et al., 2011). According to the SU Assessment Policy (2022), assessment is viewed as a "systematic evaluation of students' abilities to demonstrate their having achieved the learning goals set for a curriculum" (CHE, 2016:2). These achievements could be demonstrated through different assessment tasks, products, outputs or the demonstration of competencies where students' performances are set against the pre-defined assessment outcomes and criteria.

The SU Assessment Policy (2021) furthermore reiterates the notion that assessment enhances student learning and that assessment itself is a continuous learning process. For instance, formative assessments (assessment *for* learning) provide students with the opportunity to develop skills in judging their own understanding through completing assessments that could be designed and implemented by different role players (i.e., teaching academics, peer-to-peer facilitators, fellow students, etc.) and which act as learning opportunities (assessment *as* learning). Subsequently students are prepared for summative assessments (assessment *of* learning) to demonstrate that learning outcomes were achieved.

AVOIDING DICHOTOMIES IN PROCESSES AND INTERACTIONS: TEACHING-LEARNING-ASSESSMENT IN DIFFERENT LEARNING SPACES

Ashwin (2012:2) argues that there should be a movement away from viewing teaching, learning, and assessment as independent activities but that they represent different facets of an integrated process where teaching academics and students are simultaneously involved. Such a perspective furthermore challenges the assumption that teaching is only embodied by a 'teaching academic' (i.e., someone who teaches) and learning is only embodied in a 'student' (i.e., someone that learns). Other aspects of students' as well as teaching academics' lives all contribute to the learning process within and beyond higher education. Learning is therefore embodied during the whole lifespan of individuals (i.e., lifelong learning) that represents a range of different types of learning opportunities (i.e., life-wide learning) and represents different levels of learning (i.e., life-deep learning).

Furthermore, Dann (2014:149) states that the boundaries between learning and assessment are blurred. The notion of assessment *as* learning is offered as an aspect of formative assessment (assessment *for* learning). The view of teaching-learning-assessment as different, but symbiotic aspects of the same process has already been included in the SU Assessment policy (2022) where it is stated that "[a]ssessment forms the essence of an integrated approach to student learning where assessment constitutes the learning and teaching practice through which the most direct influence may be exerted on student learning, as well as the practice in which most is at stake for students." Hayward (2014:39), noted that there might be different assessment purposes, but the *raison d'être* of assessment is learning.

The purpose is therefore not to engage in debates about the positioning of constructs such as 'learning and teaching' as opposed to 'teaching and learning', but rather to view it as an integrated process where learning is positioned as the different levels of the higher education programme and becomes further embodied by other opportunities beyond the formal curriculum for both students and teaching academics. The purpose is not to "distinguish between teaching-learning processes and assessment processes in higher education, but rather [to] view that assessment processes [are] an essential part of teaching-learning processes" (Ashwin, 2012: 3). As Dann (2014:151) argues, teaching-learning-assessment (T-L-A) is a single activity that involves teaching academics, students and disciplinary content that calls for an interactive interplay of minds in real contexts.

Figure 1: A learning-centered orientation at Stellenbosch University
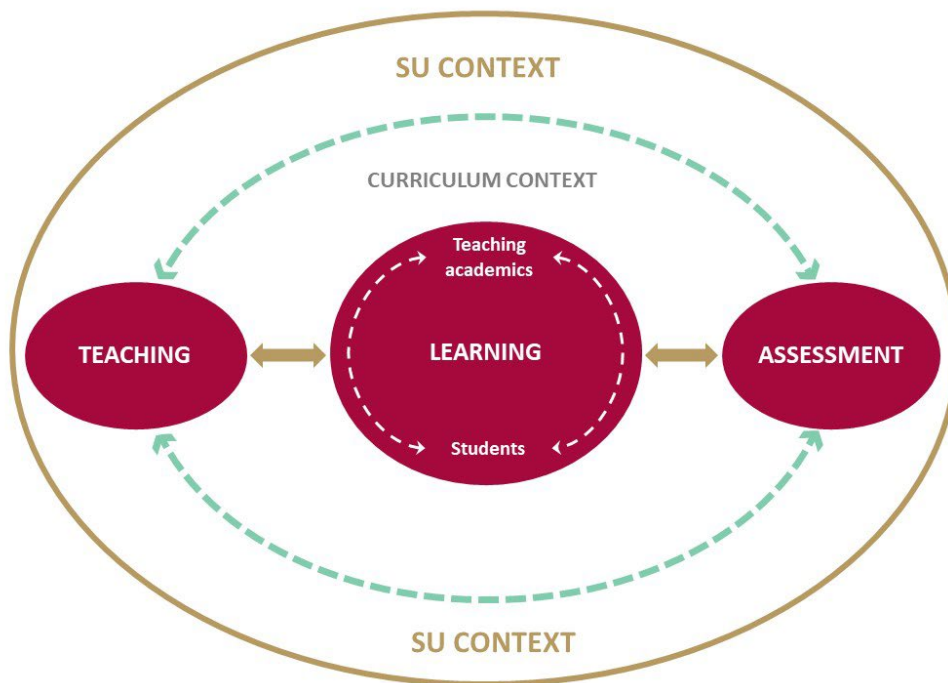
Learning takes place in formal and informal spaces of which one such space is the digital space. We acknowledge a 'post-digital' perspective as a new reality through which we do not align ourselves with the hype usually associated with the evolution of digital technologies. By adhering and responding to the values of the institution, a post-digital perspective provides opportunity to continue with the core mission of the institution within a continuously changing context (Dennman, 2019). By embracing a post-digital paradigm, the digital is not foregrounded in our interactions with T-L-A principles (Starcic, 2021). While acknowledging the evolution and impact of digital technologies, we argue for a learning environment characterised by a "mixture of subtle cultural shifts and ongoing mutations caused by digitalisation and global digital infrastructure" (Cramer, 2014 as cited in Dennman, 2019:3). We argue that T-L-A interactions are rooted in complex and multifaceted social and technical spaces of learning (Dennman, 2019). Such learning spaces resemble various areas where the 'social, material, digital and biological' are interconnected (Lamb, Carvalho, Gallagher & Knox, 2021:4).

INSTITUTIONAL ALIGNMENT

While striving to re-conceptualise key concepts and practices as outlined above, the conversation is already/should be reflected in institutional T-L-A related documents, for example:

- T&L Policy (2018) (under review)
- T&L Strategy (2017-2021) (under review)
- ICT Strategy (under review)
- Language Policy (2021)
- Assessment Policy (2021)
- Student Feedback Policy (under review)
- EDP/ECP Strategy (under review)

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