

Chapter 11

Re-Engineering Sociological Constellations for Higher Education in South Africa

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Abstract

Higher education in South Africa has experienced a number of challenges for the past three decades: from the days of apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa, to the challenges of transforming the higher education landscape. The merger of several South African higher education institutions in 2004 created a plethora of challenges to add to the already existing ones. These challenges were political, sociological, structural and fiscal in nature. The desire to address these challenges has in a way created an epistemological backlog where access to higher education has increased drastically but epistemological access remains a challenge. These amongst other things fuelled the decolonisation movement which demanded for the decolonisation of knowledge. However, the decolonisation of knowledge amongst other things cannot be effective or complete without a re-engineering of the sociology of education. This chapter articulates a pathway for the re-engineering of the sociology of education by articulating four sociological constellations.

1. Introduction

Higher education in South Africa has been construed as a public good and a tool for redress against the backlog of apartheid South Africa. This special function necessitates the drive by the higher education sector to be responsive to both the higher education stakeholders and the communities in which these educational institutions are found or the nation at large. With national quality assurance frameworks dictating the need for fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation, the higher education sector or higher education institutions have more to respond to amidst trying to re-invent itself and articulate a path for itself in the days ahead. This drive to forge a new path has seen the emergence of different waves in the higher education sector like the mergers of 2004, the transformation agenda, the FeesMustFall movement and the decolonisation era. Amidst all these moves, only the decolonisation movement has attempted a critical engagement with knowledge and the philosophical as well as sociological processes that underpin the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of knowledge in South African higher education institutions. While the decolonisation movement is taking its turn and the higher education sector is warming up to it, there is need for critical engagement on a variety of issues in higher education and how these all work together to produce a particular higher education pathway. The impact of global movements like globalisation, internationalisation of higher education, curriculum internationalisation, cross-border or transnational higher education and curriculum, and higher education partnerships, amongst others, on the higher education sector in South Africa has also exposed several lapses in relation to contextual responsiveness and the underpinning principles behind knowledge construction, reconstruction and dissemination in the higher education arena. With the understanding that higher education is all about educational encounters which itself is engendered by the knowledge construction and reconstruction processes within the university, be it in a classroom or within the higher education environment, it becomes critical to reconsider

the basis of the knowledge construction process especially in the face of calls for the decolonisation of the curriculum, knowledge and education in general. However, to do that, it is critical to conceptualise the sociology of education and the backdrops from which this chapter argues so as to articulate a pathway in the higher education sector.

2. Conceptualising Sociology of Education

Elias (1978) argues that sociology offers an understanding of the social world and how it operates within the larger stratosphere of the framework of life. Sociology is a critical look at human social relationships and institutions. This means that sociology's subject matter is far-reaching and diverse, ranging from crime to religion, from the family to the State, from the divisions of race and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture, and from social stability to radical change in whole societies. Sociology therefore becomes the study of life and how it is lived in the society. It is the drive to understand how human action and consciousness both shape and are shaped by surrounding cultural and social structures. Ballantine, Hammack, and Stuber (2017) add that sociology which aims at studying and analysing is an exciting and illuminating field of study that analyses and explains important matters in our personal lives, our communities, and the world. At the personal level, sociology investigates the social causes and consequences of such things as romantic love, racial and gender identity, family conflict, deviant behaviour, aging, and religious faith. At the societal level, sociology examines and explains matters like crime and law, poverty and wealth, prejudice and discrimination, schools and education, business firms, urban community, and social movements. At the global level, sociology studies phenomena such as population growth and migration, war and peace, and economic development. Matheson (2014) argues that education is the process of learning, unlearning and relearning or the process of knowledge construction within a particular setting. The process of construction evolves to relationships as one individual (such as a lecturer) is there to facilitate or co-

create knowledge with another (the student). This makes the process of knowledge creation a social one. This is confirmed by Durkheim (1956, pp. 70-71) who argues that

“it is society as a whole and each particular social milieu that determine the ideal that education realizes. Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands...Education is then the only means by which society prepares the essential condition of its very existence... That education consists of the methodical socialisation of young generation”.

The sociology of education therefore is strategically placed at the heart of education. Education does not function or operate in a vacuum and to fully understand its significance and ability to shape the society, it is vital to analyse the society to show its strengths and weakness and plan the educational programmes that would address the weaknesses and promote or strengthen its strengths. The education system in any country must be contextually responsive by taking into consideration the needs, demands and aspirations of the society for it to function properly. Sociological of education is therefore the study of the relations between education and the society. Rao and Singh (2018) add that sociology of education is concerned with how the economic, political, religious, social and cultural forces shape educational aims, methods, institutions, administration and curricula. Society both shapes and is shaped by education, making education and the society integrally related. For education to be responsive, there is a need for constructivist knowledge of the society, its systems and how it functions so education graduates can fully fit within the society. At a time like this in South African higher education where responsiveness is the talk of the day, sociology of education becomes critical to sound and responsive education, especially because responsiveness is built on context, which is itself a product of the society and is made sense of through sociology or the sociology of education.

Sociologists like Max Weber, Karl Max, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim have all contributed significantly to the development of sociology of education and in the shaping of the field of higher education from a sociological standpoint. Wexler (2017), Young (2002) Bennett and LeCompte (1990), and Clark (1973) argue that there are eleven key constructs of sociology which have shaped the direction of sociology of education. These key ideas are at the centre of sociology of education and they are underpinned by particular views of the society. The first centres around the norms and values students learn in school and how they influence the kind of citizens they eventually become in the workplace or in the society. Since education is neither innocent nor exists in a vacuum, but rather aims at shaping the citizens and the future of the nation in a particular direction, it follows that how the norms and values enshrined directly or indirectly in the education system are a direction function of the vision of the society that those in power want to see. This shaping is done through policies, guidelines and procedures and order funding requirements (Maton, 2013).

The second construct centres on social and cultural capital and this is orientated by the skills, knowledge and attitudes associated with the dominant culture, possessed by the middle classes, which give middle class parents and children an advantage in life. Karl Marx theorised cultural capital as the cultural architecture brought about by social class which allocates certain levels or kinds of advantage to those who belong to such classes. It explains why middle class students turn to achieve more than working class students do. As part of the dominant culture, middle class students have an automatic advantage over working class students because they share the culture of the university. Their language is like that of teachers (also middle class) and their values correspond more closely to those of the university. This 'cultural capital' enables middle class families to pass on their superior position to their children and in so doing, reproduce class inequalities (Blakemore & Cooksey, 2017).

The social class to which student belongs determines their cultural heritage which directly impacts the knowledge construction process and their meaning making abilities. The third is cultural deprivation which stands as an antithesis to cultural capital. Within this notion, some groups of people, most often those of the lower social classes, have inferior norms, values, skills and knowledge which hold them back in life. Their very circumstances act as a deterrent and deprives them of opportunities to engage at different levels both in the knowledge construction process, as well as in the improvement of their socio-economic standing. Cultural deprivation often produces a negative effect on the education of working-class students because they lack language skills or possess poor language skills which make them struggle in most higher education institutions in South Africa where the medium of instruction is English. Students who lack cultural capital struggle to understand what they are taught, and the fact that working class parents do not value education means that their children are less likely to stay on at school post-16 (Arum, Beattie, & Ford, 2010). Exogenous privatisation and marketisation in higher education is another phenomenon which the sociology of education engages with. The precarious nature of economic forces like privatisation and marketisation has increasingly brought the burden of payment and resources upon the students. This has led to or resulting in unhealthy competition amongst universities who now see students as clients who must be serviced.

The rigorous process of learning, unlearning and relearning is neglected as institutions struggle to cut down on expenditure and increase profit. The result of this neglect most often is a cultural, intellectual and pedagogic debacle which defeats the ultimate purpose of higher education in South Africa, transformation. From a sociological perspective the project of marketisation represents the attempt to commodify academic education. Specifically, it is oriented towards the transformation of what is an abstract, intangible, non-material and relational experience into a visible, quantifiable and instrumentally driven process (Furedi, 2010; Jongbloed,

2003). The next phenomenon is the hidden curriculum which constitutes the hidden norms and values transmitted indirectly in the higher education sector. Whereas the official curriculum is made up of subjects, subject content, formal lessons etc. the hidden curriculum is composed of teacher attitudes and expectations, and the general ethos of school which includes such things as attitudes to punctuality, attendance, dress codes and future career aspirations (Fomunyan, 2014).

Hidden norms and values that drive particular societies, be they positive or negative, are couriered in the curriculum and help shape the society which in turn shapes education and the curriculum. The next idea which the sociology of education focuses on is the ideological state apparatus. To Marx the main function of education in a capitalist society is to transmit an ideological justification of capitalism, presenting the unequal capitalist system as normal and inevitable. The ideological underpinnings of higher education help to model and remodel the society by conspicuously maintaining its place in the higher education sector and making sure that the statuesque is not destroyed (Lowith, 2002). Universities do this indirectly by mirroring the inequality found in wider society (lecturer-student relations, banding and streaming), thus getting students used to the idea that inequality is normal. Material deprivation is another key sociological notion predominant in higher education (Furedi, 2010; Jongbloed, 2003). The lack of basic resources informs school choice, performance and the educational encounters the student ends up with. When students lack basic necessities, like food, internet and proper housing conditions, their ability to study at home or concentrate in the class is hampered, creating a negative effect on their educational achievement (Furedi, 2010; Jongbloed, 2003). The sociology of education therefore concerns itself with the wellbeing of the student and how societal orientations necessitate or hamper their academic performance. These key considerations of sociology and the sociology of education has by and large shaped the educational experience of most students and continue to determine the kind of educational

encounters they have and the kind of citizens they eventually turn out to be.

Furthermore, there are three key theories of sociology which have made a tremendous impact in education in general and higher education in particular. Theories which are now understood as theories of the sociology of education or sociological theories of education are the functionalist perspective, conflict perspective and symbolic interactionist perspective. The functionalist perspective emerged from the work of Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim and was further developed by Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton (Mooney, Knox, & Schacht, 2015). Functionalism as a sociological perspective sees the society as a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. The state or nation relies on this balance of power to function. In this light, education is made to serve several functions in or for the society.

Firstly, it ensures the process of socialisation. Since people or students are to learn the norms, values, and skills they need to function in society within the higher education sector, education becomes the primary vehicle for such learning (Lang & Moleski, 2016). Through socialisation students are expected to learn about the rule of law, democracy, and social justice amongst others. Through socialisation students are also expected to gain knowledge and develop technical skills be it through the hidden curricula or through the overt or planned curricula. The process of socialisation operates in units. For example, “family provides a context for reproducing, nurturing, and socializing children; education offers a way to transmit a society’s skills, knowledge, and culture to its youth; politics provides a means of governing members of society; economics provides for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; and religion provides moral guidance and an outlet for worship of a higher power” (Mooney et al., 2015, p. 30). Ballantine et al. (2017) argue that functionalists use the terms functional and dysfunctional to describe the effects of social

elements on society. Different elements of society can be described as functional if they contribute to social stability, and dysfunctional if they disrupt social stability.

Secondly functionalism ensures social integration. Social integration sees society as interwoven or integrated and this integration is necessitated by buy-in or subscription by everyone in the society to common sets of beliefs and values. Once individuals within the society subscribe to these beliefs and values the process of integration unfolds (Barrett, 2016).

The third function of functionalism is social placement, and this is necessitated by the need for different kinds of people to fill different kinds of positions in the society. Access and orientation to higher education aims at placement students are placed into particular programmes to address different society needs or base on their abilities (Mulkey, 2014). The last function of functionalism is social and cultural innovation. Social and cultural innovation is theorised as a direct function of education because scientists cannot make important scientific discoveries, artists and thinkers cannot come up with great works of art, poetry, and prose unless they have first been educated in the wide variety of courses which makes up the higher education curricula. Sociologists have identified two types of functions: manifest and latent. The manifest functions are those that are intended and directly orchestrated so they can be easily recognised. Latent functions on the other hand are consequences that are unintended and often hidden (Weber, 2008). Functionalism as a sociological perspective therefore gears towards maintaining the functioning of the society. It seeks to keep the society in a particular direction by ensuring reproduction.

The second perspective is the conflict perspective, and this sees the society as made up of different groups and interests competing for power and resources. Society is divided into classes or groups of people who are always competing for power and resources in the nation. The conflict perspective explains various aspects of our social world by looking at which groups have power and benefit from a particular social

arrangement. For example, feminists argue that we live in a patriarchal society — with hierarchical systems controlled by men. Feminists would therefore be demanding “that existing economic, political, and social structures be changed” (Weir & Faulkner, 2004, p. xii). The conflict perspective originated from the works of Karl Marx. Marx argued that all societies go through stages of economic development. The era of development in the world has continuously evolve from agricultural to industrial, and concerns over meeting survival needs are usually replaced by concerns over making a profit, the hallmark of a capitalist system. Industrialisation leads to the development of two classes of people: the bourgeoisie, or the owners of the means of production (e.g., factories, farms, businesses); and the proletariat, or the workers who earn wages (Mooney et al., 2015). The society is usually divided into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. The workers, who may earn only subsistence wages, are denied access to the many resources available to the wealthy owners. Greer, Van Bunderen, and Yu (2017) argue that the conflict perspective focused on the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor). They further maintain that the economic, social, and political implications of the rise of capitalism brought about the existence of a powerful minority class (the bourgeoisie) and an oppressed majority class (the proletariat), and created class conflict because the interests of the two were at odds and resources were unjustly distributed among them. Within these two groups the system of unequal social order is maintained through ideological coercion which creates consensus and acceptance of the values, expectations, and conditions as determined by the bourgeoisie. Marx theorized that the work of producing consensus was done in the ‘superstructure’ of society, which is composed of social institutions, political structures, and culture, and what it produced consensus for was the ‘base’, the economic relations of production (So, 2014).

Marx reasoned that as the socio-economic conditions worsened for the proletariat, they would develop a class consciousness that revealed their exploitation at the hands of the wealthy capitalist class of bourgeoisie, and then they would revolt, demanding changes to smooth the conflict (Lowith, 2002). But the changes made to appease conflict maintained a capitalist system, and so the cycle of conflict would repeat. But if it created a new system, like socialism, then peace and stability would be achieved. The conflict perspective therefore sees society as always in tension; conflicts arising from the uneven distribution of resources, status, and power amongst the different groups in society become the engine for social change (Lowith, 2002). In this context, power can be understood as control of material resources and accumulated wealth, control of politics and the institutions that make up society, and one's social status relative to others determined not just by class but by race, gender, sexuality, culture, and religion, among other things.

The last perspective, symbolic interactionism, which was largely influenced by the works of sociologists like George Simmel, Charles Cooley, George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman reflects the micro-sociological perspective of the society and emphasises that human behaviour is influenced by definitions and meanings that are created and maintained through symbolic interaction with others. Rock (2016) argues that symbolic interactionism sees the identity or sense of self for the individual as shaped by social interaction. This means who we are is shaped by others' interpretations of us and how we respond to these interpretations. We develop our self-concept by observing how others interact with us and label us. By seeing a reflection of ourselves in how others see us, we bring alive the "looking-glass self" notion. Symbolic interactionist studies of education examine social interaction in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school venues. This is to provide ample understanding as to what happens on the university campus, and how it is related to the larger society. This perspective sees reality as actively constructed in everyday life. Booher-Jennings (2008) argues

that symbolic interactionism focuses on how people interact and how they make sense of the interaction. In this light, individuals through shared freedom and meanings are able to think and develop their actions and these actions affect the groups they belong to and ultimately the society. People with similar culture and background would tend to interpret situations in a particular way because of their pattern of socialisation. Antikainen (2005) argues that the fundamental concept of symbolic interactionism is that people act on the basis of meanings, and the object of study is how meanings originate in interaction. This means the self is construed as a social product with two facets: the subjective self (I) and the objective self (me), with the former being the creative side of the self and the latter the passive, 'social' side that mirrors others. Symbolic interactionism as a sociological theory of education sees reality as a class of phenomena that exist regardless of our will and which we cannot wish away. This reality is a result of people's creative action in two respects:

“made by people and constructed from meanings given by people. Thus, the evolution of social order is characterized by the following dialectics: society is a human product, society is an objective reality, and human being/individual is a social product” (Antikainen, 2005, p. 33).

Since symbolic interactionism is about the construction of reality at the micro level, it can therefore be used to explain how socialisation shapes student performance, attitudes, values, self-concept and aspirations, and economic status amongst students.

The three sociological perspectives articulated above provide inside into the world of sociology of education and how society both shapes and is being shaped by education. They provide insight on cultural and social capital used in the construction of knowledge and how such capital is created. Both the functionalist and the conflict perspectives are concerned with how broad aspects of society, such as institutions and large social groups, influence the social

world. This level of sociological analysis is called macro sociology: It looks at the big picture of society and suggests how social problems are affected at the institutional level. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with micro sociology, another level of sociological analysis concerned with the social psychological dynamics of individuals interacting in small groups.

3. Re-engineering sociological constellations for higher education

The South African higher education landscape in the advent of decolonisation needs re-engineering from diverse angles to ensure that change is not stereotypical but meaning and productive for all stakeholders. This chapter therefore attempts the re-engineering of the dominant sociological approaches and theories in education by proposing four key approaches. These approaches which are not new in themselves but have emerged from the key theories of sociology of education provide alternative ways to look at the society in which the school functions and how that both impact and is impacted by education. They are not exclusive but rather indicate the beginning of a debate around sociological constellations in South African higher education and what direction it should take. These perspectives are: critical functionalism, functional interactionism, critical interactionism and critical inter-functionalism.

4. Critical Functionalism

Functional sociologists like Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons believed there is a social structure that shapes individual behaviour through the process of socialisation (Antikainen, 2005). For this socialisation process to be orderly, it is based on 'value consensus' (people agreeing around a set of shared norms and values) which enable people to co-operate and to work together to achieve shared goals (Barrett, 2016). This ensures that the society has a stable social structure, in which different institutions perform unique

functions that contribute to the maintenance of the whole. Functionalists generally believe institutions perform positive functions (they do good things for the individual and society). However, as has been seen in South Africa, universities and institutions of higher learning are not only forces for good. They are also centres of racism, marginalisation, colonisation, patriarchy, and hegemony amongst others (Fomunyam, 2017). The functionality of the society and how it shapes education needs to be re-examined to theorise a path which would open up the discussion not only on the functionality of the society but on the responsive functionality of the society; the education system inclusive. To Barrett (2016) and Durkheim (1956), society has a reality of its own over and above the individuals who comprise it. Members of society are constrained by social facts, ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control the individual. Since the university constitutes a functional unit within the broader society, these facts, ways of thinking and behaving also permeate into the educational landscape and form or constitute the capital (cultural, social and economic), habitus and field in which knowledge is created. Critical functionalism demands the untangling of such units of functionality in which they function as a whole to create unity in diversity wherein units can be held accountable for what values it permeates and the kind of social actors it broods. Higher education needs therefore to move beyond the notion of functionalism if the decolonisation movement will succeed for without a breakdown of the structure, its permeating influences would ensure the continuity of the system. Critical functionalism refuses to accept all units within the dysfunctional unit of the university as value-bearing units, but rather chooses to critically engage with the university to untangle the whole and create value-bearing units which are responsive and produce the right kind of capital in the process of socialisation for knowledge construction.

Talcott (2013) argued that society should be seen as a system. All facets of the society work together to create a

functional unit. He likens the system to the human body and how it works. He argues that institutions in society are like organs in the body – each performing specific functions which were necessary to the maintenance of the whole. Talcott (2013) argued that parts of society should be understood in terms of what they contribute to the maintenance of the whole. This system is anchored on four principles: adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency. Adaptation means social systems must cope with their external boundary conditions, such as their resource base, physical environment, territory and so on. With the uneven distribution of wealth and resources in South Africa and the current debates around land redistribution it is clear the units of the society which are supposed to be functional can no longer adapt and have created a dysfunctional system which requires disintegration for reconfiguration to generate a system of unity in diversity which would be responsive functionally (Talcott, 2013). Goal attainment on the other hand require the definition of the goals of societies and social institutions, resolving goal conflicts, prioritizing some over others, determining resource allocations and directing social energies. Political activity organizes and directs the goal attainment of modern social systems. The lack of political will especially in the higher education arena to prioritise what needs to be prioritised (Fomunyam, 2017; Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2018), and the channelling of resources in the right direction or resolving of conflicts (Fomunyam & Rahming, 2017) necessitates critical functionalism which would not only accept the statuesque as it is but would try to disentangle and remould it. Integration for its part speaks to the adaptive efforts required for social institutions within a society to be integrated into a cohesive system. The institutions need to be regulated so that a harmonious society can emerge from their interaction. However, the cohesive nature of the systems breeds a particular kind of social agent akin to the desires of the State and not those of the individual who have the right to be free. Critical functionalism is needed to ensure that even in the face of integration, there is disintegration. Finally, latency deals with the encultured patterns of behaviour required by

the social system and which must be maintained. Peoples' motivation must be established and renewed, and the tensions they experience as they negotiate the social order must be managed. Furthermore, the cultural patterns that accomplish this renewal must themselves be maintained and renewed. Within such parameters, it becomes increasingly difficult for the individual to function as a unique or distinct social agent with agency and the willpower to create change in society. Critical functionalism opens the door for new possibilities against the currently dysfunctional functionalism.

5. Functional interactionism

Handberg, Thorne, Midtgaard, Nielsen, and Lomborg (2015), Snow (2001) and Blumer (1986) argue that symbolic interactionism is anchored on three principles; firstly that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them; secondly this meaning is derived from the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and lastly these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things they encounter. But these meanings keep evolving as the symbols used to describe them keep changing.

The symbolic interactionist perspective considers people as active agents, but quite different from the rational, self-centred, autonomous individual. People are agents and the social world is an active one – with constant adjustment and organisation as essential features of social interaction. The self is created through such interactions, but it is not necessarily a fixed and inflexible self, but one that is constantly adjusting to others. The concern is with how the self develops, how social order is constantly being created, and how larger social forces emerge from these. For the symbolic interactionist, the world is an active one and society is this active social world. The challenge with this in the higher education landscape in South Africa is the inability of some, if not all, of the universities to make real meaning of the change process. The happenings around higher education like the

constant change in policies, the hashtag movements, student protests, and global trends amongst others make it difficult for universities to meaningfully engage with these processes and bring somethings out of such happenings. The fast pace of the symbolic change and the rife nature of the academic environment show that stability is needed within this change process to ensure that universities have enough time to respond to changes (Govinder, Zondo, & Makgoba, 2013; Mattes, 2015; Ratele, 2014; Theron, 2016). With the universities battling with racism, epistemic violence, medium of instruction, funding, and management amongst other things, there is a need for a degree of functional interactionism to create stable units which would be functional and responsive.

Jansen (2003) and Karodia, Soni, and Soni (2016) argue that the South African higher education system is troubled by a host of factors like the alignment of universities with neoliberalism, and the ensuing managerialism. The influences of neoliberalism have predominantly been seen in three ways; the way in which the logic of the market defines the purpose of higher education in economic terms; the redefinition of the university as supermarkets for varieties of public and private goods; and the rise of rampant materialism, even within higher education spaces (Badat, 2009). Also, ranking frenzies and the overproduction of such orderings are now dominating the higher education landscape; its over-proximity within the South African university landscape has given rise to forms of anti-educational and narcissistic forms of academic citizenships across the sector. Jansen (2003) further adds that the declining credibility of academic leadership, declining prominence of teaching, declining volume and quality of our research outputs, the declining quality of the student body, the declining status of the South African professoriate, and the declining voice of criticism within higher education are also amongst the major challenges plaguing the higher education system. Functional interactionism would go beyond symbolic interactionism to counter the tragic confluences and conflagrations emanating from socialising in a context plagued by a multiplicity of tantrums which higher

education stakeholders have been unable to deal with and which has resulted in the calls for decolonisation. Functional interactionism would ensure that the different units within the higher education landscape breeding such cacophonous and epistemic façade as to the direction of higher education and the processes of socialisation that produces the current educational quagmire is addressed and made both functional and responsive. It is time therefore to move beyond symbolic interactionism to a more rigorous functional interactionism which would pave the way for the redefinition of symbols for meaning-making and what it means to socialise in different parts of the society.

6. Critical Interactionism

Rock (2016), Carter and Fuller (2015) and Snow (2001) argue that symbolic interactionism has four orienting principles which fine-tune the socialisation process and by so doing create redundancies and social personas which keep society in a permanent state of disrepair. These principles; interactive determination, symbolisation, emergence and human agency all work towards the establishment and maintenance of the statuesque rather than breeding change. The principle of interactive determination speaks to the understanding of focal objects of analysis — be they self-concepts, identities, roles, organisational practices, or even social movements. But these objects cannot be fully achieved by attending only to qualities presumed to be intrinsic to them. The web of relationships in which they are engulfed in and the interactional contexts they are ensnared in needs to be critically examined to produce the basis for rigorous analysis and not just analysis and directed by societal misdemeanours. Symbolic Interactionism sees relation and meaning-making only in relation to society and how the individuals interact with it, be it physically, visually or imagined. This destroys the self as a subject of meaning in itself and its ability to construct meaning independent of society happenings. Critical interactionism would provide the platform to move away from such perspective to a more individualistic one which sees

the individual meaning-maker first before the society. The critical perspective would bring the much-needed change in interactive determination and create room for interaction and socialisation at the behest of the individual to create the kind of capital required by the individual for meaning-making. The principle of symbolization on its part highlights the processes through which events and conditions, artefacts, people and aggregations, and other features of the ambient environment take on particular meanings, becoming objects of orientation that elicit specifiable feelings and actions. However, Snow (2001) argues that symbolization is a continuously problematic issue for social actors; and they are continuously engaged in the interpretive work of making sense of the social world as they encounter and negotiate it daily.

Critical interactionism would enable the dismantling of such assumptions about symbols of meaning-making and how they function in the society. This is primarily because symbolic interactionism failed to recognise the extent to which symbols and the meanings they convey are often, perhaps routinely, embedded in and reflective of existing cultural and organisational contexts and systems of meaning, which systems themselves need to be understood critically if worthwhile meaning is to be constructed. This redundant reliance on the meanings associated with the symbols rather than seeing them as evolving with age and time constitute part of the reason why higher education has remained colonised. Engaging critical interactionism would engender the meaning-making process as an ongoing one with symbolisation being experienced differently by different actors. The principle of emergence focuses attention on the non-habituated side of social life and its dynamic character and thus the potential for change, not only in the organisation and texture of social life, but also in associated meanings and feelings. However, the non-habituated side of social life is preconditioned by the habituated and if the habituated and its meaning-making processes are faulty, the resultant change being created in the non-habituated preconditioned by the habituated would be faulty. This is why a lot of initiatives in South African

higher education have failed to produce the desired results. Critical interactionism would ensure the emerging change is studied with the parameters of critical consciousness and the habituated social life artefacts.

The last principle, human agency, deals with the active, wilful character of human agents. It recognises that “human beings are neither hard-wired robots responding in a lockstep fashion to internal directives or codes nor as passive social actors behaving merely in accord with extant structural and cultural directives and constraints. Yet biological, structural, and cultural factors are not dismissed in the determination and explanation of behaviour” (Snow, 2001, p. 373). Symbolic interactionism views these factors as predispositions on action without necessarily determining the character of that action. Social agents take into account the structural and cultural constraints that impinge on situations in the course of developing their respective lines of action. Human agency is a factor of meaning making processes developed over time and when such meaning is developed on wrong symbols the agency is corrupted. This explains why education in South Africa has remained colonised despite amazing efforts by the government and the universities themselves. The structures upon which they are building is faulty and this can only be rectified through, or by using, critical interactionism. Critical interactionism would examine the basic principles of interaction by redefining them and making sure that they are based on values and symbols which can build a better society.

7. Critical Inter-Functionalism

Sociology of education speaks to the social in education and shapes how education gets to shape the society. The three dominant sociological perspectives (critical perspective, symbolic interactionism, and functionalist perspective) in higher education in South Africa offer unique perspectives on understanding reality and social life which inform the processes of meaning making and knowledge construction. But in themselves these perspectives are limited, especially

in a higher education sector like that of South Africa's, plagued by diverse challenges. Critical inter-functionalism offers an alternative vantage point for the understanding of reality. It selects from all three perspectives to build a confluent perspective or network of understanding and ways of understanding society and social life, as well as how society both shapes and is shaped by education. Critical inter-functionalism would seek to understand the society as a whole and its meaning-making perspectives through the symbols it holds dear. From a contextual perspective moving forward critical inter-functionalism would seek to redefine these perspectives and symbols to create a paradigm shift in the meaning-making process and the understanding of the functionality of the society. This would thereby aid in shaping both education and society in ways that it would become responsive at all levels.

Critical inter-functionalism would address the unequal social order especially in education maintained through ideological coercion which creates consensus and acceptance of the values, expectations, and conditions as determined by the bourgeoisie. The unequal nature of the South African society neither requires functionalism to maintain the statuesque or symbolic interactionism to maintain the meaning-making and socialisation process nor the critical perspective alone to critic and trigger change, but critical inter-functionalism to trigger change and ensure that new-meaning making symbols are developmental and functional units, which are developed and maintained to ensure a responsive society. Education and educational systems require some level of stability to function and for these stable systems to produce and ensure apt meaning-making processes, the codes and symbols of knowledge construction need to be validated with local or contextual experiences, to produce new meaning-making patterns which can be maintained.

Critical inter-functionalism as a theory for sociology of education would not only ensure responsiveness both in the education system and in the society but responsiveness in the process of education, and in the learning experiences

garnered by students through the course of their education. The advent of decolonisation has exposed the taken-for-granted exigencies in education and expounded upon the need for critical consciousness and how such consciousness should be used to orient education in South Africa.

8. Conclusion

The sociology of education is by no means an easy subject in education but one which requires careful interrogation, for it by and large both shapes education and the society as well as the different orientations of education. However, the decolonisation move has created the need and urgency for the destruction of educational hegemony and the emergence of educational pathways which would speak to real life experiences for sociology speaks to social life and the realities in the society. Sociology of education must therefore move beyond technocratic views of society which seeks to maintain the statuesque to one that would create new avenues and opportunities for meaning making in the society. The three key sociological theories have been excellent till date in driving higher education in South African but it is time to explore other perspectives which speak to the moment and the urgency of student needs.

Critical functionalism, functional interactionism, critical interactionism and critical inter-functionalism are alternative pathways which can be considered for sociology of education. They are by no means definitive or exclusory but marks the beginning of conversations in South Africa around the re-engineering of sociology of education and what approaches to use and direction to take as a way of opening up the discourse on sociology of education. The article concludes therefore with two key recommendations; firstly that sociology of education is key in higher education for the society both shapes and is shaped by education and as such the study of sociology of education needs to evolve, as well as its approaches and schema, which are used in meaning construction and socialisation both within the academic milieu and the society

upon graduation. Secondly, educational theories should never be left to remain static or fallow as we strive to improve both the quality of education and the educational experience. The re-engineering or reconstitution of the same to influence local context and the meaning-making process should be the focus of sociology of education. Life itself is not static, neither is the quality of life or social experience. The theory must constantly evolve to meet the change and address the challenges.

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Chapter 11

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