


Introduction

Curriculum Theory and Theorising in Unstable Times in African Higher Education

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Curriculum and all its discourses constitute the heart of education and all its paraphernalia and largely informs the happenings in schools or universities. As a result of the importance of curriculum, all scholars in the field of education in general claim or appear to claim expertise in all things curriculum and how the field should unfold. These struggles in the field of curriculum studies are made more complex by the unstable times the world as a whole and higher education in particular is currently facing. The world in general and higher education in particular is currently dealing with and striving to readjust to the new normal and abnormalities created by the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the calls for decolonisation, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and other contextual crises in different nations across the African continent. How are curriculum scholars responding to these crises through curriculum theorising, curriculum theory, curriculum change, curriculum innovation and development amongst others? What are the changes happening in the field of curriculum studies within this period and how are these changes changing the curriculum experience? What curriculum encounters are emerging within these times? What curricular charges are shaping the curriculum conversations and what curriculum matters are currently being prioritised in curriculum conversations? These questions amongst others, are the immediate concerns of this book. This edited

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volume seeks to chart a new course by providing alternative insight from both empirical and theoretical research. This book takes on all things curriculum as pertains to the current education landscape. To get into the crux of the issues in this book, it is important to situate them with within broader curriculum conversations.

Fomunyan (2021) articulates three theorising approaches: contextual theorising; responsive theorising; and theoretical theorising. He argues that contextual theorising is at the heart of relevance in theorising since curriculum theorising focuses on the process rather than the product. If the process is problematic, the product will be the same. Contextual theorising not only opens the conversation up, but ensures that all the dimensions of context - that is, context as place, time and space come into play. This way, everything that works towards ensuring relevance is prioritised, especially in uncertain times like this when new solutions and approaches are needed to address educational challenges. Responsive theorising on the other hand deals with the process of making curriculum pedagogically, disciplinary, culturally, and economically responsive. These dimensions can only be achieved by a multiplicity of voices, articulating curriculum pathways that are responsive. Responsive theorising experiments with voices that matter as a way of creating alternative curriculum responsibilities that shape or redefine the power dynamics in educational spaces, creating disciplinary and interdisciplinary spaces, and shaped curricular charges that make for responsiveness. This type of theorising takes the curriculum further by ensuring that it articulates responsive solutions to educational challenges, since the educational landscape has been drastically altered by the COVID-19 pandemic, decolonisation, and the 4IR, amongst others. Lastly, theoretical theorising moves beyond the continuous process of thinking, imagining, and positing new ways of understanding curriculum to theory theorisation, which explores theorising approaches and the trustworthiness of theory development process as we move to decolonise the curriculum and everything about it or respond to the

challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that not only solve the current problem but prepare the academic to be ready for such challenges in the future. Theoretical theorising focuses on failed curriculum theories and the processes that made them fail, so as to theorise alternative pathways for new theory generation.

Theorising curriculum matters

The first chapter of this book and section is titled “quality education for what, how, who, and why in the Fourth Industrial Revolution?” and it argues for quality education (curriculum) defined as a reconstructed process of teaching and learning based on the critique of pragmatic-, performance-, and competence-based curricula, in order to address the ‘why’ question of education (driven by education reason). This chapter focuses on the integrating of digital technologies for a performance or competence-based curriculum, as a way of ensuring quality within the context of the curriculum.

The second chapter in this book and section is titled “curriculum decision-making in times of uncertainty: A case study of a technicist approach during the COVID-19 pandemic”.

The chapter explores curriculum decision-making processes especially in times of uncertainty. This chapter uses the Mauritian experience during the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study to examine curriculum decision-making in a centralised education system. The chapter also deals with the significance of a close collaboration between stakeholders at the strategic, tactical, and operational levels of curriculum decision-making during times of crisis.

The third chapter in this book and section is titled “‘brave new world’ revisited: drama education in a virtual landscape”. This chapter is a follow-up on a previously published chapter titled “Brave New World: Decolonising Shakespeare in the Drama Education Curriculum”, which dealt with curriculum prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and gave an account of an extra-curricular drama education project

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using interactive workshopping and syncretic theatre, and recommended teacher agency as a powerful mechanism for transforming university curricula from within. The authors posit that:

“the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the context overnight, and we now have two years’ experience of the shock and dismay with which university educators have greeted and addressed the changed circumstances. Not only Drama Education, but the real-world phenomenon of drama itself has been affected, with many theatres closing down”.

This chapter critiques the approach described in the previously published chapter from the point of view of its feasibility in the virtual landscape to which we have been forcibly exiled by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fourth chapter in this book and section is titled “curriculum implementation dilemma imposed by COVID-19 pandemic: Re-engineering curriculum through self-directed learning approaches”. The chapter poses that curriculum implementation in many schools in South Africa has exposed a huge disparity which is historic in nature between well-resourced and under-resourced schools. This chapter draws from the partial implementation of blended learning introduced in 2020 and 2021 as a critical intervention for curriculum implementation and concludes that the introduction of new subjects and content are necessary to improve the quality of education.

The fifth chapter in this book and section is captioned “enactment principles underpinning the digitalised curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic: Lesotho higher education”. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a hasty paradigm shift in higher education institutions (HEIs), with most having to move from traditional to digitalised curriculum (DC). This chapter draws from the connectivism theory and the natural identity framework to undergird and provide solutions for effectively using DC. This chapter poses that DC should display balanced principles of both the performance-based curriculum (implementation) and competence-based

curriculum (enactment), without inclination to either, lest there be an imbalance of knowledge-building.

The sixth chapter in this book and section is titled “theorising the politics of curriculum responsiveness in a Cameroonian university”. The chapter sees content as the epicentre of the educational experience, without which no meaningful learning can take place. The research was designed as a qualitative case study of three literature modules and data was generated using semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation. The chapter concludes that curricula changes like educational integrity and moral commitment are vital for the continuous blossoming of the higher education.

Theorising Decolonisation in Contested Spaces

The seventh chapter in this book and the first in this section is titled “Science Pre-service Teachers’ Perceptions towards Developing isiZulu Vocabulary for Chemistry”. This chapter explores the need for decoloniality of the Chemistry curriculum, to make it relevant to our context. In this chapter, the author argues that there is an obligation to develop an isiZulu vocabulary for chemistry. This is a qualitative case study of six universities of technology in South Africa.

The eighth chapter in this book and second in this section is captioned “Decolonising Teacher Education Curriculum in South Africa: the Realities and Challenges in Higher Education”. The chapter argues that there is a growing demand for the decolonising of teacher education curriculum, as a paradigm shift from the Eurocentric-dominated curriculum which spans from the apartheid era until the present democratic period in South African society. The chapter examines the teacher education curriculum within a post-colonial context as it exists in South Africa.

The next chapter which is the ninth in this book and the third in this section is called “Walking the Tightrope of Decolonisation in Education: Critically Gauging Curriculum Emancipation in SIDS Contexts”. This chapter examines two disenfranchising moves in the Mauritian curriculum. The

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chapter makes the case for the establishment of a creolised curriculum for global citizenship.

The next chapter is the tenth in the book and fourth in the section is titled “Decolonising Curriculum Practices: an Analysis of Student Perspectives from a South African University”. This chapter describes student experiences on the delivery of a newly introduced university language-acquisition course as part of the institution’s curriculum decolonisation agenda. Guided by the null curriculum theory, the chapter employs both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires for data generation.

Chapter eleven is the last chapter in this book and the fifth in this section. It is dubbed “Dancing with Decolonial Curriculum Theorists: Technology as a Shapeshifter in Art and Design Education”. The chapter posits that some decolonial theorists have associated the notion of decolonisation with changing the nature of knowledge, shifting our position in relation to knowledge, and economic transformation. The chapter proposes a framework that can be used to position, or bridge informal learning knowledges driven by technology outside the boxes of curriculum to support disadvantaged students to meet industry requirements or employability in art and design disciplines.

These two sections explore different kinds of crisis affecting education in different context and how the institutions, or academics within the institutions, responded to such crises and the way forward. While the chapters explore uniquely different contexts and different kinds of crisis, they all deal with uncertainty in education in general and curriculum particularly. Whether the uncertainty is the cause or the effect, it is clear that there is crisis at hand and the curriculum must respond. This is part of such response as well as a call to further engagement on the multiplicity of crises rocking the African continent as far as education is concerned.

Reference

Fomunyan, K.G. (2021).Theorising Alternative Pathways for Curriculum Theorising in Africa. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 9(4), 720 - 726. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2021.090402>