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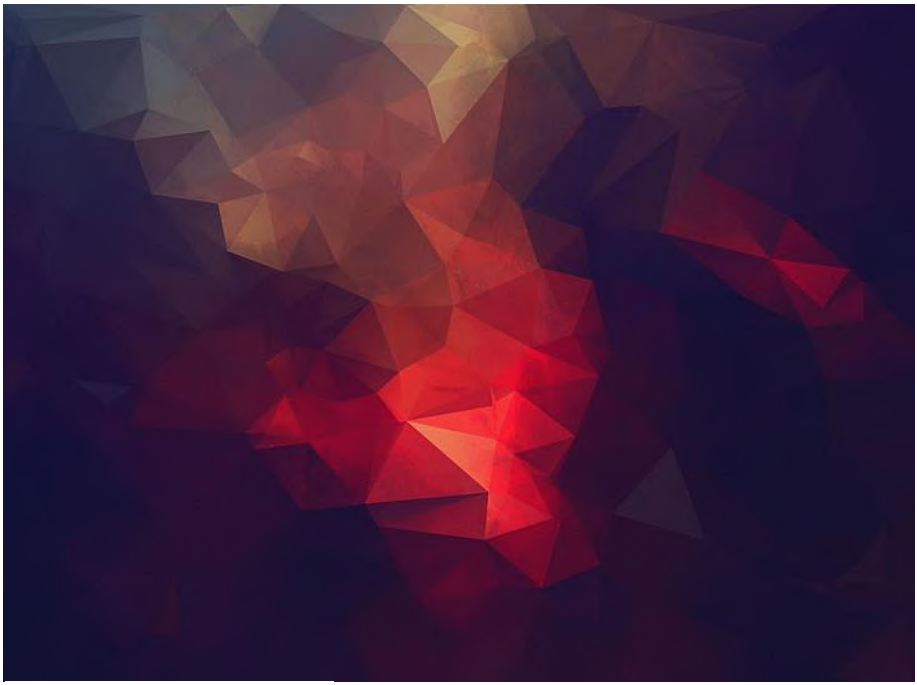
On Curriculum Philosophy, Thinking, and Theorising in South African Higher Education Transformation



CURRICULUM STUDIES
Special interest group of SAAEA

Petro du Preez
Labby Ramrathan
Shan Simmonds

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CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

The Editor: Alternation, Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal, Priv. Bag X10, Dalbridge, 4041, DURBAN, South Africa; Tel: +27-(0)31-260-7303; Fax: +27-(0)31-260-7286; Web: http://alternation.ukzn.ac.za
e-mail: smitj@ukzn.ac.za; hlongwan1@ukzn.ac.za; chettd@unisa.ac.za; maphitha69@gmail.com

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On Curriculum Philosophy, Thinking, and Theorising in South African Higher Education Transformation

Guest Editors
Petro du Preez
Labby Ramrathan
Shan Simmonds

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Durban

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Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa

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PRINT CONNECTION Tel (031) 202-7766; 202-7766

Editorial: On Curriculum Philosophy, Thinking, and Theorising in South African Higher Education Transformation

Petro du Preez
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9100-6461

Labby Ramrathan
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9963-0675

Shan Simmonds
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5005-9906

1 Introduction

Transformation in South African higher education has been an on-going process since the mid- 1990s, focusing initially on the demographic profiles of staff and students, through to widening physical access, and making attempts to improve student throughput and graduation rates (Du Preez *et al.* 2016). Although matters curricula were part of the transformation movement, they were addressed, in most cases, as part of a proliferation of policies geared toward addressing structural aspects dealing with the exoskeleton of the curriculum (Lange 2017) but a more nuanced look at curriculum is needed. This has been initiated through published works such as Bitzer and Botha (2011) and Samuel *et al.* (2016). But the complexities and pressures of an emerging fourth industrial revolution, the mobility of students, the rapid growth in technologies, the environmental crisis, the widening inequalities of epistemological access, and calls for decolonisation inform key discourses that are shifting our thinking about higher education curriculum (Jansen 2019; Le Grange *et al.* 2020). Juxtaposed against these complexities and pressures,

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curriculum transformation is further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to the investigation of the posthuman in education and in the lives and livelihoods of people across the globe in an ecology that includes humans and other biological and environmental elements (Ramrathan *et al.* 2020). These key discourses revolve around the sorely needed troubling of the curriculum so as to enable alternative pathways for its advancement.

Initiated by members of the South African Education Research Association curriculum studies special interest group, this special issue's intent is to engage critically with various dimensions of curriculum transformation. This important, appropriate, and timely scholarly undertaking with its philosophical and theoretical musings, is framed by the questions: Why is curriculum philosophy, thinking, and theorising in South African higher education transformation pivotal right now? How has curriculum transformation unfolded in diverse higher education institutions? These questions are central to curriculum specialists and their continued commitment to advance the field in South Africa. Articles providing philosophical engagement with higher education curriculum transformation open this special issue and these are followed by articles that contribute to the thinking and theorising thereof.

2 Philosophical Engagements with Higher Education Curriculum Transformation

'Higher Education Curriculum Transformation in and of Radical Immanence: Towards a Free and Creative Ethics' shows how curriculum transformation experienced thus far reinforces a reductionist approach to transformation that is fundamentally transcendentally motivated and, therefore, tends to overlook education as meaningful in and of itself. Using Deleuze's notion of radical immanence in relation to discourses of higher education curriculum transformation, the authors of this paper argue that this transformation needs to be complemented by other notions of immanence so as to open up avenues for a new kind of ethics.

'(Re)Thinking Lived Curriculum as Complicated Conversation through Nomadic Thought in Pursuit of Curriculum Transformation' invites deep reflection on the discontent evident in South African higher education regarding the critique and dismantling of dominant inscriptions of curriculum.

In an attempt to engender a curriculum discourse that shifts the focus from policy to the subject, this article engages with subjectivity and the lived curriculum as a constructive tensionality. In a (re)thinking of lived curriculum as complicated conversation, the author takes account of the posthuman era and uses this to unlock the possibilities of complicated conversation through nomadic thought.

'Towards an Embodied Critical Pedagogy of Discomfort as a Decolonising Teaching Strategy' focuses on a humanising critical pedagogy of discomfort to practice social justice though curriculum. Through a discussion of students' responses to racism, privilege, and inequality as experienced in South Africa and in its university classrooms, the authors advocate for a shift towards an 'embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort'. This kind of pedagogy takes into account the acute awareness (epistemological and ontological) of embodiment in its desire to counteract education that promotes instrumentalization and commodification in favour of cultivating social justice as a form of decolonisation.

Continuing with issues of inequality and social injustice, 'The (Post)human Condition and Decoloniality: Rethinking and Doing Curriculum' brings to the fore the significance of the (post)human awareness that valuing all of life and its interconnectedness should characterise our very being in this 21st century context. The article raises critical existential and educational questions such as: How should we live? What is the unit of reference for the human now? How should we learn? What knowledge is of most worth? Whose knowledge is of most worth? Through the insightful analysis of the implications of these questions, the notion of *curerre-ubuntu* is introduced as a concept for reimagining curriculum in the post-Anthropocene.

3 Thinking and Theorising Higher Education Curriculum Transformation

Bringing into dialogue the Anthropocene and the current COVID-19 complexities, 'Curriculum Theorising in an Economics Education Programme' explores border thinking as a tool to unpack curriculum theorising historically in the Economics education curriculum. Using Decolonial Critique and Posthumanism, this paper explores how canonical thought on, and principles of, Economics might be disrupted in a teacher education programme for pre-service teachers of Economics. The centrality of human need satisfaction is

troubled to reflect on the application of a disruptive curriculum to contest traditional disciplinary Economics knowledge.

The issue of inequality is again brought to the fore in 'A Reflection on Academisation and its Effect on Curriculum Transformation in South Africa's Higher Education Sector' that provides a critical reflection on academisation as one of the educational discourses in higher education determining transformation of the curriculum. This paper provokes responses to curriculum transformation as an academisation process by asking: Does the curriculum strive for inclusion of the narratives of all stakeholders? Does it strive for the creation or development of students who can be regarded as socially responsive citizens with well-developed critical thinking skills?

Extending the notion of curriculum for relevance, 'Using Translanguaging in Higher Education to Empower Students' Voices and Enable Epistemological Access' centres the voices of students in their construction of an academic identity with a focus on plurilingualism and translanguaging. In this paper the authors make a case for a sense of embodied self, an active element in the formation of geo- and body-politics of knowledge which has been highlighted in recent literature focussing on translanguaging in education and decolonising the curricula of higher education.

Given the guiding questions informing this publication, these papers all allude to the importance of placing emphasis on the philosophical underpinning of curriculum transformation to shift the discourses from those that favour an instrumental approach to those that offer a more philosophical one. The reason behind this need lies in the diverse complexities that feed into it; all of them demand curriculum transformation in higher education and in schools.

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Petro du Preez
Professor
School of Professional Studies in Education
North-West University
Potchefstroom
petro.dupreez@nwu.ac.za

Labby Ramrathan
Professor
Department
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban
RAMRATHANP@ukzn.ac.za

Shan Simmonds
Professor
Department of Curriculum Studies
North-West University
Potchefstroom
shan.simmonds@nwu.ac.za

A Reflection on Academisation and its Effect on Curriculum Transformation in South Africa's Higher Education Sector

Primrose T. Sabela
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7189-9194

Mfundo Mandla Masuku
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3743-0779

Lindelani Q. Qwabe
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/000-0003-2266-2104

Abstract

South Africa's higher education has undergone complex processes of state mandated institutional restructuring since the demise of apartheid. These have resulted in an increase in access to higher education and several processes of regulating the administration, organisation, management, and functioning of the country's institutions of higher learning. The transformation of higher education in South Africa has relied on, among other factors, discourses of academisation to address historical legacies of inequity, and transform the country's higher education curriculum. In this paper, we explore how the discourse of academisation has changed the country's vocational programmes from being alternatives to university studies to becoming universities of technology. This change has compelled vocational programmes to shift their focus and re-curriculate thus interfering with staff composition and constraining rather than creating an autonomous atmosphere for actual curriculum transformation and implementation. The country's higher education sector needs to reflect critically on its current process of curricular transformation by interrogating if and how these transformations respond to the needs of the

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sector's stakeholders, namely students and their prospective employers. This critical reflection seeks to answer questions that focus on how the curriculum strives to include its stakeholders' narratives to help students to become socially responsive citizens, equipped with well-developed critical thinking skills. It is proposed that a participatory platform be established to which all relevant stakeholders could contribute by helping to build an effective academic agenda. This could enable the country's higher learning institutions to be responsive to the rapidly changing needs and demands of employers by producing graduates who are both innovative and competitive critical thinkers.

Keywords: curriculum, transformation, academisation, responsiveness, higher education

1 Introduction

In the past, universities were associated with elitism, exclusion, and inequality. However, today's institutions are described as being diversified, globalised, borderless, marketised, neo-liberalised, and technologised (Hey & Morley 2011). Further, these authors raise concerns about what the future holds for universities and whether current policy discourses enhance or limit creativity and critical thinking. Altbach and Davis (1999) recognise that profound transformations have taken place in higher education globally, and predict several challenges associated with the implications of these changes. Predicted about four decades ago, as these scholars remind us, these challenges have become cause for concern and much has been written about them. These include an increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education, diversity and demographic changes, the impact of new technologies, reconsiderations of the social and economic role of higher education, and others. Higher education expands with growing demand for graduate knowledge, skills, and certified professsional competencies (Adetiba 2019). However, expansion of the higher education sector has led to the production of unemployable graduates. Despite these challenges, few studies with a focus on the curriculum, pedagogical practices and approaches, and the consequential effects and impacts on the product produced – the sector's graduates – have been conducted.

Both traditional higher education institutions (HEIs) and universities of technology have been affected by either the global environment or circumstances within and beyond their borders (Altbach 2004). Such impacts

are felt by universities located in countries that were never colonised. Although colonisation may not have impacted these nations, most universities in the Global South have copied and adopted foreign models of higher education, thus implementing their programme structures, curricula, course credit systems, management systems and so on. The implications of adopting without adapting foreign higher education structures, academic programmes, and policies must be examined in terms of how relevant or irrelevant these structures are. This leads to questions:

1. Whose standards are considered in curriculum, programme and policy development in higher education?
2. Who dictates the standards adopted in higher education?
3. Who determines the standards adopted in HEIs and on what basis?
4. What are the implications of transformation in higher education in terms of curriculum changes?

Exploring these critical issues can result in questions arising as to whether current higher education policies and curricula respond to local and global trends that manifest in prevalent conditions in the countries in which the institutions are located. According to Maassen and Cloete (2006), countries must consider reorienting and repositioning higher education systems if they are be responsive to the planetary changes. Further, universities continue to serve critical institutions that produce a well-trained, and informed workforce characterised by a critical and inquiring intellect.

In this paper, we reflect critically on the implications of academisation discourse on curriculum transformation in South Africa's higher education sector. We examine how the discourse of academisation has been applied to the curriculum of vocational programmes in the transformation of former technikons into universities of technology. In examining this kind of transformation, we focus on its broader implications. We seek to unpack critical questions that relate to whose interests are served by transforming the country's higher education sector and how responsive this transformed curriculum is to the needs of the country in terms of producing employable, informed, critical citizens.

One of the objectives of South Africa's former technikon system was to prepare students to be efficient and better qualified practitioners. Kreber (2006) maintains that the challenge in higher education has always been to

prepare students who are not only discipline specialists and doers, but independent thinkers, productive citizens, and future leaders. Cranton (2011) observes a global trend that compels universities and colleges funded by the state to demonstrate how effective teaching is realised, which sometimes forces them to focus on the numbers produced (end-product) and the state subsidy to be obtained thereafter. We begin by conceptualising academisation in higher education, and this is followed by a history of higher education institutional transformation with a focus on the complexity of processes involved in the state's endeavour to restructure institutions of higher learning. Further, we also consider the landscape of the South African higher education system during the period before and after 1994. A prominent feature of the post 1994 phase is the democratisation of higher education largely informed by the democratic government. In the last section of the paper, we focus on the implications for the changed curriculum and structure of the higher education system and research in universities of technology.

2 Conceptualisation of Academisation in Higher Education

Despite that academisation has proven to be one of the most important trends witnessed in contemporary higher education, it has received comparatively limited attention in the field of higher education research as Ek *et al.* (2013) note. The concept is viewed against the backdrop of several changes in higher education after 1994. In this paper, our explanation of academisation is based on the transformation undergone by vocational programmes from being alternatives to universities, to becoming an integral part of higher education. This process has prompted former technikons to review, revise, and change their curricula from being purely practice-based to being theory-based. Unpacking the concept of higher education is essential since it forms the basis of understanding academisation and its effects on curriculum transformation. Higher education is conceived of as a contested concept with no precise definition. Barnett (1990) has raised questions about whether higher education is a single, albeit contested concept or a number of different concepts with little, if anything, in common or whether it is a concept which is used in distinct language games that are representative of rival ideologies. Scott (2019) explains an ideal model of higher education in terms of transition from elite to mass and then mass to universal higher education, arguing that variance in higher education institutions and the context defines higher education itself.

Ambiguity in the definition of higher education is attributed to the plethora of dynamic challenges it faces that include internationalisation, academisation, marketisation, and massification. Further, the ambiguity and lack of consensus is exacerbated by continued demand for universities to be responsive to societal needs. The term higher education indicates post-secondary school education that covers a wide variety of institutions. In the South African context, the diversity of tertiary level institutions includes universities, former technikons, various types of colleges and others (Raju 2004). In addition, a higher education system is expected to provide transformative education and enable participatory parity irrespective of the type of institution. This includes the provision of education that shapes and prepares students for their respective life possibilities.

The concept of university is considered a key component of higher education. Lategan (2009) argues that there is neither a fixed structural understanding of what a university is, nor a one-size-fits-all approach. Importantly, universities are expected to prepare students to be the future workforce and not act only as knowledge-sharing institutions (McEwen & Trede 2014). Thus, universities are also viewed as higher education institutions that equip students with knowledge that will allow them to participate in the field of power. According to Lategan (2008), traditional universities have three core functions: teaching and learning; research; and community engagement. These functions remain unchanged, yet they have taken a new direction in terms of commercialisation, innovations, and other changes. Further, comparing the functions of a traditional university with the core activities of universities of technology remains a mammoth task. It can be argued that the term university suggests that the three core functions apply to the universities of technology. Higher education should provide technical performance and knowledge production skills. Graduates must be equipped with high level critical thinking as well as analytical and creative conceptualisation skills (Ahrari *et al.* 2016). However, concerns have been raised about changes in higher education that involve institutions being merged and treated as a single system. A typical example is the change from technikons to universities of technology, calling for re-orientation of disciplines, programmes, and the curriculum, with important implications for co-operation and articulation among different types of higher education institutions. However, various influences have shaped the higher education system in Africa that include colonialism, apartheid, racialism, acculturation, and inequitable economic de-

velopment (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017).

Many scholars have posited that higher education enhances scientific expertise while at the same time responding to items which should inform the curriculum such as market pressures and societal demands (Aina 2010; Barnett 1990; Lategan 2009). Thus, higher education institutions play multiple and sometimes contradictory roles as Brennan *et al.* (2004) point out; questions about policy issues in higher education, specifically whether the policies enhance or impede performance of the designated roles, are almost inevitable. Often, questions are raised in the context of productiveness, responsiveness, relevance, and transformative higher educational institutions. They include the identity of recipients of higher education, the output (what recipients obtain from HEIs and the future prospects of their graduates). Kyvik (2009) defines academisation as an educational discourse that has significantly changed the higher education fraternity. It refers to the intellectualisation of the higher education system in which various levels of change are discernible. The levels are identified as the policy drift that is used to describe governance issues, institutional drift to explain changes at the programme level, and academic drift to explain academisation processes that occur at student and staff levels (Kyvik 2009). Further, these levels are closely intertwined, but they become much easier to understand in terms of the dynamics and implications of academisation when the focus is directed at each individual level. Academisation is used to analyse a particular change that occurred in the South African higher education context that involved orienting activities in ways that bring technical education close to the university image, resulting in reconfiguration of the mission and functions of these institutions of higher learning.

Academisation is characterised by incorporating stronger elements of theory and engagement in knowledge production and dissemination. The definition of university provokes critical thinking which raises several questions such as whether providing this theory-flavoured curriculum adds any value that makes universities of technology produce different and more informed, productive, and relevant graduates. Further, exploring how re-orienting the curriculum responds to market pressures and societal demands is worthwhile. Kyvik (2009) describes academisation as a functional response to the need for more theory in the curriculum with a belief that it contributes to better trained students who have the ability to cope with the demands of an increasingly knowledge-based labour market. This relates to curricular-drift that is characterised by accentuation of abstract knowledge, gradual reduction

in emphasis attached to practical work, and a move away from a utilitarian approach in course curricula (Kyvik 2009).

According to Ek *et al.* (2013), academisation has several demands for engagement in knowledge production, and it compels vocational programmes to change focus towards a more active involvement in theory and research. Others argue that academisation could be somehow counterproductive for the maintenance of a diversified post-secondary higher education system since it may fail to respond to production of skilled labour for the practical profession vocations (Kyvik 2009). However, some authors claim that converting technikons to universities of technology has been confined to name changes alone and did not ever translate to any other significant alterations (Raju 2004; McKenna 2009). A focus on the historical developments in the higher education sector sheds light on the direct and indirect effects of academisation on curriculum transformation.

3 An Overview of the South African Higher Education Sector

The higher education sector in South Africa has undergone a series of changes to address legitimate concerns of inequity and redress, and to pursue the goals of increased access and success in higher education. McKenna (2009) maintains that a significant change to higher education in South Africa was aimed at creating a single unified public higher education sector. This aim resulted in merging many public HEIs and led to the creation of three types of institution – traditional universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology (McKenna 2009). Attention has been directed to addressing issues of inequality, historical legacies, and widened access with a minimum amount being paid to the discourses of change that influence curricular transformation. Badat (2010) posits that South Africa's higher education system has been profoundly shaped by apartheid planning and the socio-economic and political priorities of apartheid policies. Changes in South Africa's higher education have been driven by developments in the global context that include national conditions and needs (Dison *et al.* 2008). During the apartheid era (1948 to 1994), higher education was a complex and discriminatory system that boasted 21 universities, 15 technikons and a variety of colleges for the fields of education, agriculture, and nursing. Raju (2004) argues that the apartheid era was marked by initial tight state control of higher education and this changed to a brief period (in the mid-1980s) of de-regulated so-called free-market

higher education. However, from 1994, higher education has been highly regulated again in the name of ensuring a more equitable, integrated, and efficient system (Habib *et al.* 2008; Raju 2004; Scott 2019). This has once again jeopardised the institutional autonomy and academic freedom of HEIs.

Through the Advanced Technical Education Act 40 of 1967, South Africa created advanced technical education systems with the aim of producing skilled and high-level personnel to meet the needs of both commerce and industry. The system was regarded as intermediate between matric and university and located in the higher education sector. Later, the Advanced Technical Education Amendment Act 43 of 1979 changed the name of the institutions to technikons. This change in name sought to ensure that technikons enjoyed free vertical development but with a difference in focus. These technikons were defined as HEIs of learning whose main responsibility was to provide education and training to supply the labour market with middle-to-high level personnel, and they developed their unique qualifications parallel to universities. Post 1994, the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 reaffirmed the autonomy of technikons within the higher education system although the Act seemed to be silent about the status of technikons and their relation to universities. Raju (2004) argues that institutions may be developed parallel to one another yet perform different functions and have different foci. Lategan (2008) perceives a university of technology as a unique institution but similar to the traditional universities. Furthermore, Universities of Technology must perform all the core functions of universities but not in the same way as the traditional type of university and should not lose focus on the target population served. The period after 1994 is characterised by the enactment of various legislative frameworks, courtesy of the democratic government that sought to address the injustices perpetrated by the previous regime. The plethora of legislative frameworks sought to ensure equal access to higher education. Further, they also aimed to regulate the administration, organisation, management, and the overall functioning of higher education institutions in South Africa. Section 16 (1) (d) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is regarded as a constitutional recognition of the unique position of universities in democratic societies. It guarantees academic freedom as a constitutional right that alludes to the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of scientific research. It also recognises the academic freedom of lecturers, and the institutional autonomy of universities.

Further, the government of South Africa enacted policies such as the

document on the *Transformation and Restructuring: A New Institutional Landscape for Higher Education Institutions in South Africa,* Higher *Education Act101 of 1997, Education White Paper 3 of 1997* and the National *Qualifications Framework Act 67of 2008* (NQF) including the *National Plan for Higher Education.* Most of the regulatory frameworks have tended to constrain rather than liberate or create an autonomous atmosphere or lead to academic freedom within the higher education sector. Waghid *et al.* (2005) argue that the state has to a large extent instituted regulatory measures with regard to what gets taught and how, who teaches, and who is taught. The NQF, a framework that sets the boundaries, principles, and guidelines that provide a philosophical base and an organisational structure for the construction of a qualification system makes provision for the Minister of Higher Education and Training to have the overall responsibility for the NQF and determine the qualifications structure for the higher education system. However, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), regulated in terms of the NQF Act, is responsible for the development of policy and criteria for registering standards and qualifications on the NQF upon recommendation by the Council for Higher Education (CHE). CHE is responsible for advising the Minister on matters related to higher education in South Africa. It also develops and manages the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), which forms an integral part of the NQF. The HEQSF is, in turn, responsible for establishing parameters and criteria for qualifications design and facilitates the comparability of qualifications across the higher education system (Revised HEQSF 2013).

The Education White Paper 3 of 1997, a Programme for Higher Education Transformation, outlines the framework for change in the South African higher education sector to ensure uniformity in how the system is planned, funded, and governed. According to Badat (2010), the discourse on transformation in higher education has revolved around issues of increased access and success, including improved participation and advancement of social equity. Further, the discourse on transformation has a thrust towards meeting the country's economic and social development needs, redressing past discrimination, and contributing to knowledge production to keep pace with international standards. The main focus of the Education White Paper 3 was to create a unified and coordinated national higher education system to overcome the fragmentation, inequality, and inefficiency of the higher education system. This unification intended to create a learning environment that promotes

creativity and develops individuals with inquiring and critical intellectual abilities and aptitudes. The Education White Paper 3 of 1997 has also focused on addressing the needs of society in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent manner for both the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. It is acknowledged in the policy that the country has a dual higher education system characterised by institutions that can claim academic achievement of international standard that co-exist with those parts of the system that observe teaching and research, and that favour academic insularity and closed-system disciplinary programmes (Aina 2010). Furthermore, transformation is possible and achievable, but requires understanding of the politics of the process of change. Badat (2010) notes that the Higher Education Act of 1997 and Education White Paper 3 declared the need to create a single coordinated higher education system but maintain diversity in the organisational structure of the institutional landscape. However, some of the Acts acknowledged in this paper, including the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act 67 of 2008) and the National Qualifications Sub-Framework of 2013 seem to be silent about the relationship between traditional universities and Universities of Technology.

4 Implications of Academising the HE Sector

Many education researchers have discussed the various challenges associated with transformation within the higher education sector in South African, including how the various changes influence performance of functions, roles, and responsibilities (Lotz-Sisitka & Lupele 2015; Maserumule 2005; Raju 2004). Higher education can be viewed as a thick forest of institutions, systems, and practices that do not have clear tracts, values, and goals that connect the institutions and systems to the major challenges of their context (Scholtz 2013). Transformation in higher learning institutions has actually been viewed as a largely top-down process built on a set of predominantly neoliberal and market-driven assumptions, diagnoses, and prescriptions (Scholtz 2013). Very little space has been provided for adequate discussions, debates, and reflections on the identity and role of Universities of Technology in the HEI sector or in broader society. Clarification about how universities of technology differ from traditional universities could assist in establishing the focus and identity of the institutions.

A prominent feature of debates on curriculum transformation is the imperative to move from content-driven to objective-driven and to process-

driven learning, which includes a distinct career-focused and advanced technology education (Lootzt-Sisitka & Lupele 2015; Maserumule 2005; Scholtz 2013). Before 1994, technikons (now universities of technology) had a strong vocational focus and provided training for a skilled labour force in a range of fields such as engineering (technicians), health, biotechnology, nature conservation, auditing, design, film, video and other pre-professional levels (Garraway & Winberg 2019; Maserumule 2005; McKenna & Boughey 2014). These technikons were viewed as institutions of higher learning that offered career-focused, hands-on education and training. They were responsible for producing graduates with knowledge that was immediately relevant in the workplace. While, on the one hand, traditional universities remained repositories of advanced knowledge, technikons, on the other, were responsible for applying knowledge to enable students to perform real-world tasks. Therefore, the distinct focus of Universities of Technology has always been described as providing career focused and advanced technological education through a curriculum focused on experiential and vocational teaching (McKenna 2009; Raju 2005). Their programmes were designed to produce graduates that could readily use their skills in the practical world of work. Furthermore, they closely interacted with work-places. McKenna (2009) posits that the central thrust and purpose of technikons was to provide a broad variety of opportunities that focused on the needs of a developing economy. Similarly, Deissinger and Gonon (2016) view apprenticeship as the cornerstone of economic welfare and associate it with low unemployment rates.

Further, technikons had strong ties with industries and they continually made great efforts to produce competent, employable, and well-prepared graduates for a specific occupation or industry. As alternatives to universities, technikons had lower entry requirements that often made them more inclusive in terms of student admission when compared to traditional universities. Garraway and Winberg (2019) explain that the role of technikons, clear and somewhat unitary, was to produce employees for industry. Academisation of the curriculum has brought terminology such as examinations and progress that far outweigh such phrases as skilled trade and modern apprenticeship, so no equilibrium can be observed between academic and non-academic subjects (Rogers & Richmond 2016). McKenna (2009) has questioned the rationale behind the higher education sector's commitment to change the status of institutions that were widely recognised and had clearly defined roles and functions.

The question on whether academisation of former technikons considered the role that these institutions of higher learning had in developing the country's technicians remains relevant. Changing the designation suggests changing the mission and vision as well as the curriculum, which raises questions about whether curricula in Universities of Technology changed, and if so, why and in what ways and for whose benefit were the changes implemented. Further, it was noted that an ill-informed curricula change could be detrimental to the end-product. While it emerged that the curriculum never changed the boundaries between the university-type programmes and ex-technikon-type programmes became permeable and fuzzy, which contributed to challenges of articulation (McKenna 2009). The consequences of transformation relate among others to the creation of a series of qualifications, such as Bachelor of Technology (B-Tech), which was added as a compliant measure. The B-Tech qualification has already been phased out because it failed to address issues of articulation and the inherent stigma attached to the name itself (B-Tech) translated to the view that the end product could not be admitted to postgraduate studies in a traditional university because of inadequate grounding in theory. This resulted in traditional universities deciding, apparently at whim, on who to enroll for further studies such a Master's degree after completing a B-Tech degree. Students who held a B-Tech degree could not be guaranteed a place in a Master's degree programme even in the same school or department. In some instances, admission would be dependent on B-Tech degree graduates successfully completing remedial courses from the Honours programme.

Recently, the Advanced Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma were introduced as a substitute for the B-Tech programme in a bid to address articulation deficiencies and as a compliance strategy to meet admission requirements for the Masters programme in traditional universities. Surprisingly, the Advanced Diploma is not considered a postgraduate qualification and funding bodies such the National Research Foundation (NRF) do not support students enrolled for this programme yet it is a postgraduate diploma qualification. Some Universities of Technology are now abolishing diploma qualifications in order to offer what are known as B-degrees. In this context, pertinent questions include, but are not limited to these.

1. Why are universities of technology abandoning specialisations that

previously constituted their strength and relevance to industry?
2. What would be the quality of the 'B-degrees'?
3. How different are entry requirements for 'B-degrees' from those of the diploma qualifications that are being phased out?

We argue that the drive and the urgency of universities of technology to academise could cause more harm than good if the process is not carefully monitored and evaluated. Furthermore, the Master of Technology (M-Tech) and Doctor of Technology (D-Tech) qualifications have also been changed to Master's and Doctor of Philosophy respectively as a form of face lifting and to align the qualifications with HEQSF requirements.

There are mixed responses among scholars regarding this. Garraway and Winberg (2019) posit that the transformation of technikons to universities of technology could be viewed as more of a reputational marketing ploy than a substantive change in identity whereas Maserumule (2005) maintains that the changing of technikons to universities of technology was probably done out of a need to conform to the international trends such as the German Technische Universitäten. Further, changing the designation was viewed as being apparently attractive but superficial and without value. It is critical that implications and challenges that relate to curriculum transformation, functions, and roles of the renamed institutions are duly considered. Maserumule (2005) argues that the changes were not accompanied by a detailed concept document outlining expectations that could guide these institutions. Further, Maserumule (2005) criticises the lack of clarity in having the curriculum changed to intellectualise or academise without regard for subjects that cannot be theorized such as those that have a special focus on practical application. Rogers and Richmond (2016) claim that academisation has differentiated between academic and non-academic subjects with automatic degrading and placing of the latter (drama, art etc.) low down in the hierarchy of curricula value.

Despite the skepticism associated with the academisation of former technikons, McKenna (2009) argues that the decision to change the technikons was taken to extend programmes to enable universities of technology to offer and award undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, arguing that the change will encourage the advancement of applied research for the benefit of the industries served and will adequately address issues of articulation. Rogers and Richmond (2016), however, maintain that programmes currently offered in universities of technology have incorporated a stronger element of theory. This

change ignores the fact that former technikon programmes exhibited a knowledge base characterised by principles of practice rather than a theoretical component typical of a traditional university. This means that the curriculum offered was instrumental in its approach and students learned skills in a theoretical vacuum (Maserumule 2005). Prior to the transition from technikon to university of technology, lecturers were normally drawn from occupational spheres rather than the academically experienced with research-based higher degrees (Garraway & Winberg 2019).

Most lecturers in the former technikons were not actively engaged and had no reason to engage in research and the teaching and learning materials that were used for teaching were prepared by lecturers without delving into unearthing the theoretical basis and reasons for practices. However, the curriculum was supposed to be of nationally acceptable standards and was quality assured by the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC), a quality assurance body responsible for the evaluation of technikon operations and teaching at the time. However, Maserumule (2005), in comparing the process though which published academic books go before being made available to the reading public claims that teaching and learning manuals that were used in former technikons were not subjected to peer review processes by the wider community simply because they were meant only for instructional interaction with students. The system of manual development in technikons denied students the opportunity to engage with many sources related to issues that constituted the core syllabus.

According to Scholtz (2013) transformation of higher education meant two related processes – conceptualising and contextualising the role and functions of former technikons including the academisation of the curriculum within the restructured higher education landscape. She metaphorically uses both chaotic and complexity theory to describe curriculum transformation in universities of technology. The argument presented refers to the development of curricular in these transformed institutions without knowing what the final product should look like. Further, lecturers had no prior experience in curriculum development. Actually, curricula for specific qualifications in technikons were developed by a system of convenor technikons with input from various stakeholders. The process of curriculum development was centrally managed with academic staff expected only to implement them. The renaming of technikons required in-depth evaluation of what was taught, how the programme was structured, how industry was to be roped in, and how to

embrace a myriad of pedagogical imperatives of programme delivery (Scholtz 2013).

Compounding the above challenges was the super complexity of the nature of curriculum change coupled with the need for universities of technology to deal with internal and external changes while finding ways to establish their identities. Challenges were also experienced with the disorderly nature of curricula revision or review since it was characterised by training sessions that provided an overview without any stipulated format. Garraway and Winberg (2019) claim that most technikons offered undergraduate certificates and diploma programmes not intended to attract the calibre of student willing to pursue postgraduate studies. Similarly, Mckenna (2009) claims that technikons had a history of attracting low calibre students who were incapable of enrolling for postgraduate studies. Further, most of the academic staff did not have capacity to conduct research and supervise at postgraduate level.

Varied views have also been expressed about the capability of technikon staff to review, recurriculate, academise, and restructure the curriculum to respond to the developmental imperatives of the changing world. Several scholars have expressed concern about a number of issues including the shortage of suitably qualified and experienced staff to review, recurriculate, and supervise postgraduate studies and research capacity (Garraway & Winberg 2019; Maserumule 2005; Scholzt 2013). Scholtz (2013) also noted the disorderly nature of curriculum revisions but maintained that recurriculation became successful when academic members were keen to participate in curriculum review, although indicators on how success could be measured still need to be developed. Other concerns raised relate to the dogmatism, firm conviction, and paternalism that were displayed by professional bodies that previously assisted with the development of technikon curricula and the disconnection between the expectations of employers and departmental management.

5 Research in Universities of Technology

The transition from technikons to universities of technology in the context of South Africa's higher education sector has been perceived by some researchers as a marketing ploy (Garraway & Winberg 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that academics at universities of technology contribute only

about a third of the research output when compared to their counterparts in traditional universities (CHE 2019). This difference can be attributed to several factors. Research at traditional universities is mostly driven by postgraduate students as opposed to universities of technology that do not offer many postgraduate programmes which, incidentally, presents a major obstacle to their research productivity. Bozalek and Boughey (2012) describe how higher education institutions were (mis)framed post 1994, which resulted in historically Black institutions and universities of technology being overlooked in terms of research funding in favour of mainly historically White institutions. While these scholars focused on the mis(framing) of higher education institutions, we highlight the struggles of universities of technology to contribute significantly to higher education research output. Further, it explains how funding of higher education institutions is skewed towards research productivity. Thus, Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argue that the funding formula does not distinguish between different categories of institutions nor consider their backgrounds.

Apart from funding constraints and a limited number of postgraduate qualifications, lack of adequately experienced academic researchers also poses serious challenges to research productivity at universities of technology. Consequently, some universities of technology (e.g. Mangosuthu University of Technology in Durban, South Africa) have resorted to recruiting retired academics from traditional universities to help bolster the institution's research activities. This attempt is a recognition and acknowledgement by leaders in such institutions that something must be changed if their research output is to be compared to that of their traditional university counterparts. Such strategies are commendable but are superficial and unsustainable. Universities of technology are teaching-intensive institutions that leave little room for academics who are interested in research to pursue this type of scholarly work. Some have attempted to design workload models that will consider the involvement of academics in research activities. However, the question of whether South Africa's universities of technology are living up to expected standards and are comparable to the traditional university remains. Further, the need to academise these institutions in a manner that is bound to compromise their core business, which is to train students who are vocationally strong and ready for work, remains questionable.

However, the picture painted by the comparison between universities of technology and the traditional university is not as gloomy as it may appear.

There are universities of technology that have increased their research output in the field of applied sciences through both national and international research collaborations with other researchers (see Chiware & Skelly 2016). Further, the Universities of Technology research niche areas are linked with industrial needs to ensure that they remain relevant to the potential employers of their respective students. Okafor (2010) attests that the economy and prosperity of the country are somewhat determined by research productivity in areas of applied science. It is acknowledged that Universities of Technology have contributed positively to the economic development of their countries by producing graduates who respond to the needs of the job market. Findings from Chiware and Becker (2018) indicate that the graduates' research skills enable them to identify the problems and needs of both society and industry by finding relevant scientific solutions to those identified problems.

The South African government has established research frameworks to enhance the research agenda of Universities of Technology by increasing their research funding, and by creating specialised research units and research chairs at Universities of Technology. These initiatives were strengthened by the effective recruitment of highly skilled academic staff in research and the development of research infrastructure through sustainable funding of laboratories and research equipment (Schemm 2013; Chiware & Becker 2018). Academisation of the curriculum should be accompanied by a strong research focus in order to enrich the curriculum with research findings. Considering the challenges associated with universities of technology in the context of research, we argue that research output by these institutions will remain dismal for the foreseeable future. Against this backdrop, questioning whether it was necessary for former technikons to shift from a strong vocational focus to a more academic orientation is imperative (Chiware & Becker 2018; Schemm 2013).

6 Conclusion

Within the context of South Africa, technikons played a specific part in both the higher education sector, and in commerce and industry since they had a particularly distinct focus that made their role very clear. While traditional universities were repositories of advanced knowledge, technikons were responsible for the application of knowledge to carry out tasks in the practical

or physical work environment. As technikons have shifted to become universities of technology, debates have arisen around the relevance of what is being taught in this new type of HEI, raising questions about whether the title of these institutions have simply changed without any curricula change. Academisation and intellectualisation presumably aim to produce students with critical thinking skills that are relevant to the changing world of work. Academics with up-to-date knowledge and exposure to new trends in knowledge production are required in the academisation of the curricula. However, it is essential for institutions to identify their distinctiveness and institutional culture with a set of norms, values, and beliefs. The roles of both traditional universities and universities of technology should be clearly defined so that each segment of the higher education landscape in the country can fulfil its mandate without overlapping too much on those of others. The culture and identity of these institutions is what defines them and should be preserved at all cost. The framework of higher education should, therefore, be clear in terms of the extent to which universities of technology should academise. If this process is not carefully monitored and evaluated the country runs the risk of experiencing severe skills shortages. The need for work ready graduates who can support and move the nation's economy forward remains legitimate. The Department of Higher Education and Training should consider reviewing the research funding formula to assist universities of technology to grow their research capacity.

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Primrose T. Sabela
Senior lecturer
School of Development Studies
University of Mpumalanga
Nelspruit
Thandeka.Sabela@ump.ac.za

Mfundo Mandla Masuku
Senior lecturer
School of Development Studies
University of Mpumalanga
Nelspruit
Mandla.Masuku@ump.ac.za

Lindelani Q. Qwabe
Senior lecturer
Department of Chemistry
Mangosuthu University of Technology
Umlazi
lqwabe@mut.ac.za

Curriculum Theorising in an Economics Education Programme

S.M. Maistry
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9623-0078

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic is having a serious effect on all aspects of society. It presents with novel challenges for higher education curriculum theorising since it brings into view the need to re-orient thinking in this field. Higher education curriculum theorising in economic education, in particular, has been strongly connected historically to the nature of Economics as a discipline, as well as its fundamental tenets of economic efficiency, utility maximisation, trade-offs, and quantifiable justification for economic decision making. The discipline of Economics has its genesis in neoclassical Economics and addresses two key issues: the need to solve the economic problem of scarcity; and the maximising of human need satisfaction. In this paper, I draw on Decolonial Critique and Posthumanism to explore through self-study research, how canonical thought and principles pertinent to Economics might be disrupted in a teacher education programme for pre-service teachers of Economics. I trouble the centrality of human need satisfaction as the paramount objective of the field with a view to reflecting on the application of a disruptive curriculum to contest traditional disciplinary economic knowledge. I contemplate a decolonial approach to curriculum theorising at the borders of the colonial matrix of power, an approach that problematizes neoclassical Economics and neoliberalism's preoccupation with narcissistic human needs prioritisation in favour of philosophical posthuman and decolonial perspectives that reposition the human subject in a critical, equivalent, reciprocal relation to the non-human in the (post)Anthropocene. In this paper, I offer specific insights for alternative curriculum theorising in Economics education and curriculum theorising in general.

Keywords: curriculum, Economics, theorising, border thinking

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1 Introduction

The year 2020 marks a watershed moment in the historical trajectory of humankind, the dominant being on planet Earth, a year (which is barely half-complete at the time of writing this article) in which the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is presenting as unprecedented crisis. That the repercussions have been catastrophic and that it has created chaos and panic is without contention. The pandemic has certainly precipitated a dramatic change in human behaviour on a global scale. How then might curriculum theorising in the context of a societal transformation agenda now be envisaged? Where might curriculum theorists draw inspiration to address curriculum transformation that the current milieu presents with poverty and socio-economic inequality now firmly under the spotlight?

Poverty and inequality have been pervasive features of modern society for centuries, yet intervention strategies to alleviate the plight of the poor have had somewhat limited effect (Gray & Maharaj 2016; Pogge 2010). The pandemic, as devastating as it is, has had what we might call potentially positive spinoffs for the indigent. The eyes of the world have been forced to focus on this very public affliction and the publics that are most vulnerable. This accentuated focus has become a powerful driver of social intervention programmes across the world. In South Africa, political denial, evasion, and avoidance of the prevalence of widespread socio-economic inequality have become increasingly difficult issues for the political elite to negotiate. The absence of running water and ablution facilities in more than 3,000 South African schools is a social injustice beyond comprehension. In essence then, the current pandemic has drawn sharp attention to how socio-economic inequality manifests and plays itself out during a crisis, especially as it relates to the provisioning of health and education. How then might curriculum theorists respond and from where might they seek theoretical inspiration?

In this paper, I present an approach to curriculum theorising in a teacher education curriculum and pedagogy course on offer in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This particular preservice teacher education course entitled *Economics Teaching* is a teaching specialisation offered to the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students, a so-called capping programme for prospective Bachelor's graduates who wish to pursue a career in teaching. Prospective teachers of Economics enter the programme with Economics as a major subject in their undergraduate

degree. These candidates would have been exposed to a typical university Economics curriculum comprised of both basic and advanced Macroeconomics and Microeconomics in their initial exposure to the subject, as well as sub-disciplinary specialisation knowledge from among Monetary Economics, Labour Economics, and/or Public Sector Economics. Of significance is that neoclassical Economics remains the bedrock from which the body of Economic knowledge has developed and continues to grow (Petkus *et al.* 2014). The overview of fifty years of Economic education scholarship in *The Journal of Economic Education* since its inception in 1969 (Hoyt & McGoldrick 2019) is a clear reflection of the focus Economics education researchers have taken on teaching, learning, and assessment in Economics. It reflects the taken-for-granted nature of the fundamental disciplinary knowledge and principles of Economics that Economics education researchers and pedagogues both at school and university level have adopted. The discipline (and disciplinary knowledge) remains sacrosanct. The scholarly endeavour has been entirely focussed on how to better teach and assess the canon. While university Economics students have expressed some dissatisfaction with the discipline's ability to explain financial crises, Shiller (2010) reminds us that this discontent has been mild and that the discipline has in fact seen an increase in subscription by students keen to lap up the subject's knowledge. Raghuram (2010) alerts us to the fact that even the sub-field of development Economics and standard macroeconomic models have not been successful in resolving issues related to the plight of developing nations during times of economic crises. The Economics textbook publishing industry has paid cursory attention to amending the content in undergraduate textbooks especially as it relates to responding to the failings of world capitalism and the crash of financial markets (Madsen 2013). It is necessary to rethink what is taught to undergraduate Economics students especially in terms of the failure of (Economics) textbook knowledge to explain economic crises (Friedman 2010). Neoclassical Economics and its associated so-called fundamental principles continue to remain central to Economics programmes around the world, both in schools and post-school academic offerings. Profit-making, economic growth, and the optimum exploitation of natural resources is a distinct feature of the Anthropocene, with humankind centrally positioned as main benefactor and arbiter of the relationship between people and nature. It has become clear that in the current geological age, the dominance of humankind in its quest for human needs satisfaction through exploitative

human economic activity has presented the planet with potentially cataclysmic outcomes should this human economic activity continue unchecked. This is the problem that I attempt to address in this paper by mounting a humble challenge to the western-Eurocentric Economics curriculum, based on neoclassical Economics principles, through a teacher-training course for teachers of Economics.

In speaking to the brief of this special issue, namely, 'to illuminate the thinking and theorising that informs (the) curriculum transformation', I reflect on the theoretical strands that influence the teaching and learning dynamics at play as I engage pre-service teachers of Economics in the contemplation of an alternative to the teaching of the traditional neoclassical Economics canon. I consider how a different conjuring might produce an alternative set of futurities to what currently manifests. To achieve this new imaginary, I appropriate from critical transformative theories that have, as significant intent, the need to interrogate knowledge frameworks (like neoclassical Economics) with a view to exposing how they actively contribute to socio-economic inequality. I draw on key tenets and conceptualisations from Decolonial Critique and Posthumanism to argue for the curriculum transformation moves I present to my pre-service students.

While posthumanism and decolonial critique might be considered disparate with regard to their ontological and epistemological premises, for me they share a common intent which, following Zembylas (2018), is to transcend the normative conception of the human so as to move beyond and through this normative conception.

2 A Brief Methodological Note

To address the focus of this special issue, I draw on data from my ongoing project of researching my practice as teacher educator and postgraduate research supervisor. While the concept of lifelong learner has become something of a cliché in South Africa, I fully embrace the notion of contributing to the scholarship of teaching and, importantly, of sustaining a process of continuous personal renewal as Feldman (2009) advocates by centring my (fallible) self as continual object of study. Self-study as an emerging methodological field has significant appeal and, in the past two decades, self-study research has gained significant traction in the teacher education arena. It is a field of inquiry that firmly recognises the

embeddedness of the teacher in researching her or his own practice, a situatedness that demands candid and careful introspection and reflection on one's practice as teacher (Samaras 2011).

Self-study emphasises the implicated nature of the teacher in the teaching and learning enterprise. The teacher as human subject with a particular history and biography becomes crucial in troubling, deconstructing, and reconstructing the self (Samaras & Freese 2009). As teacher, my history and biography as a descendent of Indian labourers imported into South Africa in 1860 means that I am certainly not indigenous to the continent although I am South African. As a university academic, I occupy middle-class status. While I hail from humble beginnings, I currently live in the suburbs, and am a heterosexual male firmly embedded in a colonial society and socialised into a colonial lifestyle. These are crucial issues since they are implicated in how I embrace the societal and curriculum transformation project. Self-study, while supporting a range of data generation methods including memory work, autobiography, and narrative life history, does not subscribe to positivist notions of validity and reliability but, instead, invokes qualitative constructs such as credibility and trustworthiness (Craig 2009). Some scholars in this emerging field encourage self-study research to be systematic (Samaras 2011). Of course, critical reflection on one's practice seldom happens in any uniform or linear fashion. In fact, critical incidents are precisely that – incidents or occurrences that are unexpected or spontaneous and require of the self-study researcher an ongoing meta-awareness of stimuli or sources of inspiration that might enrich the project of teaching. As a self-study researcher, much of what I think of as my data presents itself when I least expect it to. It might entail the taking of mental notes or scribbling on notepads or pieces of paper (in meetings, in my classroom, at a conference, while waiting to board a plane and so forth). Giving effect to a particular pedagogic action might entail meditating on an issue or a phenomenon and harnessing the various data pieces to create the narrative that I wish to compose. Student personal narratives as they relate to their experiences of race, class, or gender in the economic world are powerful resources that offer rich context for making sense of economic concepts. As can be expected, this kind of research activity will have little currency in the traditional modernist scientific paradigm and post-positivist traditions that still hanker after the science standard, a 'cantankerous 'what constitutes truth' debate' (Craig 2009: 22), a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Arguably the strongest criticism levelled against self-study as an approach to research might be its degeneration into narcissistic, navel-gazing exercises in which the teacher researcher embarks on a project of romanticising her or his practice as opposed to adopting a disposition of humility and prudence in reflecting on achievements in that practice. In essence, then, my ongoing self-study (of my own practice as teacher educator) is a recognition that one never quite arrives, or that pre-specifying, in any rigid fashion, the precise co-ordinates of the outcomes of one's endeavours is not useful. The proverbial learning curve is undefined and likely to become pronounced and steep in times where precedence is absent, as in the current period of COVID-19 contagion. Of crucial importance is that the ultimate aim of self-study research is to improve one's teaching practices.

In the discussion that follows, I present an account of significant theoretical influences that have shaped and continue to shape curriculum theorising in the university courses I teach. I draw attention to the complexities and contradictions that present as I navigate the theoretical world in search of an elusive all-encompassing framework that might coherently speak to my critical project as teacher education activist. My somewhat late discovery of the seminal work of Gloria Anzaldúa, in particular, her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) has, arguably, had the most profound influence on my thinking as a scholar and educational researcher. A discussion of the profundity of her insights is included later in the deliberations below of what has shaped my curriculum theorising and continues to do so.

3 Tracing my Trajectory as Border Thinker

In this section, I present an account of my personal journey in theorising curriculum and pedagogy by focussing on what shapes the teacher education programmes I teach for teachers of Economics and Business Sciences, a field, as mentioned earlier, that is saturated with neoclassical economic and neoliberal economic thinking. My presentation of a somewhat condensed, apparently linear account of just over two decades of practice in higher education runs the risk of essentialising what has been a tension-filled, fraught, and humbling experience as I engaged with demographically diverse students, the majority of whom were Black African first-generation university candidates. Among other objectives behind the design of pedagogy courses was the need to help my students read the world of Economics teaching as an

enterprise that entailed moving beyond simply acquiring pedagogical content knowledge as Shulman (2005) recommends, towards troubling the very foundations and principles on which the Economics they would teach to school learners, was based. The principle of pareto optimality for example is critiqued for its utopianism. Similarly, the notion of human beings as rational economic agents who always think at the margin (using marginal analysis) is interrogated for its relevance and practical applicability. Importantly, neoliberalism's preoccupation with economic growth and individual capital (wealth) accumulation at the expense of egalitarian redistributive economic modelling have been powerful in helping student teachers to (re)consider the kind of economic theory they might teach. It thus entails posing a challenge to the canonical capitalist model (see Picketty 2014), (especially its systematic marginalisation, othering, and asymmetrical gendered outcomes) that frames economic systems across the world.

The history of my experience of the world of curriculum theory can be traced back to my undergraduate study (my first teaching degree which I completed in 1987) at a university designated exclusively for Indian South Africans, the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), but administered by white South Africans during the apartheid era. The curriculum for this undergraduate teacher education programme certainly carried the pedagogic identity of the then ruling Nationalist party, namely that of Fundamental Pedagogics (FP) and Christian National Education (CNE) as Suransky-Dekker (1998) reminds us. Fundamental Pedagogics as a philosophy of education frames the teacher as authoritative adult tasked with the transmission of incontestable knowledge to passive learners (De Jager *et al.* 1985). My undergraduate and postgraduate Economics curriculum (at the University of South Africa) was based entirely on neoclassical economic foundations. As a schoolteacher (for nine years), my teaching philosophy and teaching methods were largely informed by my undergraduate training.

My first encounter with any alternative thinking about education and its methods and purposes came with my engagement with an Honours and subsequent Masters programme (completed in 1999) in Curriculum Studies at an English medium former whites-only university, the University of Natal (UN). During this time, I took up employment in the Faculty of Education at UD-W as a junior lecturer responsible for teaching methodology as it applied to Economic and Business Sciences school subjects. The postgraduate programme at UN was designed and taught by what might be regarded as the

white liberal left, an intellectual block that actively challenged FP and CNE, the doctrine advanced by Afrikaner universities in South Africa (Suransky-Dekker 1998). While the seminal work of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) received some attention at UN, the theoretical influences were largely that of Anglo-American scholars. For me, Freire's disdain for banking education and his advocacy for problem-posing pedagogic praxis had distinct appeal.

The Faulty of Education at UD-W (where I worked) was at that time strongly influenced by the Dean, Jonathan Jansen, a critical scholar famous for his widely publicised denouncement of South Africa's move to an outcomes-based school curriculum (Jansen 1998) and his earlier critique of superficial alterations to the school curriculum in the immediate post-apartheid period (Jansen 1997). My exposure to key critical theorists influenced by the Frankfurt School and the work of Henri Giroux (2004) and Peter McLaren's (2005) advocacy for pedagogy to be seen and practised as a political project of disrupting cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological hegemony, provided a powerful alternative frame in which to understand curriculum. This was complemented by Harvey's (2007; 2010) analysis of neoliberalism and his critique of capitalism in its affording to the pedagogy programme I envisaged for my students a theoretical and conceptual language with which to contemplate the study of what and how to teach in the Economics and Business Science disciplines. These insights gave me a framework from which to contest the fundamental capitalist tenets of Economics as a discipline. The appropriation of critical pedagogy's notion of education (teaching) as a distinctly political act (of resistance) necessarily entails the contestation of relations of power implicated in received knowledge. In essence, conceiving of teaching as a political act provokes the question of the purpose of education and its articulation with economic growth.

The works of African American theorist, bell hooks (1994), Critical Race theorists like Yosso (2005) and Hannah Arendt (1973; 1998), continue to inspire the social justice direction of the pedagogy courses I have designed and taught in the last two decades. Key insights framed my attempts at a transgressive against-the-grain pedagogy that challenges constructions of race, gender, and class, in 'dark times' (Arendt 1998: 11). The use of testimonio, for example, as a pedagogic practice (Cervantes-Soon & Carillo 2016), that contests Cartesian rationality and patriarchy allows for a pushing beyond dialogic teaching, inviting confession and reflection especially as it relates to

addressing sensitive issues of race, class, and gender prejudice. My attempts at theorising a different curriculum and pedagogy has been ongoing (even before the resurgence of higher education curriculum transformation initiatives triggered by the 'Fees must Fall' movement in 2015). This is reflected in my published journal articles, 'Transformation through the curriculum: Engaging a process of unlearning in Economics Education pedagogy' (Maistry 2011), 'Foregrounding a social justice agenda in Economic Education: Critical reflections of a teacher education pedagogue' (Maistry 2012a), and 'Using memory as a resource for pedagogy: Fashioning a "bridging pedagogical moment"' (Maistry 2012b). These pieces draw attention to how issues of social justice could be integrated into a pedagogy course for teachers of commercial subjects.

The works of contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2003; 2006; 2010) and economic theorist Amartya Sen (2005, 2009) have also been a source of inspiration for curriculum development and theorizing. Nussbaum's influential *Not for Profit: Why the Democracy Needs the Social Sciences* (2010) offers a compelling argument for questioning the neoliberal-informed instrumentalist purpose of education as being to serve the economy. The theoretical insights offered by these writers and those of other critical scholars like Bauman (2007), Bauman and Rovirosa-Madrazo (2010), and Pogge (2010) inspired a further attempt at theorizing the purpose of education in an article entitled 'Education for economic growth: A neoliberal fallacy!' (Maistry 2014). Theorising curriculum and pedagogy has become a project of resisting attempts to make classroom teaching simply a matter of technique and method, a necessary detraction from the neoliberal performative character of education.

Prospective teachers in the field of Economics and Business Sciences have to engage with the programmatic curriculum (the school textbook). In an attempt to unearth the subtext of school textbooks and theorise how textbook content is likely to shape the worldviews of its multiple users (including pre-service and in-service teachers as well as learners), the work of Critical Discourse scholars has been particularly useful (see Fairclough 2003; Wodak 2005; Wodak & Meyer 2009; Van Dijk 2006). Such scholars offer powerful conceptual and analytical tools for programmatic curriculum analysis. In the study of the portrayal of entrepreneurship knowledge presented in school textbooks for example, critical discourse analysis exposes particular embellishments, (un)witting foregrounding and backgrounding, as well as

omissions and silences regarding certain knowledge pieces. This, together with the use of modality, nominalisation, and register help to reveal embedded neoliberal value systems presented as well as the distinctly gendered nature of textbook content. I developed scholarly pieces to advance this agenda. These include 'An analysis of economic modelling used in school economics textbooks' (Maistry 2015), 'Phantasmagoria: Communicating an illusion of entrepreneurship in South African school textbooks' (Maistry & David 2017), and 'The school economics textbook as programmatic curriculum: An exploited conduit for neoliberal globalisation discourses' (Maistry & David 2018). This curriculum and pedagogical theorisation is novel in the South African context.

The issue of gender prejudice is germane to the field of Economics and Business Sciences, an agenda that is foregrounded in the curriculum transformation project. The work of Judith Butler (1990: 2004) has particular salience since it offers a powerful framework for understanding how gender is performative and how stereotypical gender constructions manifest in the school and university curriculum. Butler's notion of dissolving socially constructed binary categorisations of man and woman and her advocacy for non-normative gender theory disturb the gendered monolith of traditional Economics education. Another article, 'The 'firstness' of male as automatic ordering: Gendered discourse in Southern African Business Studies school textbooks' (Pillay & Maistry 2018) is an attempt at theorizing how curriculum is programmed (in textbooks) for consumption by learners. In a paper presented at the Southern African Educational Research Association 2019 conference (currently under review) entitled 'Disrupting oblivion and aligning with feminism: Critical autoethnographic reflections of a profeminist 'heterosexual male' teacher educator' I invoke the work of the profeminist writers, Burrell and Flood (2019). Poststructuralist thinkers like Foucault (1979; 2001) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) although not curriculum/education philosophers, certainly offer sophisticated frameworks and concepts for understanding the society in which the educational enterprise is given effect, especially as it relates to the formation of the disciplined subject.

The *Rhodes-must-Fall* campaign which saw mainly Black South African students demanding a curriculum that was relevant to their indigenous context, triggered the institutionalisation of the higher education transformation project, resulting in a flurry of academic activity (conferences,

workshops, seminars) with a specific focus on the decolonisation of the curriculum. Dissatisfaction with western-Eurocentric theorisations and a sudden awareness of a vast body of decolonial scholarship marked what was the beginning of arguably the most traumatic and dissonant period of my life as a scholar and researcher. This was (and still is) a particularly unsettling period since, for the first time in my academic career, the western-European scholarship that I was bred on was under threat. Its relevance for understanding the complexities of the African context was in question! I came to the harsh realisation that the emancipatory (postmodern) approaches to curriculum and pedagogy that I was so wedded to remain haunted by the ghosts of Eurocentrism (Cervantes-Soon & Carillo 2016), a critique that Grosfoguel (2007) describes as applying a Eurocentric frame to analyse non-European contexts, giving epistemic privilege to western thinkers (and continental philosophy).

As described earlier, my classes were comprised mainly of indigenous African students, many of whom were keen supporters of the decolonisation of the curriculum project. I realised that like my students, I lacked the theoretical or conceptual sophistication to adequately engage the decolonial project given my contemporary status and colonial socialisation. According to Quijano (2000) Western Eurocentrism, as hegemonic worldview, co-opts both witting and unwitting collaborators across racial and gender divides, naturalising its ideology, thus sustaining its generational transmission of a Euro-centric world view.

Up to that point, my engagement with decolonial scholarship was non-existent. I subsequently attended several conferences and symposia on decolonisation and a decolonial summer school, in an attempt to immerse myself in this newfound theoretical oasis. The work of Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2009; 2002), Ramon Grosfoguel (2007; 2008; 2011; 2013) and Maldonado-Torres (2007) had particular appeal since they offer profound insights into Decolonial Critique, especially as it relates to understanding the modernity-coloniality-capitalist complex and a nuanced conception of the distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality as well as the workings of the colonial matrix of power.

Of profound significance to me is that much of this scholarship drew insights from the work of Frantz Fanon, African thinker and philosopher, who even with his having passed more than fifty years ago, continues to inspire contemporary decolonial thinkers. Having heard of Fanon, but not having

engaged with his work created a further state of academic discomfort (and some degree of embarrassment) in my not having privileged the scholarship of arguably the foremost thinker to grace the African continent. *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1963) and *Black Skins, White Masks* (Fanon 1967) are resources that I attempt to make accessible to my students. Fanon's original works written at a particular time (and in a unique genre) often do not immediately resonate with students' current lived experiences and given their familiarity with contemporary texts. Concepts including modernity, epistemicide, linguiscide, femicide, racial hierarchisation, racialisation, the colonial matrix of power, coloniality, decoloniality, colonisation, and decolonisation are relatively scarce in usage in the curriculum field in South Africa. They do, however, offer a conceptual apparatus with which to think about societal transformation and curriculum transformation.

As mentioned above, South African higher education has witnessed an institutionally driven agenda based on decolonisation and transformation of the curriculum, an academic project for which the diverse demographic profile of South African academics, was not prepared. This is an issue I attempted to address in two articles, 'The higher education decolonisation project: Negotiating cognitive dissonance' (Maistry 2019a) and 'Fetishistic disavowal and elusive jouissance: The case of the South African higher education decolonization project' (Maistry 2019b) that attempt to theorise the experience of South African academics as they engage in the decolonization of the curriculum project. Inspiration for these works came from decolonial theory.

The dissonance I continue to experience, though, is with understanding how to navigate my contradictory identity (heterosexual, middle-class, Indian, South African, male) in embracing the transformation agenda. In the section that follows, I share my contemplation of how to manage this liminality.

3 *La Mestiza* of Sorts … Decoloniality and Border Thinking

The context for the exposition below is that of the teacher education pedagogy curriculum for teachers of Economics and Business Sciences (a field unequivocally shaped by neoliberal economics and intimately connected to normative capitalism). Curriculum transformation then would entail an attempt at disrupting the knowledge (and ideology) embedded in the canon. In the section above, I presented an explanation of how postmodern theorisations (critical theory and critical pedagogy) were appropriated to challenge

neoliberal capitalism's threat to democracy and socio-economic equality. The key issue though was that postmodernism and Critical Pedagogy struggle to escape the shadow of modernist, western-Eurocentrism that lingers overhead (Cervantes-Soon & Carillo 2016), a shadow that hangs over much of my scholarship on curriculum transformation to date.

My recent reading of the Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) mentioned above has assisted me in thinking about how I locate and identify myself as a non-indigenous, colonial, heterosexual male of Indian descent, and (self)-proclaimed academic activist with a social justice agenda. Through Anzaldúa's insights, in which she describes herself as '(c)radled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war' (1987: 78). I am starting to better understand myself as a border person raised in two cultures (Western Eurocentric Anglo and traditional Indian). Clearly, borders are not exclusively physical or geographical; there are psychological and sexual borderlands, borderlands that exist between races, classes, sexualities, and worldviews (Anzaldúa 1987) or 'metaphorical spaces of periphery and liminality' (Cervantes-Soon & Carillo 2016: 282).

For me, straddling multiple borders has been uncomfortable. Having been schooled on a rich diet of modernity and colonial scholarship (which I ravenously devoured and continue to consume), and my recent encounter with decolonial scholarship has meant dealing with a self-loathing, experiencing a kind of intellectual trauma of searching for a scholarly home with which I can identify and that will give me comfort. Anzaldúa (1987) reminds me of the difficulty of maintaining one's integrity and identity as one occupies and dwells in the border, but there is equally an excitement, an exhilaration at the thought that one has the potential and capacity for fashioning an alternative humanity through the work one does. In reflection on her experience she speaks of her 'existence [and] preoccupations with the inner life of the Self, and with the struggle of that Self amidst adversity and violation' (p. 3). She writes, 'I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that was imposed on me' (p. 16).

In describing the mestiza, Anzaldúa contends that '[s]he has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else' (1987:

79), drawing energy from this state to write from a deep place. These insights marked a turning point for me as a researcher and thinker since it allows me to occupy the borderlands, and to act in this pluralistic, dissonant space, enabling curriculum theorisation from the epistemic border. As Mignolo (2011) asserts, it is about thinking and learning from where we are especially given that we cannot escape or imagine a space outside of the colonial matrix of power since it is all encompassing. This is a comforting reassurance from powerful scholars since it allows me to help my students understand the borderlands that they occupy with the view to using that positionality as a resource for navigating the world. It enables me to appropriate ideas from the work of a range of critical scholars knowing that they may well depart from different ontological and epistemological premises, as is the case with my recent attempts at invoking posthumanism's theoretical tenets. Forlano cautions though, that 'it is not productive to speak of the posthuman when so many people – non-white, less privileged/powerful, female, older, indigenous, people with disabilities, and so on – have not been historically included in the category of the human in the first place' (2017: 29).

Decolonial Critique arose from the seminal work of Anibal Quijano in his theorisation of the hegemonic model of global power. The coloniality of power is a useful entry point into a discussion, especially with students in my programme, of how the contemporary capitalist world order has come to be. International capitalist western-euro-centred capitalism hinges on two axes – modernity and the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000). Coercive physical (military) domination was sustainable (up to a point) for the coloniser. Coercive domination transcended into domination based on human epidemiology, together with the European coloniser's perception of the colonised indigenous peoples' lack of a Christian religious god. Having a spiritual belief system that was not Christian relegated the colonised native to that of lesser than human status, of animal, of slave. This marked the advent of the first forms of racialisation and human hierarchisation (Grosfoguel 2013). European colonisers thus fabricated a racial hierarchy and superiority that permeated every sphere of economic and social life for centuries. These insights help students historicise the contemporary.

Internationalised capitalism pivots on its other crucial axis – modernity. The effect of modernity was to compound and reify the marginalisation of indigenous ways of thinking, knowing, and doing which led to systematic epistemicide. In Fanon's words, what colonialism did was to

empty 'the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it . . . devaluing pre-colonial history' (1963: 261).

This nuanced understanding of how contemporary global socio-economic inequality and racism has come to be, has certainly shaped my approach to my pedagogy and curriculum transformation endeavour. From an Economics perspective, it is important to recognise that colonialism ushered in a system of land ownership (coloniser ownership in the first instance). The notion of ownership of what was once unmarked, an undivided expanse into nation states and provinces, and individual land ownership marked the beginning of ascribing economic value to natural resources. It fuelled the belief that what I own is what I can choose to ruin or save. So the sense that the earth belongs to us (humans) exclusively, and the notion that even the wildlife belongs to governments, calls for a radical way of unthinking/unlearning and of seeing the human as co-agent in the ecological mix, respectful of non-human counterparts and appreciative of co-existence.

Decolonial Critique is certainly complexly layered. Both Anzaldua (987) and Lugones (2007) remind us of the precariousness of woman beings and how normative constructions of gender are implicated in the colonial matrix of power. These insights add a richness to curriculum transformation initiatives, well beyond technical tinkering.

4 A Posthuman Tease/ Provocation

Like Ulmer (2017), I experienced much discomfort with my engagement with posthumanist theory since I felt that I was shifting allegiance and betraying the critical project on which I was raised as activist student, teacher, and teacher educator. Having been fed on a diet of Critical scholarship and decolonial scholarship in recent years since decolonial debates started to (re)emerge in South Africa, I drew insights from Zembylas (2018) in an attempt to tease out moments of divergence and convergence of decolonial critique and posthumanism. He notes, though, that the commensurability of decolonial critique with posthumanism remains a fraught argument.

Posthumanism calls for a decentring of the human as the primary focus of research (Ulmer 2017). What distinguishes posthumanism as a theoretical heuristic for curriculum theorising is its planetary/global appeal, unlike Decolonial Critique and its appeal to previously colonised subjects wanting to

shake off lingering coloniality. The crisis that COVID-19 currently presents for the world is a stark revelation of the fragility of humankind on the planet. It brings into sharp focus humankind's susceptibility to attack from non-human micro-organisms. Importantly, it has drawn attention to modernity's preoccupation with humankind as the paramount species whose needs, wants, and longevity has been at the expense of the non-human matter in the ecosphere. Posthumanism invokes a thinking that moves beyond the preoccupation with modern humans' material pursuits. It appeals to a planetary justice, a justice accruable to more than just the human; it necessarily includes everything that is non-human (Ulmer 2017). Egyptian-born American literary theorist, Ihab Hassan (1977) is credited with first introducing the concept of posthumanism. The concept has since morphed and assumed lines of flight in applications across an ever-growing spectrum of intellectual endeavours and has particular appeal for curriculum and pedagogy studies.

Posthumanism's multiplicity of characteristics and features (Ulmer 2017) make it an elusive field to capture in definitive terms. It does have as its central tenet, though, the object of decentring the human as the focal point of our intellectual endeavours. It takes issue with contemporary conceptions of humans that derive from modernity's fixation with a science of things that have, to date, rendered an epoch characterised by modern humans' indelible, destructive footprint in every realm of the geosphere. The Anthropocene marks an era of human existence in which the supremacy and prioritisation of the human (and human need satisfaction) at the expense of other living and non-living matter. It is an epoch that has unequivocally demonstrated the negative geological impact that humans have had and continue to have on the planet (Crutzen 2002).

In engaging with curriculum transformation initiatives, it becomes imperative for a deliberative praxical orientation that is unapologetically political. For teachers working in the field of Economics and Business Science, there is need for an understanding of the profound imbrication of the complicity of modernity and neoliberal capitalism in perpetuating economic exploitation of the natural world (including that of humans). Forlano's (2017: 27) sceptical caution is important since she reminds us that celebratory posthumanism is premised on 'an understanding of the human based on the notion of a universal subject – usually white, male, privileged, well-off, and young – that does not exist in reality'. The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly powerful in drawing attention to the dangers of conceptualising a

universal subject and it has become strikingly clear that the virus does not discriminate with regard to its potential host. Historically entrenched socio-economic inequalities, though, render certain segments of society, including the indigent who are most prone to having underlying health conditions, and women in captive contexts, susceptible to serious infection and increased chances of fatality.

5 About Transitioning and Cognitive Dissonance

The elucidation above, presented as linear occurrence with somewhat neat transitions might be misleading. If anything, paradigmatic transitions are intensely complex and traumatic for the subject (myself) who is likely to experience feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and loss of self-belief. As researcher and scholar, I am learning what it means to exist in a space of perennial cognitive dissonance, characterised by (self) contradiction, wild leaps of faith to pursue research, and scholarship that unsettles (me). Inhabiting and operating at the proverbial border forces me to develop proclivities for constantly unlearning and learning anew.

6 Concluding Comments

In this paper, I attempted an exposition of what has informed my approach to curriculum theorising as it relates to the teacher education pedagogy courses I design and teach. I drew on the tenets of self-study research to problematize (my)self as key architect in the design and construction of my programme. I reflect on personal trauma of being born into a pre-configured world, a world view which remains circumscribed by the colonial matrix of power. I engaged the notion of the metaphorical border as powerful space to inhabit and act as I engage my students with understanding their own border occupancy. I offered a brief account of the difference in ontological premises that Decolonial Critique and Posthumanism depart with a view to understanding how these theoretical heuristics magnify different phenomena for scrutiny, transformation, and theorisation. It has however become increasingly apparent that conventional educational research methodology (and subsequent curriculum theorising) is under contestation given the radical turn that posthumanism has presented (Ulmer 2017).

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S.M. Maistry
Professor
Social Sciences Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban
maistrys@ukzn.ac.za

Using Translanguaging in Higher Education to Empower Students' Voices and Enable Epistemological Becoming

Fouad Asfour
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1087-2879

Yanela Ndabula
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8436-8827

Gamuchirai Chakona
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3784-8980

Paul Mason
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8100-792X

David O. Oluwole
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3018-327X

Abstract

This article is based on research conducted by a group of plurilingual postgraduate students from different disciplines who facilitated writing groups at the Centre for Postgraduate Studies at Rhodes University over the past two years. It is based on self-reflective writing of language biographies and aims to raise attention about, and to open up a discussion on, the impact of social and personal language practices. We approach the role of language not only as complex interrogation of academic identity, but also as sense of embodied self, an active element in the formation of geo- and body-politics of knowledge which has been highlighted in recent literature focussing on translanguaging in

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education and decolonising the curricula of Higher Education. Following self-guided research, we engaged in a critical reflection on the use of home languages in education and consulted relevant literature that argues for the inclusion of translanguaging practices in Higher Education. Our research, therefore, focuses on new epistemologies afforded by a shift away from the monolingual habitus and from the concept of multilingualism towards plurilingualism and translanguaging. Our data suggests that a plurilingual approach towards teaching and learning in Higher Education can afford epistemological access to learners across faculties and disciplines in Higher Education, and we argue that the role of languages of tuition in curricula need to be strategically re-evaluated.

Keywords: Higher Education, curriculum transformation, decolonising curricula, translanguaging, plurilingualism, monolingual bias, interdisciplinary writing group, postgraduate scholars, translanguaging, writing practices, self-reflexive, language biography writing, educational practice, writing groups facilitation, social epistemological knowledge

1 Introduction

We have argued previously that writing groups[1] are valuable spaces in which postgraduate students are able to develop the literacy practices of their disciplines (Oluwole *et al.* 2018; Wilmot & McKenna 2018). [2] They provide scholars with an opportunity to try out new discourse and to build confidence in fledgling research identities in collaborative groups of fellow students.

[1] In this article, 'writing groups' refer to the peer-led groups of students consulting and writing. These occur in different forms internationally, as outlined by Shabanza (2017), while the writing groups organised by the Rhodes Centre for Postgraduate Studies were referred to as 'Writing Circles'.

[2] This article is the result of a team of postgraduate writing group facilitators at the Rhodes Centre for Postgraduate Studies, made possible thanks to the generous support of and critical feedback by Prof Sioux McKenna, director of the CPGS who kept supporting the efforts of our research group, continued to engage rigorously with our data, and encouraged us and challenged us to keep going in the process of our research.

Furthermore, these groups are free from the power differentials that so often mark supervision relationships. Given the efforts to ensure equality in these relational contexts, which encourage experimentation within the academy, we are interested in how writing groups might function as places where translanguaging can be harnessed as a 'vehicle for epistemic access' (Makalela 2015: 15). In this article, we set out as a group of writing group facilitators to reflect on our own language practices and how plurilingualism[3] has shaped our own writing development and to explore translanguaging as a tool for knowledge creation and growth. Writing groups presently are extracurricular spaces that students use to critically review each other's writing practices. Our research draws from the fundamental premise of collegiality (Oluwole *et al.* 2018) in writing groups which we claim enables students to tackle difficult questions about the use of home languages as academic literacy skill rather than as obstacle, while acknowledging that it is a process that is experienced as difficult and challenging (Mgqwashu 2009; 2011).

In this article, we reflect critically and analyse the findings from our self-led research process of language biography writing (see Busch *et al.* 2006) which highlight the complex (and at times contradictory) interaction of home language and language of tuition in acquiring academic literacy skills through translanguaging, i.e. writing between languages (Guzula *et al.* 2016; Makalela 2015). We do this while focussing on the role that awareness of the plurilingual situation of learners can play, via writing practices, in developing epistemological depth, conceptual depth, conformity, and resistance, as well as

[3] In this article, we use *plurilingualism* as a concept that frames the *situation* of a South African learner in the education system, whereas *translanguaging* denotes the speakers' use of their languages as repertoire. This is based on the distinctions elaborated on in Garcia and Otheguy (2019) who observe that *multilingualism* tends to describe a social phenomenon whereas *plurilingualism* specifically highlights not only the awareness and competence of speakers, but also that home language, or L1, is important for the development of L2 or L3. The authors highlight raciolinguistic ideologies in Europe that require plurilingual refugees to speak and use the national language in what is considered a 'native norm'. *Translanguaging*, however, 'rests on the idea that the concept of the named language, and the related concepts of language purity and verbal hygiene, were constructed to support ideologies of racial, class, and gender superiority' (Garcia & Otheguy 2019: 9).

identity validation. Thus, we argue that peer-led translanguaging academic writing group practices need to be included as curricular activities, so as to help students to gain insight into how their writing is shaped by language ideologies and to question how these are either reproduced or questioned in their scholarly work. We claim that the process of sharing difficulties and contradictory experiences, such as the tension between the desire to conform and resistance against challenging formal requirements in writing, can lead to processes of epistemological becoming in plurilingual postgraduate students. We begin with a brief discussion of the literacies framework that underpins the use of writing groups.

2 From Epistemological Access to Epistemological Becoming

Knowledge is made in various ways inside and outside of the academy and across different disciplines. What counts as truth varies between Philosophy and Physics, as does what counts as suitable evidence for that truth. When students enrol in university, armed with their school leaving certificates and years of hard work, they are often confronted with what seems to be an entirely marginalising environment as they access new forms of knowledge and are expected to make sense of the world in new ways. This process is often not made explicit and they may find few opportunities to try out these new practices and get formative feedback to guide them as McKenna (2010) points out.

Despite the rhetoric that the academy is a meritocracy where anybody who puts in the hard work will be duly rewarded, research around the world shows that it is socioeconomic demographics that most strongly correlate to Higher Education success (Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Walpole 2003). While 'academic language is no-one's mother tongue' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1994: 8), it remains more accessible to those from middle-class backgrounds. Students from working class backgrounds, especially those who have not had a strong schooling experience, will have the toughest time at university and are the least likely to succeed.

Taking a literacies approach to looking at Higher Education means understanding that teaching is about enhancing epistemological access (Morrow 1993). The role of the educator is thus not only to transmit the knowledge in her possession, but to explicate the ways in which that knowledge is made, how it is deemed worthy by the discipline, and why it is articulated in the ways that it is. In this context, language is often considered

as the conduit for transmitting academic knowledge, rather than being central to the individual's meaning making processes. However, in this article we argue that students' plurilingual realities and translanguaging practices are an overlooked resource in postgraduate writing practices.

Writing in the extracurricular spaces of interdisciplinary peer-led writing groups affords students the opportunity to interrogate the role of language as knowledge, and to critically shift their position to learning from accessing knowledge to knowing as a form of becoming. In this research article, we focus our attention on ways in which the use of home languages can enable processes of knowing as a form of becoming, or what Barnett terms 'epistemic becoming' (2009: 435). Our research posits that language biography writing that takes place in writing groups can function as a starting point for the experience of an 'extraordinary and intimate relationship between knowing and becoming' (p. 435). In this article, therefore, we aim to examine how writing groups can become part of curricula and pedagogies that are 'likely to elicit formation of the kinds of (epistemologically linked) dispositions and qualities' (p. 437) that could enable more rigorous academic engagement across disciplines and thereby broaden epistemological access as well as facilitate epistemological becoming, instead of sustaining and perpetuating learning practices that compartmentalise and exclude students' home languages (Banda 2000; Bangeni & Kapp 2007; Makalela 2015; Makoe & McKinney 2014; Maseko 2019).

As noted earlier, this article draws from the work of García and Otheguy (2019) in order to argue the necessity of moving away from the discourse of multilingualism, which advocates the use of home languages as language of tuition, to the concept of plurilingualism as repertoire and translanguaging as practice. It is important to activate this distinction in the context of South Africa, since, as Neville Alexander observes, 'even though Afrikaans and English are the languages of arithmetic minorities, they are the dominant languages and manifest all the features of what are generally referred to by sociolinguists and sociologists of language as 'majority' languages'. Conversely, Alexander continues, 'the demographically strong indigenous African languages, especially isXhosa and isiZulu, though, together, they are spoken as a first language by almost one-half of the population of South Africa and between 60% and 70% of all South Africans understand isiZulu manifest all the features of 'minority' languages in the typical West European country' (2001: 355–356).

The choice of language and teaching in South Africa is amplified by the economic imperative to speak 'the dominant language (of power)' (Alexander 2005: 5)., p.[4] Therefore, it is important to recognise the use of home languages as conscious choice and instrumental in facilitating epistemological access, rather than continuing the colonial situation in education where speakers find themselves limited to an ontology of 'being multilingual' while continuing to advantage English-knowing elites.[5] This shift of perspective responds to the demands to decolonise Higher Education (Heleta 2016), away from a multilingualism where the knowledge of additional languages becomes an asset for European national citizens, and where multilingualism resides 'outside of their bodies, in the society' (García & Otheguy 2019: 7). The reality of translanguaging in South Africa, however, suggests taking seriously the simultaneous use of languages in daily reality to speak about lived realities.

The language of teaching and learning is often reported as presenting an additional barrier in plurilingual students' experiences of exploring and developing academic literacy. In the context of current efforts to decolonise the curriculum, students need to be able to point out when disciplinary norms are reproduced that are nebulous and part of the hidden curriculum, instead of being explicitly elaborated on and critically reflected on, thus furthering a colonial matrix of language (Veronelli 2015) as embodied knowledge practice (Bhambra *et al.* 2018). For example, studies in South Africa have shown that when home languages are not used as the language of tuition and learning, students' performance is significantly poorer and their dropout rates higher (Mgqwashu 2011; Ngcobo 2014). By implication, teaching in ways that make the knowledge and related literacy practices explicit in a language that is

[4] 'The relevant essential proposition is simple enough. It states that in a multilingual society, it is in everyone's interest to learn the dominant language (of power), since this will help to provide equal opportunities in the labour market as well as in other markets. In post-colonial Africa, this has led to the almost complete marginalisation of the local languages of the people and the valorisation of English, French and Portuguese in the relevant African states'. (Alexander 2005: 5)

[5] 'My core proposition is that until and unless we are able to use the indigenous languages of South Africa, among other things, as languages of tuition at tertiary level, our educational system will continue to be skewed in favour of an English-knowing elite' (Alexander 2003: 22).

accessible to students contributes to their success or, stated differently, their epistemological becoming. Unfortunately, such a mode of educational empowerment shall remain idealistic rather than actualisable for as long as English continues its role of gatekeeper of knowledge in the realm of Higher Education (Hurst 2016). This gatekeeper role persists despite studies that have shown that translanguaging practices through plurilingual inclusion of languages in Higher Learning can open up paths towards epistemic justice (Walker 2018).

It might be relevant to point out that this article is a research report and the result of the work of a group of transdisciplinary postgraduate scholars, whereas our main field of academic practice is outside of educational or curriculum studies. At the same time, we claim a space within the debate around Higher Education curricula, acknowledging that our work as writing group facilitators, through the process of self-reflexive, interdisciplinary group research has started processes of epistemological becoming in each of the research group members. Therefore, the argument presented here builds on both our practice as writing group facilitators, and the insight we gained throughout the process that writing practices draw from a traffic between practices of personal reflective and creative writing on the one hand and scholarly work as thinking on the other.

In this context, it is important to point out that plurilingual inclusion is a particular element in the decolonial turn that is currently being experienced in the academy (Bhambra *et al.* 2018). When knowledge and the related literacy practices are normalised, they become almost impervious to critique. By normalising the disciplinary norms of knowledge making, the academy protects it from the harsh light of deliberation. Teaching in ways that make practices explicit means that we have to be able to justify our expectations and this can assist us in seeing which norms are worthy of our stewardship and which need to be dismissed as part of an exclusionary legacy.

While epistemological access can be understood to comprise access to the content and practices of the target field, it should not be seen in isolation from epistemological becoming (Barnett 2009). Taking on a particular discipline or disciplines has implications for a student's sense of self. If we understand literacy practices as including the ways in which we think, talk, act, dress, walk and so on, then we understand that all of us have a repertoire of literacy practices that we can embody as the context demands. However, not all of these practices sit comfortably alongside each other. The number of

testimonies about the alienating nature of the university in the 2015/2016 student protests (Badat 2016; Le Grange 2016) perhaps do not come as a surprise. If taking on the practices of the discipline entails taking on new ways of being and doing, the potential for identity issues to emerge is significant. If these practices are never opened to scrutiny and challenge, they can seem mysterious and even suffocating.

There are many ways in which the practices of the academy can enhance the likelihood of epistemological and ontological access in ways that are socially just. Many universities have created support programmes for students to improve their literacy practices, such as Academic Literacy or English as Additional Language courses. These interventions are however sometimes 'underpinned by a conceptualisation of students as being deficient' (Coleman 2016: 18) and often treat language practices as generic across the academy, rather than emerging from particular disciplines (Case *et al.* 2018). In addition, the writing practices taught tend to disregard the possibility of rigorous academic engagement that can happen when students are encouraged to tap into their translanguaging practices for meaning making. This, therefore, suggests that a South African Higher Education curriculum that embraces plurilingualism and translanguaging across disciplines (Ramani & Joseph 2010), including writing groups and other additional programmes, could enable students to participate and contribute epistemologically, thereby activating their lived realities as knowledge rather than as obstacle.

3 Tapping into Students' Plurilingual Repertoire through Translanguaging in Writing Groups

Writing groups meet weekly at Rhodes University, where this study is situated, and serve to allow postgraduate scholars to experiment with various literacy practices, to help each other make them explicit and, at times, to support each other to challenge the dominance of particular practices, following Wilmot and McKenna (2018). This non-hierarchical space further offers students the opportunity to learn and share literacy practices between peers from different disciplines unhindered by constraints of grammar or formal language rules. Over the past years, the socio-political significance of knowledge production in South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has been questioned more rigorously as Heleta (2016) reminds us. In this context, the writing group meetings provide students not only with 'inspiring and creative places where

people talk, write and learn together because they are being nurtured, empowered and stimulated' (Aitchison 2009: 261), but also with safe spaces in which to develop their critical voice.

As stated earlier, the dominance of English as a medium of instruction has long been shown to constrain students' access to knowledge and disciplinary writing practices (Nomlomo & Katiya 2018). There is also evidence to show that this has effects on students' self-worth and sense of identity since their home language seems to be deemed less valuable than the powerful medium of instruction (Castenell & Pinar 1993; De Kadt & Mathonsi 2003). Writing groups provide an opportunity for students to activate their plurilingual background through translanguaging as groups draw on their many languages in composing reflective pieces, pre-writing notes, short essays, and so on.

Students' plurilingual repertoire is an untapped opportunity to contribute significantly to the process of developing academic literacy. We understand academic literacy as praxis (Stierer 2008: 42) which builds on the home language spoken by the learner, thus activating the epistemic potential of translanguaging. This approach is supported by studies which show that tuition based on very late-exit transition (delay of transition from mother tongue as language of instruction to a different target language) or additive plurilingual education proves more effective in the achievement of academic literacy (Heugh 2011). In the South African context, multilingual and plurilingual practices are not acknowledged in language policies, thus continuing apartheid policies of separate languages which 'legitimise and give authority to standard English language at the expense of pluralism and diversity' (Makoe & McKinney 2014: 670). In spite of the modernisation of South African languages from the turn of the century,[6] the use of English language continues as a social marker of distinction, creating elitism and further associating African languages with inferiority (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa 2014). In our writing groups, we set out to harness translanguaging as epistemological practice for the development of academic literacy practices,

[6] During the so called *New African Movement* (1900–1960) South African languages experienced a shift in meaning making through a vast range of print publications such as *Imvo Zabantsundu* (1884), *Ilanga lase Natal* (1903), *Tsala ea Batho / Tsala ea Becauna* (1910–915), or *Umteteli wa Bantu* (1920–1956) to mention a few.

based on the assumption that plurilingual speakers have potentially broad access to disciplinary concepts. Accordingly, our writing groups provide the opportunity to address a significant question that is posed in this research article: How can a group of interdisciplinary postgraduate scholars perform, explore, and develop an understanding of translanguaging writing practices through self-reflexive language biography writing as educational practice for facilitating writing groups, so as to guide postgraduate students towards activating the potential of their social epistemological knowledge?

4 Language Biographies as Participatory Methodology

Here we outline the procedures undertaken for collecting and analysing the data discussed in this article. This research group is made up of five interdisciplinary writing facilitators coming from disciplines as unrelated as Chemistry, Environmental Science, Creative Writing, Psychology, Education, and Visual Art. As facilitators, we meet monthly to discuss how our groups are engaging and to share ideas about the development of literacy practices within the collegial ethos of the writing groups. To collect data and to fully grasp the implications of translanguaging practices for postgraduate scholarship, over the course of our monthly meetings, we wrote language biographies and reflective pieces and discussed how these could be activated in writing groups so as to enhance epistemological access and conceptual depth in academic writing. These language biographies were framed by the work of Busch and colleagues (2006), which outline how language biographies can open up opportunities for translanguaging in learning and to conscientise people (Freire 1974) about attitudes towards and practices of language.

Busch *et al.* (2006) posit that language biographies are more than just factual anecdotes and can be useful tools in classroom situations, giving learners a shared sense of perspective within a plurilingual environment. They are based on memory work, and, as acts of self-disclosure, require a safe writing space. In such settings, tensions between the dominant discourses and one's own (emerging) identity are openly addressed and revealed in a non-threatening context. Thus, language biography writing also serves the political purpose of capturing the oral histories of decolonisation that might otherwise be absent from the classroom.

We used principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Fals-Borda & Rahman 1991) to challenge and unpack the experiences of

plurilingual postgraduate students in South African HEIs, on the basis of our own experiences as writing group facilitators. PAR is based on three aspects: participation in public life through reasoning about 'life in society and democracy'; actions grounded in collaborative inquiry as 'engagement with experience'; and research as 'soundness in thought' which draws from the practice of ordinary language (Chevalier & Buckles 2013: 205 - 206). Critical pedagogy is based on collaborative thinking towards a shared concern so our research is, therefore, inspired by Barry Stierer's thoughts on critical pedagogy 'where theory and practice are integrated in order to effect action and change' (2008: 42).

Since group processes are conducive to research and experimentation, our work aimed at enabling each participant's active knowledge in the process. Thus, PAR is appropriate to this study that attempts to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of each of our plurilingual backgrounds and translanguaging practices, while at the same time enabling each of us to model this joint research process on writing in second languages in other contexts. To employ PAR also means to include the investigated in the process of investigation itself since this acknowledges that, given the proper tools, people who are affected by a problem not only better understand their realities, but will also be best equipped to address their struggles.

After writing language biographies we shared our pieces with each other and, apart from observing similarities and differences, we also further explored the memories in our language biographies. In this first phase of data analysis, the results were read and reread in our meetings. The narratives produced were then coded according to the dominant theme that was emerging in each narrative. The themes that emerged from the language biographies and reflective pieces include the following:

- Conceptual depth through translanguaging practices in plurilingualism;
- Affective processes: confusion/ exclusion/ vulnerability;
- Conformity and resistance;
- Translanguaging as decolonisation (challenging and critiquing);
- Translanguaging a tool for epistemological access; and
- Identity validation.

After reflecting on our language biographies, we decided to write reflective pieces in which we contemplated which unexpressed premises became visible

in both their form and content. This second phase of data collection was in line with the cyclic nature of PAR and was meant to explore silences and unconscious choices in our language biographies. Reading out our texts, we realised that we focused mainly on navigating between our home languages and English as language of instruction. Sharing our observations about this bias, we noticed that we did not realise the potential of all our languages as plurilingual speakers as intelligible choices in the process of reflection around the significance of 'language' in meaning making. In this process, a valuable finding was that we assumed that the field of reflection around 'language' in academia is unstructured, and that we took for granted that experimentation, creativity, and play in self-reflexive work would yield results which would mirror the role of each language that contributed to the process of our epistemological becoming. We therefore learned in this process that reflexive inputs on language biography writing is a relevant step in interrogating habitual academic writing constellations.

We framed this process of self-reflective discovery as 'memory work'.[7] The research group engaged in memory work by sharing mnemonic sound games used in childhood to remember the spelling of English words. This made evident that similar strategies exist across languages and created a sense of shared experience. Thus, as a plurilingual research group from different cultures and geo-political contexts, we were able to engage with affective processes in second language acquisition which are investigated by Mgqwashu (2009). A crucial difference between the language biographies and reflexive notes was the transition from factual narrative accounts about language acquisition and the emergent writing practices to narratives about the important scenes, figures, games, songs, and political events that have shaped their writing practises within what Rose (2004) has called the hidden curriculum (Rose 2004) as it continues in postgraduate studies.

[7] This is a social constructionist and feminist research practice which is elaborated on in the South African contexts by scholars such as Pumla Gqola, Yvette Abrahams and Desiree Lewis and based on the work of Black Feminist scholars Audre Lorde and bell hooks. To do memory work means to re-examine what is remembered and to re-write one's past, as proposed by bell hooks who posits that Audre Lorde's 1982 novel *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* could be seen as 'bio-mythography' (1989: 15).

In the section that follows we analyse excerpts from the data. Each theme is discussed in relation to plurilingualism.

5 Findings

5.1 *Epistemological Depth through Translanguaging Practices*

The language biographies that research group members wrote presented different aspects of the role of translanguaging for epistemological access. While these practices differ from individual to individual, we found that some experiences were shared. We found that the following issues link epistemological access and translanguaging in the texts written by research group members.

Looking back at the experience of acquiring academic literacy, we reflected how working in English at first blocked out the use of concepts in home languages. However, after reviewing this question, we discussed the impact of having access to the same concept in different languages. In our discussion, some research team members claimed that keeping an awareness about the meaning of concepts in different languages in mind while writing would lead to confusion, while others maintained that it provides a deeper and broader approach towards concepts. In this regard, consider the following excerpt from the language biography of Facilitator Z:

> I am currently doing my PhD and realising that I hardly ever engage my isiXhosa lens when engaging with concepts as a result it feels as though all my life I have been learning to forget concepts. Part of the decision to think in English is sparked by the illusion that it grants easier access to conceptualising about these concepts. However, there is something that happens within me when I tap into my home language that opens a whole new perspective and knowledge when I start thinking about for instance the concept of a 'mother' or 'possession' in isiXhosa. Therefore, I think something can be said about understanding and learning using one's home language.

There is no doubt that students working between different languages face a different situation than students whose home language is the same as the language of tuition. However, plurilingual students are used to navigating between languages although the contributions of the home language are at

times avoided or not readily recognised. This narrative made clear that we need to discuss students' practices and needs when they learn in their second language.

Facilitator W reflects about a different awareness of language as medium in translanguaging practices—approaching mistakes differently when writing between languages. Often, sentences are formed according to the syntax of the home language. This would be revealed as a 'mistake' only when reading the full sentence in the target language. These experiences lead to different ways of engaging through the detour of writing in another language. One would revisit the text, reformulate, and move on. Another possibility, however, is to look again at the result of a direct (and incorrect) translation and to interrogate both, the text that is perceived as ungrammatical, as well as the underlying sentence which originates in the home language. What this could make visible are further underlying processes of language use, such as the use of metaphors and idioms. Facilitator W reflects on this process.

> This struggle, however, also produces unintended sentence formations, sometimes I read what I did not mean to write. This way, the process of self-translation in writing does two things, not only thinking through what one thought by writing it down, but also with the interaction of the second language inserting new meaning in a sentence. Therefore, I stopped seeing this as struggle or waste of time, but rather as a way of thinking in two voices, one intended and one which runs between the lines of working in two languages.

The question raised here is how plurilingual speakers access complex expressions by 'throwing a metaphorical boomerang across languages' (Martin–Beltrán 2010: 266) through translanguaging. On the one hand, this process can potentially lead to a broader epistemological access, as observed by Facilitator W. On the other hand, the process of translanguaging makes visible instances in which metaphors or idioms need unpacking.

When working between different languages, plurilingual speakers often experience a reframing of habitualised forms of speech. These are gradually acquired in second language learning. The need to unpack opaque statements in translanguaging therefore lends itself to a more conscious use of idioms and metaphors, which need to be constructed into a translated form. As a result, we would argue that these processes should be raised when preparing

writing group facilitators at South African HEIs, and that an ongoing awareness about them can help students to actualise their full potential as researchers and writers. While much research on collaborative learning and its effects on conceptual engagement has been conducted, not much research has been done on translanguaging as a tool for crossing conceptual thresholds. Analysis suggests that activating home languages in academic literacy practices can enable conceptual depth and threshold crossing (García & Wei 2014).

5.2 *Conceptual Depth through Translanguaging Practices*

McKenna (2017) discusses the benefits of having collaborative spaces in postgraduate education to ensure that students achieve the required conceptual depth. Along with others (for example, ASSAf 2010; Cloete *et al.* 2015; McKenna (2017) raises concerns about the dominance of the individual Master-Apprentice supervision model that dominates postgraduate education in some disciplines. Writing groups provide a peer learning space in which students can engage in depth with others and thereby achieve conceptual threshold crossing.

Crossing a conceptual threshold is said to be transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded, and troublesome (Meyer & Land 2003). The process can be termed transformative because a new perspective is unlocked in the subject because of the learning. It is irreversible in that the subject cannot return to earlier simplistic understandings. The integrative element refers to making sense of new concepts in relation to previously accrued concepts and the characteristic of boundedness acknowledges that some concepts are discipline-specific, and that understanding is thus demarcated by the disciplinary lens through which one is looking (Meyer & Land 2005). Furthermore, the crossing of conceptual thresholds can be considered troublesome in that this can challenge dominant forms of knowledge (McKenna 2017). We would argue that translanguaging can facilitate the crossing of conceptual thresholds, as is expressed by Facilitator W:

> Two years ago, I experimented with spoken and written English in the MA programme in Creative Writing. I focussed on the bodily feeling of being in a third space, speaking a second language that is infused in complex processes of self-translation in creative writing, both as

> reflective process and as liberating practice. This experience brought about many new insights into my own attitudes and approaches towards my knowledge of language: I was forced to express myself more clearly not only because I wanted to avoid misunderstandings and tried to express myself in a language which I was not used to writ[ing] and speak[ing]. And since I started writing in English, I became aware of forms of German idioms and complex expressions which don't have a direct translation to other languages. As I was forced to unpack these, I learned to inspect concepts more critically than before, when I took the meaning of opaque expressions for granted.

Facilitator W reflects on the conceptualising blockages encountered in fixating on English proficiency in academic writing and the merits that could be gained through translanguaging and drawing on one's home language to supplement or challenge meaning. Upon reflection, the writing group facilitator recognises other ways of knowing which add nuance and critique to previously held conceptualisations of concepts through shifting between English and German. The shifts between the languages allowed the facilitator to achieve deeper engagement with core concepts and to achieve a conceptual depth that was not available had he shut off access to the understandings provided by his second language. The development of new language practices, however, is a difficult one as García and Wei (2014) point out, which amounts to learning a new way of languaging. Writing groups are spaces in which learners share their conscious effort in practicing new forms of thought since it is important to 'engage and interact socially and cognitively in the learning process in ways that produce and extend the students' languaging and meaning-making' (2014: 79).

5.3 *Conformity and Resistance*

Internationalisation of Higher Education has increased the necessity to embrace English as a lingua franca because of its linguistic hegemony. In a globalised world, there has been a growing appeal for the learning of English and while it affords disciplinary exchange in international spaces, there remains pressure to conform to the norms of a globally accepted language. This resistance to acknowledging and developing translanguaging may be understood as a response to the inferiority that is often ascribed to speakers'

home languages, with the concomitant elevation of a foreign language to a level above theirs. It is believed that this imbalance often leads to the silencing of individual thoughts because of one's inability to express critical perspectives in the language deemed acceptable in such spaces. This is evidenced by Facilitator V who reflects on experiences of staying clear of translanguaging:

> I always become hesitant to speak because I first think in my mother-tongue then try to translate to English, spent several minutes thinking and reflecting if it makes sense to me. I have developed that fear of not knowing what people would think about my grammar and pronunciation of certain words. At the same time, what could have been a straight-to-the-point narration becomes a long and winding story as I would be trying to bring some important points on the table. This however tend to confuse some people who are not patient enough to grasp everything thereby causing me to react to this by silencing myself in certain discussions where I feel I would be judged.

A different aspect of this experience is shared by Facilitator Y who grew up in a plurilingual environment:

> For me English became a language of communication alongside my home language . . . Confusion often arises from this experience of having to negotiate two languages in two separate contexts, that of home and the public domain. Initially, it was difficult for me to comprehend both languages at the same time, but my management of them was made easier through the help of my mother who studied for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Linguistics. This provided her with the skills to teach in both languages, which was certainly of benefit to my own learning.

It is noteworthy that many of the language biographies and reflective pieces showed willingness to engage in the language of teaching and learning in most academic spaces (in our case, English) but the resistance to conform towards the academic norms still holds in a very subtle form. This is evidenced by Facilitator V's decision to silence herself to avoid self-expression through long complex narrations caused by translanguaging to conform to the group, even with valuable contributions to make. Facilitator Y reflects on learning to

manage both languages and compartmentalising each according to the monolingual norm with the help of his mother. It is important to deliberate upon and discuss ways in which languages can be balanced rather than placing emphasis on one above the other. We argue, however, that more research needs to be done into how the practice of translanguaging can further original contributions to knowledge that draw from the rich epistemic realities of plurilingual speakers. Furthermore, writing groups can provide the space for inventing new ways of academic writing practices that comment on texts generated through translanguaging to generate a text that is intelligible in one of the used languages. These practices would result in students actively engaging in investigating how to make available meaning across curricula and languages[8].

5.4 *Identity Validation*

Julie Menard-Warwick opens her 2005 interrogation of identity in the field of second language acquisition and literacy theory saying, 'As educational settings become more linguistically and culturally diverse, there has been a growing recognition that the multiple identities which students bring with them affect learning in powerful but unpredictable ways' (p. 253). The language biographic approach allowed us to take a different perspective through narratives and to compare experiences with the language biographies among different language groups. Thus, social and individual translanguaging practices of plurilingual contexts can be linked to varying concepts of social organisation, identity, and ethnicity (Busch *et al.* 2006). With the use of language biography and reflective pieces collected in this study, it was evident that language is an aspect of identity that is closely related to race, social class, occupation, education, and income. This can also influence language perceptions and prejudices. For example, Facilitator V indicated,

> Being involved in an academic environment where I have to teach,

[8] García and Wei (2014: 60f) highlight the benefits of transgressing dual language structures, which allows students to reflect on their languages, correct each other and negotiate linguistic problems while making meaning, a process that results in 'more uptake from the learner, able to appropriate new language practices as their own'.

> give talks, and be involved in research completely changed my life. I cannot say I perfectly fit, but the fact that I have swallowed the fear of speaking English has drastically boosted my confidence in many ways. I can speak English without the fear of being judged and I believe I can even give tangible contributions during discussions.

The English language is used as the language of academic engagement in many institutions and one's academic capabilities are often evaluated according to the ability to write or speak in this one language only, which Facilitator V identifies in the study as stealing confidence from many whose first language is not English.

> As I was growing up, I had to learn to adjust to both languages depending on the situation I would be in. I am proud of my understanding of English and my ability to use the language in an academic environment. However, I cannot run away from the fact that English being the only language of learning being used, it affects my confidence especially if I have to contribute in English.

In some instances, postgraduate students have reflected that the use of English as a language of communication and writing, especially if it is a second or third language, may influence the erosion of one's native identity and culture as one would prefer to be identified with English in order to fit in, as is recounted by Facilitator Z.

> Learning English, the language of academic engagement in South Africa started at an early age and *iqale ngokufuna ukufana nodade wethu* (it all started with wanting to be like my sister) even though this language acquisition process would later progress independent of my sister.

As exemplified here, translanguaging makes available the simultaneous presence of concepts from various languages, activating meaning making through conceptualisation across languages as part of the process of speaking. The simultaneous use of 'udade/ sister' in one enunciation activates a conceptual depth that is rooted in social context as enabling epistemological processes (García & Wei 2014). Rather than approaching the lexical items of

'udade' and 'sister' as separate entries according to the normative use of separating languages, the glossary approach to 'translation' is removed and replaced by the embodied knowledge of sharing thought. The peer-led writing groups enable the appropriate social context for translanguaging, a space that is driven by the shared endeavour to create meaning, rather than by the desire to produce a normative outcome. This procedural activation of linguistic repertories has been conceptualised as 'heteroglossia' by Bakhtin (1981: 270), shifting the root of meaning making to the activity of speaking through 'language as communicative action'.[9] Shifting the focus away from the 'dilemma filled' process of negotiating one's way towards producing thoughts in one 'target language', which is observed by Setati *et al.* (2002: 140), the speakers' languages cease to appear as separate entities, as the outcome of the normalized habitus of two monolinguals in one body (Grosjean 1989). The normalized stigma of hybrid languages or mixing languages activates the experience of lack and of not being good enough while writing across languages can open up further multimodal dimensions understanding.[10] More often than not, plurilingual speakers experience their plurilingual practices according to the 'dominant discourse of 'separate bilingualism' . . . in which languages are viewed as discrete and bounded cultural entities attached to particular domains of use' (Preece 2016: 370). By making space for translanguaging, however, writing groups move the students' focus towards one speaking body, being perfectly capable of forming complex thought. We therefore argue that while the development of students' academic literacy is complex and is accompanied by contradictory processes of conformity, resistance, and identity validation, the simultaneous use of students' linguistic repertoire is essential for processes of what we would like to refer to epistemological becoming.

Thus, we argue that the curricula of Higher Education in South Africa need to provide spaces across disciplines that allow for translanguaging to activate students' vast linguistic-conceptual resources, rather than rushing towards the output of producing academic discourse using so-called perfect

[9] Creese and Blackledge (2011:1198) posit that this approach requires an 'explanation predicated on the fluidity and simultaneity of language use'.

[10] Taliaferro-Baszile (2019: 23) points toward the potential of 'reWriting in two languages or 'dialects' in one manuscript or even in one sentence; or with bold, fiery, righteous indignation that makes the page hot to the touch'.

language. Writing groups as peer-led spaces based on the fundamental premise of collegiality can facilitate students' epistemological becoming where translanguaging is embraced as part of the students' conceptual growth. Examples of such spaces being activated in different ways in South African Universities are starting to emerge, like, for example, Dr Siphokazi Magadla's practice of *Ukuzinza.*

Furthermore, writing groups are social spaces in which South African students' plurilingual reality questions the ideology of the monolingual habitus in academia (Gogolin 1997; Yildiz 2012). Knowledge making in the academic community is based on discourse. Translanguaging confronts programmes of transformation of language policies with the realities of plurilingual scholars. In turn, members of the academic community are challenged to interrogate their assumed monolingual realities, disrupting raciolinguistic ideologies as Flores and Rosa (2015) note. Thus, writing groups can become spaces in which the move towards a new normal is refuted by interrogating language biographies across different lived experiences. Facilitator X's reflections around the linguistic background show that language biography writing can shift the reflection around the linguistic identity to another level.

> My PhD required the reading of a collection of Afrikaans short stories which I experienced as easy to translate into English. In summary, I have a good understanding of Afrikaans but do not speak it.
> I also consider myself to have two languages on the discursive level, or the level of register i.e. the language of analysis and the language of creative writing. I write journal articles, conference papers, peer reviews, literary reviews, poetry, short stories, and literary non-fiction.

In this context, writing groups offer space for growth in which students try out the literacy practices they have at their disposal, challenge the dominance of particular styles, genres, and tones, and engage playfully with the complex work of navigating knowledge production, literacy practices, and language development. The need for safe spaces for play is key because of the intricate identity work entailed. As stated above, our use of memory work was aimed at eliciting personal experiences which require intersectional framing of identities. Therefore, this discussion was not designed to provide simple truths, but is aimed, rather, at generating narratives that complicate plurilingual experiences in the contexts of South African Universities.

6 Conclusion

In this article, we analysed our language biographies and reflective pieces as data so as to interrogate the significance of translanguaging processes in acquiring academic literacy, and to examine the role of writing groups as peer-led spaces across curricula of different disciplines. In the course of coding the language biographies, we found that the writing processes were accompanied by complex affective processes, and that the writing of language biographies points to the difficulties associated with plurilingual students' experiences of developing their writing practices in the dominant language of instruction. Therefore, we argue that the connection between language of tuition and academic literacy skills needs to be reframed so as to change the prevalent normative monolingual of students' linguistic repertoires.

Students make sense of disciplinary norms in multiple ways and, while translanguaging may not be a useful resource for some, the complexities and contradictions implicit in a monolingual habitus of knowledge production consistently prove to disadvantage many others in South Africa given its response to massification. Dominant forms of knowledge production continue to alienate scholars while epistemological (in)access is continually linked to plurilingual students' inability to keep up with the curriculum or acquire the competencies required in postgraduate studies. We argue that a curriculum that is eager to transform should not only be emphatic about the possibilities of including plurilingual lived realities, but also acknowledge that they are indispensable in meaning making/ As Sembiante (2016: 57) points out, 'a critical language awareness and pedagogy may become indispensable for the field of curriculum and instruction as it searches for relevant perspectives in an increasingly diverse and globalized society'. Therefore, the cultivation of home language use in, for example, prewriting, essay writing, or chapter outlining could be on-the-ground sites in the curriculum for the activation of epistemological access, conceptual depth, conformity, and resistance and identity validation among plurilingual and monolingual scholars.

In conclusion, we claim that writing groups can become spaces in which students unlearn the separation of languages and practise new avenues towards acquiring academic literacy skills. The call to decolonise education around the globe (Bhambra *et al.* 2018) has placed a spotlight on plurilingual researchers who challenge the normalised knowledge inherent in the global discourse on multilingualism, exposing the historical monolingual bias that

Guzula *et al.* (2016) point out, while drawing from their experience of translanguaging as a lived practice of knowledge. In the process of our research, we tried to refuse the tendency to read our data according to the theories that offer simplified answers. Instead, we embraced our research process as meaning making so as to understand that 'translanguaging is not simply a research method but rather part of a larger political struggle of linguistic self-determination for language-minoritized populations' and that 'translanguaging is a political act' (Flores 2014: n.p.). As a qualitative study, we engaged in a critical interrogation of the documents that we produced for this study and began to appreciate that these provide significant examples of the close connections between identity, language, and meaning making. Thus, we argue that the complex experiences by students who practice translanguaging need to find a place in curricular planning and that HEIs need to develop new approaches to make available spaces for these across the academy, within the formal curriculum and outside of it.

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Fouad Asfour
Visiting researcher
Wits School of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
fouad.asfour@gmx.net

Yanela Ndabula
Researcher
Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction Research Programme
Rhodes University
Makhanda (Grahamstown)
y.ndabula@ru.ac.za

Gamuchirai Chakona
Research Assistant at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC)
Department of Education
Rhodes University
Makhanda (Grahamstown)
G.Chakona@ru.ac.za

Paul Mason
Research Associate
Department of Literary Studies in English
Rhodes University
Makhanda (Grahamstown)
pm6308@gmail.com

David O. Oluwole
Postdoctoral Fellow
1 Center for Postgraduate Studies
Rhodes University
Makhanda (Grahamstown)
2 Department of Chemistry
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Cape Town
davido.oluwole@gmail.com

Towards an Embodied Critical Pedagogy of Discomfort as a Decolonising Teaching Strategy

Sylvan Blignaut
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5514-0604

Oscar Koopman
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1508-3967

Abstract

In this paper, we recount the first author's experiences of exploring a critical pedagogy of discomfort as a way of practising social justice during a series of classes with a group of predominantly white Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students. The primary focus of these classes was on issues related to race, racism, privilege, and inequality. A qualitative approach was adopted for the data collection process in which the researcher took on the role of a participant observer. Ethnographic fieldnotes were used as the main source of data. In our analysis of the first author's experiences, we discuss the difficulties and challenges he faced in adopting this pedagogical approach. After reporting on these challenges and difficulties we argue that cultivating social justice through a critical pedagogy of discomfort as a form of decolonisation is not enough to counteract an education that promotes instrumentalisation and the commodification of knowledge. Accordingly, we argue for a shift towards an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort that takes into account an acute awareness (epistemological and ontological) of embodiment to serve as a decolonising teaching strategy.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, curriculum transformation, decolonisation, embodiment, higher education, racism

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1 Introduction: Against Uncritical Learning

Most of the policy documents on curriculum transformation both in the schooling sector as well as in teacher education after 1994 foreground an education for social justice as an essential element in addressing and reversing the legacies of apartheid education. To support this claim, Ramrathan (2010: 107) writes,

> Since 1994, there has been a proliferation of new policies and changes to the education system that have had a major impact on the teaching context and schools. Statements of social justice, equity, redress, human rights, healthy environment, and quality are found in the introduction and background of almost all policy documents, gazettes, and regulations within education.

In addition to these policy changes, to set the stage for developing teacher education programmes to advance critical learning, Waghid (2010) explains how the various programmes already in existence such as the B. Ed., PGCE, and M.Ed. programmes had to be reviewed to comply with the principles adopted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) for a coherent and integrated focus on promoting critical learning. Our personal experiences of teaching in the various teacher education programmes such as the undergraduate B. Ed. and postgraduate qualifications such as the PGCE programme at the universities at which we work it is evident that much uncritical learning takes place and, in agreement with Waghid (2010: 202), we often observe how 'students seem to have become consumed with a market-orientated logic of learning'. Consequently, we feel that it is essential for teacher education programmes in a postcolonial society such as South Africa, where the legacy of the past is still evident in every facet of life, to ensure that students become more vocal and critical about issues such as racism, privilege, and inequality if they are to become effective practitioners of social justice. If teacher educators do not undertake this important task of focusing critically on social justice, their students will run the risk of perpetuating racism, stereotypes, and existing inequalities and thereby reproduce the old prevailing hegemony and the existing social order characterised by inequity and injustice.

Teacher education, therefore, has an important role to play in ascertaining what counts as knowledge and how this knowledge is produced to instil in future teachers the anti-hegemonic discourses that counteract race-based social inequality as well as provide a corrective to the abuses of power and privilege in society. Pre-service teachers need to engage critically with issues of race as well as explore and reflect on their racial identities so that they might come to understand how these identities have been shaped by past experiences and determine how these experiences play out in the ways in which they interpret the present.

To begin to outline the development of a critical pedagogy that takes into account the personal lived realities of students through an epistemology of being, the first part of the paper recounts the first author's experiences in exploring a critical pedagogy of discomfort, aimed at practising social justice through a series of classes on issues that dealt with racism, privilege, and inequality with a group of mainly white PGCE students. In our analysis of the first author's experiences, we discuss the difficulties and challenges he faced in adopting this pedagogical approach. After reporting on these challenges and difficulties we argue that a critical pedagogy of discomfort is not enough to counteract education that promotes instrumentalisation and commodification of knowledge if, as a form of decolonisation, we are to cultivate social justice. Accordingly, we argue for an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort, that takes into account an acute awareness (epistemological and ontological) of embodiment that can serve as a decolonising teaching strategy.

2 Theoretical Framework

Over the last five years, through the Fallism movement, we have witnessed how the student demand for a decolonised curriculum in universities has become almost inescapable, forcing government and university administrators to the negotiating table to commit to the demand that the university curriculum be decolonised (Le Grange 2016). From a pedagogical perspective, scholars like Ogunniyi (2007), Koopman (2019), and Iwuanyanwu and Ogunniyi (2020), and various others have argued that a decolonised classroom space requires a shift away from an authoritative pedagogy to a more democratic participative critical one that gives voice to the lived realities of students. For example, Koopman (2019) argues that in a decolonised pedagogical space,

academics should open the classroom to dialogue through the curriculum to develop new ways of seeing that are different from those of dominant pedagogical discourses that promote what Waghid (2010) calls a consumerist logic or, put differently, a factual knowledge from textbooks that must be regurgitated in tests and examinations. Iwuanyanwu and Ogunniyi (2020) argue for an instructional approach that encourages dialogical argumentation as a decolonising teaching strategy to disrupt uncritical learning. In other words, to prevent students from becoming passive consumers of knowledge, their everyday lived realities must be at the centre of critical pedagogical engagement. We are aware that although these realities might not always be aligned with theoretical knowledge captured in [text]books, this strategy does offer the possibility of acquiring plausible insights into understanding phenomena. By connecting theoretical knowledge with personal lived experiences in open discussions, the outcome of such teaching can be used to bring them into contact with more accurate accounts of the world. For example, over the years, as we engaged with our students in the classroom on topics such as race, privilege, and inequality, we observed that although their responses cannot always be regarded as accurate, fair, and considerate of the feelings of others, their drawing on their experiences through discussions in the light of appropriate theory does disrupt the traditional and detached classroom space. In the process, active and critical engagement leads to their being active participants in the class. Yet it is also true that not every student is open to participating in class discussions on sensitive topics. For example, Peter,[1]one of the first author's students responded, 'Sir, I am not interested in such topics, it is just too traumatic, and I do not feel like arguing'. But in postgraduate courses such as PGCE, one should expect students to engage critically with such issues.

Many scholars involved in teacher education programmes share similar sentiments and have reported on the difficulty they face in raising issues of race and racism with their pre-service teachers because of 'the general discomfort with the topic of difference' (McKinney 2005: 376). Allen and Rossatto (2009) and le Roux (2014) confirm this experience. Given the complexity of the issues with which students are confronted daily, we feel that it is important to deal with these topics in teacher education programmes in the light of their future role as knowledge workers in schools and because it is

[1] All names are pseudonymous.

important to understand the ways in which power and privilege manifest in schools. For example, Murris (2016) reports how Chumani Maxwele, a student at the University of Cape Town, could not contain his emotions given that he had to face the statue of colonist Cecil John Rhodes every day. Consequently, he smeared the face of the statue with human waste collected from Khayelitsha. We believe that students should be allowed to tell their stories, reflect on events taking place around them, and reveal their views through interactive dialogue (Waghid 2010) to sensitise them to these realities and, in this way, encourage them to develop the critical stance that makes questioning structural oppression and racism desirable. In this way, they can become socially aware teachers who are able to disrupt, in the classroom, the role of social reproduction that schooling plays in society. Thus, to adequately prepare teachers for how to deal with such topical issues as race and racism and inequality and privilege, discursive pedagogies are required that will allow them to deliberate as participating actors to discover for themselves, through research and reflection, the concrete and context-sensitive nature of problems and conflicts in society. Accordingly, a pedagogy can be created that has students learn to articulate their standpoint through argumentation and take into account the perspectives of others so as to understand their standpoints and then deliberate on their arguments (Iwanyuanwu & Ogunniyi 2020). The form of pedagogy needed in South African classrooms is what Zembylas and McGlyn (2012) call a pedagogy of discomfort. Such a pedagogy takes as its starting point that if we are to create the space for courageous conversations, no topic should be regarded as taboo. Since many of the legacies of apartheid education such as rote learning, conformity, and passivity still hold sway in the university (Koopman 2018; Waghid 2010) and because the classroom is similarly dominated by authoritarian pedagogies that do not allow the lived realities of the student to be given voice, this pedagogy has not been used effectively in it.

3 What is a Critical Pedagogy of Discomfort?

According to Bozalek *et al.* (2014), a critical pedagogy is a useful strategy for understanding teaching and learning about difference. Bozalek *et al.* (2014: 42) write, 'This pedagogy invites students to critique their deeply held assumptions, and to destabilise their views of themselves and their worlds'. These authors remind us that this process of learning can be painful and traumatic, but in being directed to the future, it gives participants an opportunity to revise

previously held views and arrive at new understandings. All members of the group are equally impacted by this discomfort whether they belong to the dominant or to marginalised groups. Leonardo and Porter (2010) support this view and observe that students have to work through the discomfort associated with the dialogue around difference, rather than avoiding it.

According to Biesta (2013), education involves risk and is not always secure, predictable, and risk-free. By giving students a voice and allowing them to articulate their own personal narratives we concur with him that education should not be risk-free and that we, as academics, should push the boundaries and make education in South Africa riskier by challenging our students in the classroom. Over the years as teachers we have attended many conferences and colloquia on decolonising the university landscape during which the argument has centred on the fact that our curricula and pedagogical practices are too evasive about issues of race and racism despite the tenacity of racism in South Africa as well as on the inertia among institutions about decolonising their curricula. Biesta (2013) argues against teachers who see their role as making the learning process as smooth and enjoyable as possible, and who will not ask difficult questions and confront inconvenient truths or introduce complex knowledge in the hope that students will leave as satisfied customers. Allen and Rossato (2009: 175) concur and acknowledge their scepticism and doubt 'that mere 'safe' discourse can be useful in achieving the radical transformation of the oppressor's consciousness'. Such an emphasis coheres well with our ideas that students should be challenged and confronted with critical discursive pedagogies. Carolissen (2011) argues along similar lines in that she also advocates for a pedagogy of discomfort with reference to the work of Zembylas and McGlyn (2012). Students should not be regarded simply as consumers of knowledge, but as active participants whose epistemic needs should be met as fully as possible in the learning spaces. Therefore, they should be encouraged to cultivate a critical disposition in discourse and to welcome knowledge that unsettles them (Biesta 2013).

To achieve this, Biesta (2010) identifies three domains within which educational purposes can be articulated. The first is the domain of qualifications, which has to do with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions. The second is the domain of socialisation in which students are inducted into existing traditions and ways of doing and being. The third domain is subjectification, which has to do with the interest of education in the subjectivity, or what we think of as the subjectness, of those whom we

educate. Biesta (2013) argues that subjectification has to do with emancipation and freedom, and with the responsibility that comes with such freedom. It is crucial, in our view, that we instil such a perspective in pre-service teachers who will eventually become teachers in the unequal schooling system of South Africa. Although all three domains are broadly relevant to this article, the third one, subjectification, is our central focus. We concur with Biesta's (2013) assertion that there is a weak relationship between so-called educational inputs and outcomes. He argues that teaching to match this model is slow, difficult, and frustrating, and the outcome of this process can be neither guaranteed nor secured. This view is consistent with our understanding that not all students will leave with the same understandings or will be willing to take on board some of the ideas that emerge in class through discussion and dialogue. Nothing is certain and guaranteed and everything is always characterised by risk simply because education is always an encounter between human beings. Biesta (2013: 55) continues in the same vein: 'To receive the gift of teaching, to welcome the unwelcome, to give a place to inconvenient truths and difficult knowledge, is precisely the moment where we give authority to the teaching we receive'.

4 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach in which a purposive sample of PGCE students and one lecturer (the first author) who taught a course on Education Theory in a PGCE programme at a university in South Africa were studied over three months. This module is a component of the broader subject Educational Theory for which students register. The racial demography of the class that consisted of 71 students was diverse, but the majority were white. To push the boundaries of the students' understanding of issues of race, privilege, and equality, the lecturer/researcher adopted a critical pedagogy of discomfort to invite student responses. During the classes, he adopted the position of a participant observer. During such participant observation, as Crossman (2018) notes, the researcher becomes a subjective participant and an objective observer. By doing so the first author developed a good understanding of, and a familiarity with, the students' values and beliefs about race, racism, privilege, and inequality.

The main source of data were ethnographic fieldnotes that were written immediately or, at times, shortly after each class. These fieldnotes recorded the

students' responses and the classroom interactions between students and lecturer based on fictitious scenarios such as newspaper articles about real-life experiences that underscored race, racism, privilege, and/or inequality. We used the interaction of students with the lecturer as well as the students' responses after every class to ascertain the effect of a critical pedagogy of discomfort as a teaching strategy. We then used their responses in our theorising on an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort as a decolonising teaching strategy.

5 A First-person Descriptive Narrative of the First Author's Experiences

In one of the classes I used a fictional story to illuminate the appointment of black people to positions of employment in South Africa. More specifically, the scenario I used was an advertisement for a post in which the appointment criteria clearly emphasised that this position was reserved for a Black female candidate. One of the most striking responses came from John who said, 'Apartheid was abolished a long time ago, and we are all equal now. Why should black people be favoured over us? My parents are not rich but have worked hard to get where they are today'. Melinda, in support of John's views, commented, 'I am not a racist, but affirmative action discriminates against us as white students'. The responses of these students evoked a range of emotions in me ranging from irritability to frustration. It was clear that they were unaware of the implications of the continuation of their white privilege accrued historically through a system that procured advantages and entitlements for whites on the basis of their racial profile. They do not see that those who were discriminated against in the past and who suffered economically and otherwise should necessarily be at the centre of policies that advance them. Peter, a conservative Afrikaans-speaking male, who had resisted some of my course work readings as well as the particular pedagogical approach adopted in class at the beginning of the course, countered the views of the other two students by arguing that affirmative action could be justified in the light of a political system that discriminated against black people in the past based purely on their race. This statement caught me by surprise since Peter had opposed almost all the points I raised at the beginning of the course. At one point, for example, when I brought to class a news clip of a racist incident that was reported in the local newspaper that took place in a school in another province, he questioned

the authenticity of the article and only reluctantly accepted it when Josie, another white student, convinced him that she came from the town where this happened so knew that it had taken place.

Most of the time the majority of the white students were more cautious and ambivalent, and it was difficult to pin down during the discussions their positionality in relation to being privileged.

Throughout the course, most of the white students in class often felt very uncomfortable with some of the topics that dealt with race and privilege but were often more willing to participate in discussions that dealt with class issues. They did not see the need for the past to be revisited since they felt that they had nothing to do with that past. There are salient warnings in the literature (Adorno 1998; Bonam *et al.* 2018) against such an attitude since the past cannot be avoided, especially in a country that has been severely fractured by racial fault lines that go back for more than 300 years. Adorno (1998) reminds us of the painful truth that a people without memory has no future. As we grapple with the future, as is presently the case in South Africa with demands from students for decolonisation and an African-purposed curriculum, it is essential that we interrogate the past lest we repeat the same mistakes in the future. As teacher educators in South Africa, it would be folly to avoid topics that create discomfort among primarily white students. It can also be argued that an approach involving a pedagogy of discomfort is desirable in the quest to humanise education in South Africa. This is entirely congruent with the ideas of Biesta (2013) as outlined above. Zembylas (2005) also reminds us that we cannot learn profoundly in meaningful ways without engaging in such a pedagogy.

6 Discussion

The responses of the students presented above suggest that there is a tension between their ontological and epistemological dispositions. Ontology and epistemology, from a realist perspective, exist as independent realities. In other words, an epistemological standpoint from this perspective views knowledge as something outside of the self and holds that there exists a reality or world that is different from one's personal views about reality. Four of the five students' responses come from a place within—their inner landscape of experiences—and this therefore forges their ontology around their inner personal views and perceptions. Since social justice requires an interrogation

of different social realities and social structures, one of the aims of this pedagogical approach is to gauge the meaning and understanding of the ways in which students connect everyday realities of race, racism, privilege, and sporadic inequality with their personal views and experiences concerning the realities that surround them. When students share their views with their peers who belong to different races, backgrounds, classes and so forth, they learn to see ontology from a realist perspective, and, in the process, they might develop new understandings of how their world might be different from that of others. This is what we hope for. The focus of this pedagogical approach is not on how these students learn the coursework material, but on synchronising the very essence of a pedagogical experience with the existential nature of the experience. This pedagogical approach, according to Biesta (2013), is not always easy and is not without risks, because it involves active engagement and sharing of differing, even conflicting, views. Some of these views challenge the absolutisation and essentialisation of knowledge and the ways in which people perceive the world through firmly held beliefs and unquestioned assertions about how people think the world functions. The first author's experiences illuminate interesting questions and dilemmas for lecturers in postcolonial societies who teach students who are resistant to topics that deal with a problematic past.

This case study clearly points to the fragility, sensitivity, and vulnerability of the students, 26 years into a democratic dispensation, in a South African classroom where racial attitudes have not softened. This is illustrated by the fact that many students silently withdrew their participation in the class; they did not actively participate when sensitive topics on race, racism, privilege, and inequality were discussed. This is further substantiated by the remarks mentioned above. The findings also demonstrate that such attitudes can change; we saw this in Peter's response. He commenced this course with very rigid views about race and privilege, but these changed towards the end of it. Although the majority of his classmates did not share his views, this did not deter him and here we see evidence of authentic change (or what we would call deep change) from his earlier firmly held views on racist injustice.

The first author reported that a critical pedagogy at times made him feel exasperated at the end of his classes with this group of students and at times he questioned whether a progressive teaching approach could ever be successful. It remains our view, though, that it could become a valuable

strategy in the racialised society that is South Africa. This is because the breaking down of social structures and people's knowledge of the society requires a shift from theoretical and logical constructs of knowledge to lived-through ones, no matter how uncomfortable. According to Maton and Moore (2010), injustice is real ontology that is concrete and can be empirically demonstrated and should not be viewed only as a social construction developed within a practice through applied procedures. To tear down these misconstrued notions of reality means giving students a voice and fostering debate on issues even though they may be of a sensitive nature to some. The aim of a critical pedagogy is to unearth embodied knowledge with the aim of breaking down false beliefs and values that are deeply embedded in the minds of our students. This means providing them with what we think of as the knowledge tools to break down unjust and xenophobic practices built on racism, inequality, and privilege. It is against this background and the general resistance among white South African students to address the legacy of apartheid that it becomes obvious that university teaching in a postcolonial society is in need of more robust and provocative teaching approaches if we are to encourage curriculum transformation and decolonisation.

7 Towards an Embodied Critical Pedagogy of Discomfort as a Decolonising Teaching Strategy

Most of the time, many academics view their roles as experts in their respective fields and present their content as expert knowledge from the expert's pedestal in the classroom; this constrains the ways in which students as non-experts can engage with them. Such an approach stifles any possibility of critical engagement. More than three decades ago Maxine Green (1988) listed questions that are still relevant today if we want our students to become critical thinkers. She asked,

> What is left for us then in this positivist, media-dominated, and self-centred time? How, with so much acquiescence and so much thoughtlessness around us, are we to open people to the power of possibility? How, given the emphasis on preparing the young for a society of high technology, are we to move them to perceive alternatives, to look at things as if they could be otherwise? And why? And to what ends? (Green 1988: 55)

In the light of Green's questions, we can say that in South Africa, mainly in the context of global capitalism, many people have become so self-centred, greedy, and self-righteous as to become disdainful of the merits of caring for the wellbeing of others in their communities or of any possible commitment to just social action. Our findings have shown that a critical pedagogy of discomfort might not be enough to bring about changes in the ways that students think about South Africa and the world. Therefore, we argue for a shift towards a more embodied critical pedagogy as a decolonising teaching strategy.

Why an Embodied Approach?

Every individual finds himself immersed in this world. As part of our existence, in terms of existentialist philosophy, we adopt a lifeworld in all its suffering and absurdity, and within it, common themes define our existence such as freedom, action, rebellion, and pain, to name a few. At the centre of all this is the individual thrust into this world where she or he must learn to cope and create meaning (Heidegger 1927/ 1967). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962/ 2005), we embody the scars of our experience through our active engagement with this world. Some of these scars were evident in the responses of some of the students. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, it is fair to argue that the truths the students hold are subjective and, because they held such strong beliefs, we cannot separate what they believe from who they are. Furthermore, these truths the students hold about issues of race, racism, privilege, and inequality can be viewed as the intersubjectivity of the communities from which they come. If the truth lies in the heart of the individual, this takes us to the notion of embodiment. Therefore, we feel that if we want to get to the truth of individuals' lived realities, we must adopt an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort. This is because from a Heideggerian perspective humans should be viewed as conscious, suffering beings who learn to cope during difficulty.

To give an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort a decolonising function we move beyond disciplinary knowledge to develop new knowledge agendas by deploying the body as a source of knowledge. By doing so (drawing on body knowledge), knowledge gains impetus from a localised context that is different from specialised, pure textbook laden knowledge. This is because the

knowledge evolves from deep emotional scars and trauma, grief, mourning, and a sense of loss. We have to recognise that the intellectual agenda is not fixed in a particular discipline like psychology, medicine, law, and so forth but is situated in a social, context-laden process that is centred on the human body. Far from being radical, when dealt with in a dignified and caring way, this creates more in-depth epistemological dialogue. Although such a pedagogy can articulate the fears, concerns, challenges, successes, emotions, and so forth, it shifts the focus to the tactile nature of the body as an experiencing individual with a unique humanity, developed from listening, seeing, and feeling in the African context that is very different from that experienced on North American and European soil yet, ironically, it is these works that we often use in our classrooms. Simply put, the living subject and his or her engagement with things in the world through his or her capacity to listen, see, and feel with others should be the central focus of the pedagogical discourse.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment invites conversations and discussions about the body's passions such as love, hate, excitement, enthusiasm, anger, rage, agitation, fear, joy, powerlessness, and desire, among many others. The experiencing *tactile body and the passionate body* in an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort allows the teacher and student to see, hear, and feel together so as to register one another's pain and suffering; through this they (teacher and student) can construct new meaning through understanding the otherness of each other. Such data or knowledge serves as a basis to deconstruct firmly held views and assumptions about the world and those with whom they live and becomes a powerful form of teaching for social justice. Evidence of this can be seen from the example of Peter who changed his beliefs and attitudes during the course. Since the focus of embodiment is on subjective truths and perceptions, students might learn to develop their own understanding of what they think to be the key issues of social justice and how they should be addressed. However, instead of suppressing the multiplicities of epistemologies, an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort recognises the knowledge and personal views that students bring into the classroom. This is because embodiment does not seek active engagement of knowledge outside the self but shifts the focus to grapple with the inner landscape. This is the kind of approach needed to connect epistemologies with a well-planned and carefully facilitated pedagogy to create vibrant learning spaces for our students.

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Sylvan Blignaut
Professor
Department of Postgraduate Studies
Nelson Mandela University
Port Elizabeth
sylvan.blignaut@mandela.ac.za

Oscar Koopman
Senior Lecturer
SP-FET Department, Faculty of Education
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Cape Town
koopmano@cput.ac.za

(Re)thinking Lived Curriculum as Complicated Conversation through Nomadic Thought in Pursuit of Curriculum Transformation

Shan Simmonds
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5005-9906

Abstract

The discontent regarding the dismantling and critiquing of the dominant inscriptions of curriculum by South Africa's higher education institutions continues to be experienced. Over twenty years into its democracy, curriculum transformation is yet to be realized and one reason for this is the proliferation of policy frameworks that have, for the most part, reinforced techno-bureaucratic compliance with structural change and framed myopic conceptions of curriculum. In an attempt to engender a curriculum discourse that shifts the focus from policy to the centrality of the subject, in this article I engage with subjectivity and the lived curriculum in what Ted Aoki thinks of as a constructive tensionality. This tensionality lies in the transcendental conception of the subject that very often succumbs to imperatives of myopic elements of such curriculum discourse. From the main findings of a research study that drew on the lived experience of students who invested in complicated conversations, their aspirations for curriculum transformation became evident. This initiated a much needed (re)thinking of lived curriculum as complicated conversation and what this could entail in a posthuman era. The desire for complicated conversations to enable curriculum transformation requires a shift in hegemonic conceptions of the subject and of knowledge. I embrace these possibilities through nomadic thought.

Keywords: lived curriculum; complicated conversation; nomadic thought; curriculum transformation, posthumanism

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1 Higher Education and Curriculum Transformation

For many years, curriculum was most vividly discoursed within schooling and less so in higher education (Barnett & Coate 2005; Le Grange 2006). Besides the standardization of school curriculum, its socio-political agendas also attest to the need for continual curriculum reform and debate in this sector. Although higher education is equally politicised, dismantling and challenging curriculum featured less here. Le Grange (2019a) refers to the neglect of matters curricular in higher education as a result of pressures exerted by the state both nationally and internationally in prioritising massification, neoliberalism, globalisation, and internationalisation.

The neglect of matters curricular was also driven largely by a proliferation of policies spanning most of the first two decades post-1994. These policies were geared predominantly towards structural and ideological transformation of higher education (Du Preez *et al.* 2016; Soudien 2010a). Lange (2017) describes higher education reform in the first decade after 1994 as having been dominated by policy development and implementation closely in line with the 1997 White Paper's structural objectives (Department of Education 1997). The focus was on addressing and reconciling inequalities in governance, funding, and quality assurance through heightened policy measures that strived for redress, equity, efficiency, access, and success. Preoccupied with structural institutional compliance, the discourse started to change in the second decade (around 2008) through the appearance of a dominant ideological policy discourse. Sparked by South Africa's still divided racist and sexist society (Soudien 2010a), a historic event at the University of the Free State (Reitz-saga) in 2007 led to one of the tipping points for the necessary but long-overdue engagements with broader conceptions of transformation that encompassed the cultural and social university environment (see Soudien 2010b) for detailed explanations of what this event entailed). A subsequent report of the Ministerial Committee into Transformation in Higher Education (MCTHE) (Department of Education 2008) lay the ground for epistemological change, inclusivity, and diversity in all its facets (Du Preez *et al.* 2016). Lange (2017:33) sums up well these two decades of higher education in light of curriculum transformation. The structural transformation period of the first decade 'was more interested in the exoskeleton of the curriculum, that is, the structure and purpose of qualifications as presented in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)'.

As a result, policy choices succumbed to national economic and development goals and 'did not create the space for any investigation of knowledge and pedagogy in the curriculum' (Lange 2017: 34). While the policy discourse of the second decade explicitly raised the importance of curriculum transformation,[1] 'no serious engagement at intuitional level with knowledge as epistemology, with knowledge with different frames of understanding, and with knowledge as creator of identity' were embraced (Lange 2017: 34).

In 2016, the Council on Higher Education publicised a report wherein higher education was reviewed two decades after the establishment of democracy. The task team on teaching and learning further expressed these somber realities when they highlighted that although strides had been made in the 'structural domains' of higher education curriculum through policy related improvements, 'it has made very little progress in the arguably more important 'cultural domain' of ideas and theories' (Council on Higher Education 2016: 171). This came at the cost of cultivating moral persons and infringed on the optimal possibilities for curriculum to be a deliberative encounter, one of openness, mutual respect and critical engagement with different epistemologies and subjectivities. This reinforces the complexities of curriculum transformation and the need to reject reductionist, essentialist, and one-dimensional conceptions thereof.

For Lange (2017), a more nuanced outlook on curriculum is needed. She presents her arguments within the #Fallism movements occupying higher education institutions since October 2015. She opines that students' outcries for curriculum transformation are heavily, but not only, entrenched within the need to challenge Western, phallocentric, dominant content in the curriculum. Alongside this disciplinary knowledge, institutional knowledge cannot be ignored. Institutional knowledge is tattooed into the social fabric of the university since it underpins tactic assumptions about knowledge, its practices, and lived experiences. As a social epistemological moment in the wider student movement, curriculum transformation cannot be simplified; it must involve institutional culture since it affects its terms of purpose and content directly and raises questions about academic authority, the meaning of democracy, and equity. Contrary to what was possible in the first two decades post-1994, Lange

[1] The MCTHE report (South Africa, 2008) is a prominent example since it bluntly exposes the fossilised institutional cultures and unchanged curriculum as being direct obstacles to the transformation of higher education.

proffers that this level of curriculum transformation cannot be realized through any form of policy framework, old or new. The university needs to step up to the plate if it wants to confront and address the deep-seated curriculum questions inhibiting transformation. This does not imply that the responsibly lies only with top management; there is urgency at the grassroots level for academics and students. Lange cautions that this should be engendered as a process since it entails bold self-examination, the dismantling of power, and the stimulation of dialogue and debate among all role players. This will be the ultimate test for South Africa's universities that have chosen to remain myopic in terms of curriculum transformation since 1994.

Given its centrality, the higher education curriculum remains the cornerstone of efforts to (re)think transformation. However, such transformation would be possible only through an expanded notion of curriculum. Le Grange (2019a: 41f) suggests that this requires curriculum to be more than its planned activities and policy frameworks in that it needs to give 'legitimacy to students' lived experiences and to experiment with new ways of doing that to open pathways for students to become, instead of colonizing students' desires and potential to create newness in the world, through privileging a predetermined curriculum'. This creates, in part, what Aoki (1993: 257) alludes to as a 'tensionality', the constructive/ destructive contentions that can emerge through the in-dwelling of curricula as prescribed and as lived. I begin this article by attempting to engage in the constructive tensionalities of subjectivity and curriculum as lived. I explore the subject as ecological for its immanent potential. Thereafter, I give legitimacy to particular students' experiences of, and aspirations about curriculum transformation through their explicit non-participation in the student protests that have marked the landscape since 2015. Their experiences of the curriculum, although specifically surfaced by the ongoing student protest that began in 2015, indicate how students view curriculum transformation and the forces influencing this. One of their key aspirations is for curriculum transformation to be fostered through complicated conversation rather than protest. We need to contemplate what such complicated conversations might entail for a lived curriculum in the world of the posthuman condition in which hegemonic, unitary, and predetermined subjectivities can be challenged. I conclude this article by considering what such complicated conversations might entail if they are to open up alternative pathways to pursue curriculum transformation so that the curriculum as lived is an act of creation rather than of reproduction.

2 Subjectivity and the Lived Curriculum: A Constructive Tensionality

Being mindful of students' experiences resonates in the language of a lived curriculum which offers 'the more poetic, phenomenological and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and languages people speak and live' (Aoki 1993: 261). It challenges a curriculum topography fundamentally informed by 'the lure of Western epistemology' that dictates 'our beliefs about knowing and knowledge, [and] which has given our universities and schools a striated curricular landscape' (Aoki 1993: 256). We have become so deeply infected by Western curricular landscapes that our preoccupation with structure and compliance has meant that we have failed to engage with the much-needed questioning of curriculum. Curriculum, 'in spite of its inherent indefiniteness, has become definitive, so much so that we speak with ease of *the* curriculum'. Privileging a single curriculum, in its arboreal sense, echoes the 'chiseled motif of the striated linear instrumentalism deeply inscribed into our [curriculum] landscape' (Aoki 1993: 259). For Aoki this evokes the 'crisis of modernity in the Western world, a questioning of the way of life we have constituted as modernism'. We need to 'reunderstand our curricular landscape' by 'disturbing the landscape' that holds faith in critical reason to apprehend and transform society (Aoki 1993: 257). To disturb or trouble emphasises the urgency of challenging deeply inscribed conceptions of curriculum such as the traditional curriculum studies discourses that deny subjectivity. Through the reconceptualization of curriculum studies, curriculum resonates as *currere* (Pinar 1975). This includes the politics of presence, space/place, and the ethical dealing with alterity or, in other words, otherness or the state of being other or different. *Currere* provides an autobiographical method for studying the self so that both individuals and groups can understand teaching as passionate participation in the complicated conversation that is the curriculum. Pinar's (2012) curriculum theory emphasises the significance of subjectivity to education.

The curricular challenge is thus simultaneously subjective and social as it 'seeks to understand the contribution academic studies make to one's understanding of one's life (and vice versa), and how both are imbricated in society, politics and culture' (Pinar 2012: 45). The curriculum requires 'subjectivity in order for it to speak, for it to become concrete, to become actual. Without the agency of subjectivity education evaporates, replaced by

the conformity compelled by scripted curricula' (Pinar 2012: 43). This agency, Pinar argues here, is dependent on the cultivation of subjectivity as situated and historically attuned.

For Braidotti (2011: 18) subjectivity involves 'a socially mediated process of entitlements to and negotiations with power'. Central to her conception of nomadic subjectivity is a dissatisfaction with our advanced capitalist world with its dominating phallocentric schemes of thought that create 'hegemonic, fixed, unitary and exclusionary views of subjectivity' (Braidotti 2011: 58). Instead a non-phallocentric way of thinking, informed by feminist theory, attracts her since it stresses the limitations of logocentric approaches and shifts the emphasis to other ways and modes of representation both human and non-human. The desire is to leave behind linear modes of thinking ordained in teleological argumentation and to 'start cultivating the art of disloyalty, or rather, ... the healthy disrespect' that is needed to imagine affirmative representations of an embodied subject (Braidotti 2011: 24). Nomadism is about critical relocation, about becoming situated through embodied and embedded materialism so as to transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world. Within this notion is a heightened desire for becoming-other, the affirmative activity that is relational, ethical, and situated. This requires identifying lines of flight for 'creative alternative spaces of becoming' from *within* (Braidotti 2011: 7). Continuous becomings from *within* accentuate subjectivity as multifunctional and complex, 'as a transformer of flows of energies, effects, desires and imaginings' so that it does not get subsumed in dichotomous renderings of Cartesian dualities (Braidotti 2011: 17).

In light of what this could mean for curriculum as *currere*, Le Grange (2019b) emphasises that conceptions of *currere* such as those of Aoki (1993) and Pinar (2012), reinscribe a transcendental view of the subject invested in strong phenomenological foundations. The subject is prized as an a priori image of a pedagogical life that privileges the individual (and their reflection of self and other) in such a way that it gives fixity and closeness to curriculum thinking. Wallin (2010) reimagines *currere* from its first intended meaning ('the course to run') as Pinar (1975) reminds us, to contemplate instead what *currere* wills to power so as to unlock what it does or might do. Wallin's focus is on 'root[ing] out a legacy of transcendent thinking in curriculum studies that continues to reduce potentials for thinking new forms of subjective and social organisation ... [and that gives] rise to the proliferation of institutional nihilism,

cynicism, and conservatism' (Wallin 2010: x). This has led to the reactive conceptual force of Western university education in the twentieth century where 'one way of doing has become *the* way of doing', and this has further led to,

> instrumentalist approaches to teaching whereby outcomes or aims are predetermined and often derived from existing disciplines. Students are tracked by standardized tests and kept on track by subject disciplines. The territorialization of *currere's* active force has led to the ossification of potential movements, thwarting of experimentation, freezing of living and domestication of self (Le Grange 2019b: 215).

An active conceptual force of *currere* is more invigorating since it allows for the liberation of the subject 'who is no longer cathected to pre-existent identity structures' (Wallin 2010: x) and to the creation of 'new types of decentered subjects and social organisations [so that] curriculum is approached as an act of creation rather than reproduction' (p. xii). For Le Grange (2019b: 221) this enables multiple coursings for the becoming of a pedagogical life, with immanent potential, so that subjectivity is not individual but ecological, a 'humble "I"' that is 'embedded, embodied, extended and enacted'. The concept of *ubuntu-currere*, coined by Le Grange (2019b), encompasses these ideas. Driven by the possibilities invested in an active conceptual force of *currere* (as the positive power of *potentia* that connects, expresses desire and sustains life), *ubuntu-curerre* 'shifts our registers of reference away from the individual human being to an assemblage of human-human-nature [so that] subjectivity is ecological' (Le Grange 2019b: 222). What this means is that it is not only the oneness of self with other humans, but also the 'oneness of self and the cosmos [that] provides the impetus for becomings that are caring towards other humans and the more-than-human world' so that education fosters co-operation and not competition (p. 222). This image of education embraces the desire to live, to connect, and to care for other humans and the more-than-human-world by opening up multiple coursings for the becoming of a pedagogical life. The subject is then always in-becoming and driven by an affirmative ethic that 'actively strives to create collectively empowering alternatives [as] transformative and inspirational ... [and by] an active commitment to the social horizons of hope' (Braidotti 2011: 14).

Contemplating the musings of subjectivity creates the necessary constructive tensionalities needed for opening up alternative pathways for (re)thinking curriculum as lived. This is especially necessary given the complex challenges we face in our world, one that involves, and revolves around, the self, social relations, technological advancements, and the environment. The curriculum as lived, informed by nomadic subjectivity and *ubuntu-currere*, challenges us to think differently about the human gaze etched in what is the living, to live and the lived in what we know as the curriculum. A subject fully immersed in processes of becoming, offers an active conceptual force of *currere* (Le Grange 2019b) so that 'power, knowledge and desire [are] a positive vision of the subject as affective, productive and dynamic' (Braidotti 2011: 17). As a subject of becomings, the lived curriculum decenters '[m]an, the former measure of all things' so that it can proffer a 'nature-culture continuum' (Braidotti 2013: 2). However, such a continuum is not possible when education informed by humanism is driven by *potestas (currere*'s reactive conceptual force) since it could centralise control, colonise desire, and predetermine 'the course to run through predefined aims, objectives or outcomes ... [thus] territorializing *currure*'s active force into a reactive force' (Le Grange, 2019b: 221). For Braidotti (2013) *potestas* resonates within the binary opposition between the given and the constructed as perpetuated by social constructivist approaches that have too long enjoyed widespread consensus. The danger is that 'social constructivist methods sustain the efforts to de-naturalize social difference and thus show their man-made and historically contingent structure' (Braidotti 2013: 3). Her posthuman subjectivity must be premised, rather, on the vital, self-organising and yet non-naturalistic force of living matter itself, through a non-dualistic understating of nature-culture interaction. In our ever-changing landscape of scientific and technological advances, the boundaries between the natural and the cultural need to be 'displaced and to a large extent blurred' (Braidotti 2013: 3).

The principle of non-linearity can help us to imagine subject formations as they might evolve in a nature-culture continuum. The in-between or within (as promoted by a continuum) cannot be linear and process oriented. Instead, it 'strikes a new deal in actualizing the practice of *conceptual personae* or figuration as the active pursuit of affirmative alternatives to the dominant vision of the subject' (Braidotti 2013: 164). A lived curriculum that is non-linear accounts for the complexity of our contemporary world; it recognises that 'the heteroglossia of data we are confronted with demands complex

topologies of knowledge for a subject structured by multi-directional rationality' (Braidotti 2013: 164–165). In a continuum, time needs to be embraced as *Aion* (the dynamic and more cyclical time of becoming that is curiosity-driven) and not *Chronos* (dominant time that is protocol-bound) (Braidotti 2013: 165). The principle of non-linearity thus enables us to unlock *Aion* as different temporality and a creation of new things through curiosity so as to critique the powers that dominant linear concepts hold for the subject. Here the subject as embodied, embedded, and embrained can affectively open out towards geo-philosophical and planetary dimensions through 'the threshold of gratuitous (principle of non-profit), aimless (principle of mobility or flow) acts which express the vital energy of transformative becoming (principle of non-linearity)' (Braidotti 2013: 166–167).

Subjectivity needs to be attuned to the posthuman condition, needs to embrace a nature-culture continuum of non-linearity, and needs to be embodied, embedded, and embrained. When curriculum as lived takes accountability for these constructive tentionalities as an affirmative ethics based on collaborate morality, alternative pathways in pursuit of curriculum transformation can emerge.

I go on, in this article, to give legitimacy to students' lived experience in an attempt to understand how they experience the curriculum and the underlying agendas that they regard as influential for curriculum transformation. The intention is not to attribute their experiences as *the* (humanistic) way of understanding *the* (linear) curriculum, but, rather, as *a* perspective depicting curriculum transformation. Taking heed of these lived experiences as a departure point means recognising *a* view of the agendas (the students') and implicating curriculum transformation in the consideration of alternative pathways for lived curriculum as complicated conversation.

3 Research Process

I elicited the experiences of students enrolled in a postgraduate curriculum studies programme at my institution between 2015 and 2019. Students were invited to voluntarily participate in a once-off interview during which they could share their experiences and opinions of the student movements that occupied higher education in the name of transformation. Since they are Bed. Hons students specialising in curriculum studies, their voice was deemed significant since it depicted their current lived experiences, expressed their

hopes in this historical movement, and disclosed what they thought about curriculum transformation. A total of 14 students participated. This number of participants represents the size of this programme where enrollments of between two and ten are common. In fact, from 2015 to 2017 there were only, on average, three students per annum with curriculum studies as their major and this increased only slightly in 2018 and 2019. The participants were diverse in relation to gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background and there were both full-time and part-time students. The five full-time students were continuing their studies and came directly from B.Ed. or PGCE programmes. Of the nine part-time students, three were teaching at high schools and the other six at primary schools. The schools were situated in urban and rural areas in the provinces of Gauteng and North West. Their subject areas included Setwsana Home Language, English First Additional Language, Social Sciences, Life Orientation, Economic Management Sciences, Mathematics, Natural Science, Technology, and overall Foundation Phase subjects (numeracy, literacy and life skills). Each participant chose a pseudonym to be used when their responses were documented to protect their identity.

In the interviews, students were asked to share their involvement or non-involvement in the student protests movements and to reflect critically on this. This included being explicit about how the protests unfolded, what roles they played, and what they regarded as key agendas influencing curriculum transformation in higher education. These topics speak to the curriculum as lived (Aoki 1993; Pinar 2012) since their exposition relies heavily on the experiences of students whose social fiber is intricately interwoven into all aspects of the university (Lange 2017) and not just on the experiences of students seen as the clients of the neoliberal university that produces graduates for an economic workforce. Of course, what students experience matters and must be seen to be central to agendas that influence curriculum transformation in higher education.

4 Legitimizing Students' Experiences

From the engagements with the student participants, it was clear that not one of them participated in the student protests. Of significance to this article are the reasons behind their non-involvement. They revealed explicit and implicit agendas that are inhibiting curriculum transformation and their experiences of these gave rise to their discontent with curriculum transformation in higher

education. They disclosed their thoughts on how students could be involved in curriculum transformation in the future or in future times of student uprising. Five themes capture what the student participants experienced as the underlying agendas influencing curriculum transformation. The first four themes, all of which disclose reasons for the lack of transformation, are: curriculum as a political act; curriculum as a social product; the reactive force of curriculum; and economic repercussions and curriculum transformation. The fifth theme, allegorical approaches for curriculum transformation disclose the aspirations of students to foster complicated conversations as an alternative to protest actions.

4.1 *Curriculum as a Political Act*

Three participants referred explicitly to the protests as a political act that is part of an agenda that inhibits curriculum transformation. For Lucia, South Africa's political climate is violent and hegemonically driven. She explained,

> I think the problem is with our government. The South African people are used to demanding things with violence because if they speak ... they're only heard through violence that's how this government is operating. My view with that is that is how the leadership of the country regain[s] the power, by creating this culture that in order for you to be heard as citizens, you vandalise, and you fight. Then they come back and solve the problem that they created.

This speaks to Lesedi's conjecture that the protests were an agenda of politicians 'to gain political power' because 'most people who were leading the protests were not registered students in tertiary institutions'. They were politicians. So, whether students protest or not, Othandwayo believes that 'the government does what is in their political power without hearing from the mass. So, they will do what they want to anyway'.

For these students, the protest movements were politicized. In having a political agenda, curriculum transformation could be regarded as an act of political symbolism and a means for government to legitimate itself (Jansen 2002). Cross *et al.* (2002: 186) argue that 'very often in educational reforms political concerns are made to prevail over educational and pedagogical concerns in order to mediate conflicting interests in the political domain'.

Curriculum transformation becomes a political statement that reflects students' struggles as the opposing group, or the oppressed (Chisholm 2005). This reinforces the belief that curriculum transformation is influenced directly by the political sphere and that the curriculum is political.

4.2 *Curriculum as a Social Product*

Lindie's and Elana's responses questioned the ability of the protest movements to unite students when they articulated the tendency for these movements to be exclusionary and discriminatory. Lindie longed for unity and the common cause. Instead, she experienced that students 'did not serve a common cause, and [the protests] appeared to draw more racial lines and barriers between black and white people'. For Elana, it becomes counter-productive if 'decolonialisation and transformation are being used to promote divisions in the country rather than counter [them]'. These student participants experienced the student protests in the name of curriculum transformation as creating a divide rather than uniting students. For Chisholm (2005) when curriculum is a social product curriculum will be a complex and turbulent process because it includes contestations between multiple social forces and actors and cannot be the product of any one such social group. Desires of social groups are negotiated on various levels. On the one hand, this could include taking into consideration the direct interests of social groups or, on the other hand, acknowledging instead how these interests come forth through other social forces or are even mediated by broader goals and visions of underpinning the curriculum (Chisholm 2005).

Furthermore, curriculum as a social product becomes further complicated from within and between the social forces it encounters and engenders. This could be because curriculum is so deeply inscribed in situated knowledges (Haraway 2006) and knowledge in the blood (Jansen 2009) that although students are advocating for curriculum transformation (perceived as a 'common cause'), this can never be uniform and uncomplicated because the student body itself is diverse and further complicated by actors such as the institutional curriculum. This resonates with Jansen's (2017: 162) conception of entangled knowledge which recognizes that our knowledge is 'intertwined in the course of daily living, learning and loving' so much so that 'we cannot escape our entangled lives, which are inevitably reflected in what we know and how we know it'.

4.3 *The Reactive Force of Curriculum*

The violent nature of the protests was raised by six of the student participants and this signaled concern for enabling curriculum transformation. For Lesedi, it is ingrained in South Africa's transformation struggles to use violence. She said, 'In South Africa it is believed that to solve a problem, you need to be violent and that's not the case'. Elana also recognized this trait and said that 'unfortunately these are mostly the methods used in the marches' so she refrained from participating in the protests because she is 'not particularly in favor of violence or vandalism'. The forms of violence used by students were described by Nix as 'reactive and destructive' because of the vandalism. She drew specifically on how protesters were 'destroying labs, burning buildings and throwing stones'.

For Charmaine and Lisa, the violent approaches were counterproductive. Lisa drew on the way in which 'classes were disturbed and violently stopped and [on how] this inhibited other students from continuing with their academics'. She regarded this as 'totally unacceptable'. She explained,

> Just because you have a problem with something, does not mean everyone must have a problem with it and stand together with you. This act is selfish, and unfair to me. Instead of giving students a chance at a better future, they took away other students' hope of a future. Burning and breaking down is not the only tactic to fight against something.

Charmaine's reasoning drew on how the use of violence portrays students negatively. She insisted,

> I mean really, you are destroying stuff that will need to be replaced with money that you are demanding. This is so counterproductive. In actual fact, defeating your own purpose, your own cause through your own acts .... I think it gave [others] such a bad view [of us] as students. It says that we are not critical thinkers or that we do not factor in all the things that would come into play for the certain demands we have, that we cannot give arguments for the statements we make, that we would rather be seen as if we were hooligans who would vandalise and be violent to get our point across. That we do not see value in our

> own voices .... The primary school children and high school children look at you in your tertiary state and that is how you answer to problems or that is how you react to problems. You are not a problem solver and you are supposed to be at the highest level of education, tertiary education.

By questioning these violent actions, Charmaine described the far-reaching implications of students' violent acts as portraying all students in a bad light and she highlighted the example that this could communicate to younger generations. Ava was also critical of violence and she warned that it could be counterproductive to the decolonial project and in turn become 'just another form of colonisation and oppression'. Although scholars such as Fanon (1967) and Žižek (2012) draw on the use of violence as central to protest and change, these student participants experienced the violence used by student protestors as reactive, destructive, and disruptive. It can de deduced that these students are perhaps wary and cautious of curriculum transformation that is invested in a negative force of power ('*potestas'*) (Le Grange 2019a: 40) that could, even if unintentionally, promote transformation that is hierarchical, transcendent, and colonising (violently demanding a way of knowing as *the* way). Instead, when curriculum change is invested in an active conceptual force it unlocks a productive and positive power (*potentia*) so that the cause of curriculum transformation is one that connects, affirms, and is joyous in bringing newness and the creation of things unforeseen. This notion of curriculum 'opens up multiple pathways for the becoming of pedagogical lives [with an] immanent potential to become other' (Le Grange 2019a: 40).

4.4 *Economic Repercussions and Curriculum Transformation*

Some students did not protest because of a heightened awareness of the economic repercussions this would incur and they regarded this as counterintuitive to achieving curriculum transformation. Lesedi reflected that 'South Africa was never ready for free tertiary education. It was not feasible looking at the current state of the country and the political fights in the country'. He went on to argue that students were destructive in the way they expressed their demands and this lead him to ask, 'If students burn buildings where education should take place, who will pay for the damages and also give you free education?' For Lisa, 'Free things are not valued' and that is why

education should not be free. Paballo shared a scenario; her institution used to issue learning materials but one of the outcomes of the student protests was her institution going paperless to cut costs. She shared that her losses were greater than her gains when she said,

> We could not have free study guides any more. Instead we had to download them and that also took data when you needed to access the information from home. Even if you came to campus to get them for free it took you money to get here ... it took us back because the students ... didn't think about the repercussions of no fees and what that would then mean for the operations of higher education and education.

Revelations drew on another scenario. He was concerned that if student demands were met, lecturers might also incur financial losses, and this could be detrimental for 'the quality of education'. He explained, 'Lecturers were obviously going to earn less than they were getting, then they would relocate to another country, then the South African education system was going to suffer'. For Nix, none of this adds up because she is of the opinion that many of the students protesting took no responsibility for their demands through their learning. She elaborated that among the protesting students were those who 'failed and then complained when they did not receive NSFAS but they didn't take charge of their learning. They were playing, smoking, doing whatever they wanted to do and then they demand to go to school for free'.

The larger picture is missing for Charmaine. She argued that students did not think about the financial implications of what they were asking for. She felt strongly that there are 'critical arguments that they are not bringing to their demands or that they are not using to support their demands' and these include 'being critical about whose needs must be sacrificed in order for your cause or your demand to be met'. This includes deeper deliberations with questions such as: 'Who must suffer for fees to fall? Where must the money come from?'

The experiences of these students provide nuanced perspectives of the various economic dimensions that came to the fore through the protest movements. On the surface a consequentialist view that focussed on the outcomes of actions, was expressed when student participants were inclined to weigh the likely social benefit against the costs incurred (see Cohen *et al.* 2011). But, given these experiences, a deeper discourse of discontent regarding physical

destruction and a lack of accountability were repeatedly offered as counterproductive to transformation. This could signify the territorialisation of a reactive force which counterintuitively thwarts the active, affirmative potential of curriculum transformation to create newness that is affective, productive, and dynamic (Braidotti 2011).

4.5 *Allegorical Approaches for Curriculum Transformation*

Student participants spoke about the importance for higher education to take curriculum transformation seriously. Of the participants, 11 were explicit about their hopes of employing approaches other than those they witnessed. The approaches proposed included signing petitions (Elana; Nix; Othandwayo), campaigns (Nix), forums that generate debate (Ava; Lisa; Lesedi; Piet), conducting research (Don Voli; Lisa; Othandwayo) and dialogue (Charmaine; Lindie).

For Nix, petitions and campaigns need to be so provocative that they become propaganda. She explained,

> We need to start actively advocating ... convincing people ... getting people on board ... making it our propaganda .... By not shouting. Speak, convince .... If you want to create awareness, be smart. Get charismatic students together, start informing by speaking to students of all cultural groups, speak to them in their language, and speak to them in ways that they can understand ... it's about actively advocating [by] building up and not breaking down.

For Charmaine and Lindie dialogue would prove to be a significant means for people to speak about the transformation they think is necessary. Dialogue through 'radio interviews and talking to each other' where people can really engage so that transformation discourses become 'a language and a topic amongst people' (Charmaine). This can happen, explains Charmaine, by setting a 'new precedent of how to approach problem solving and how to deal with problems. The culture of vandalizing must die out and we must begin to be critical thinkers who think about what we do and say'. Lindie added,

> we need to open our hearts more and be willing to participate in dialogue and conversation that will lead to the strengthening and

> enhancing of our knowledge ... it is a process that cannot be rushed because it might cause fear and panic ... as we continue to be confronted with racial and religious instances on a daily basis.

These responses stress the need for student voices in bottom-up approaches in curriculum conversations. Alongside these, Lesedi drew on the importance of 'involving different stakeholders to deal with this issue'. For Piet this requires the involvement of the Department of Higher Education and Training and, for Revelations, that of 'our leaders', while Lisa said we cannot strive for curriculum transformation alone, 'we need to change the mindset of our nation'.

The approaches students hope for are communicative and dialectical in nature. Pinar's (2015) conception of allegory proves insightful here as we try to make sense of these students' aspirations. In its allegorical form, curriculum as *currere* accentuates its etymological root, to 'speak publicly in an assembly' and suggests that speaking allegorically is not merely an exchange of information. Its autobiographical, pedagogical, and communicative character invites 'reactivating the past so as to render the present' (Pinar 2012: 50). For Pinar (2012: 47) this necessitates complicated conversations as a specific kind of 'communication'. He avers that curriculum is an ongoing effort at communication with both oneself and with others that portends the social reconstruction of the public sphere. In this way, engagement with the self and the world is self-mobilizing and reconstructive through an allegory-of-the-present, a present that is historically conceived of so that through past experience we can begin to seek the meaning of the present and navigate ways to the future. This is significant since it ensures that there is 'no longer a flat line between what is no more and can never be, the present becomes a palimpsest' so that complicated conversations bring to life 'temporally structured, subjectively animated curriculum' (Pinar 2012: 47).

Students expressed their experiences of curriculum transformation in higher education through the events of the protest movements. These revealed the many agendas that they think underpin curriculum and that can influence its transformation. The themes (or agendas) present an analysis of students' experiences that should be read as interrelated and intersecting in their entanglement and that reveal the complex multilayered nature of curriculum transformation. What is aspired for in the wake of these experiences is the desire for allegorical approaches to curriculum transformation through lived curriculum as complicated conversation.

In the next section I contemplate Pinar's (2012) notion of complicated conversation through the conception of lived curriculum that embraces subjectivity as attuned to the posthuman condition, in harmony with the nature-culture continuum as non-linearity and embodied, embedded, and embrained in nomadic thought. Within the constructive tentionality of subjectivity and lived curriculum, curriculum as complicated conversations can be contemplated through nomadic thought.

5 Lived Curriculum as a Complicated Conversation through Nomadic Thought

Pinar's (2012: 44) *currere* as a verb infers an action, process, and experience aimed '[at studying] the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction'. Advocating for a lived curriculum that is 'subjectively situated, socially engaged and historically attuned' (Pinar 2012: 48). Importantly, he offers *currere* as a means to 'reconceptualise curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation' (Pinar 2012: 47). *Currere*, as a lived curriculum, is an ethical, political, always intellectual undertaking through complicated conversation in the name of educational experience. Its conversations are complicated by its multi-referenced interlocutors of self, other, and spatio-temporality and its ongoing nature, with no end to conversations and no anterior aims or objectives. As an autobiographical method through four moments (regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical) (Pinar *et al.* 1995) it is not narcissistic. Rather 'it is conversation with oneself ... and with others threaded through academic knowledge, an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilised for engagement in the world' (Pinar 2012: 47). As an ongoing conversation, its complicatedness should not be rendered 'a pedagogical problem but an educational opportunity' (Pinar 2015: 111). As an erudite explanation of educational experience, Pinar's (2012) complicated conversation has without a doubt been revolutionary to (re)conceptualising curriculum studies.

As a starting point for (re)thinking lived curriculum as a complicated conversation, *currere* as an active conceptual force within *ubuntu-currere* proves insightful as Le Grange (2019b) points out. It accentuates that there is 'no a priori image of a pedagogical life, but multiple coursings for the becoming of a pedagogical life' (Le Grange 2019b: 221). Just as pathways for

becoming of a pedagogical life are not predetermined, they are unknown as is the ever-changing world in which they reside. Embracing an ontology of immanence, lived curriculum cannot be an interpersonal or intrapersonal experience alone. A material immanent plane 'that connects everything in the cosmos and from which all actualized forms unfold/become' could enable lived curriculum as an assemblage of human-human-nature in the posthuman condition (Le Grange 2019b: 223). But how might such an image of lived curriculum be fostered through complicated conversation? I suggest nomadic thought as one avenue since it is rooted in alternative visions of both the subject and the structure of knowledge. In other words, complicated conversations need to shift conceptions of the subject and knowledge if they are to be prolific in the posthuman era. Since much has been said in this article about the vision of the subject, I emphasise only some main arguments and then move on to discuss thinking and knowledge invested in nomadic thought.

Nomadic thought decenters the human so that subjectivity can devise 'new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing' in the posthuman era (Braidotti 2013: 12). Complicated conversations must thus include a heightened awareness of who we are, our vital materialism that is neither organicist nor essentialist but pragmatic and immanent, since the 'practices and flows of becoming, [are] complex assemblages and heterogeneous relations' (p. 171). So as already mentioned, a vision of the subject as attuned to the posthuman condition embraces a nature – culture continuum of non-linearity and is embodied, embedded, and embrained through vital materialism. This vision demands different conceptualisations of ourselves in a process of defamiliarity. It requires critical and creative contemplation through complicated conversations that ask complex questions such as: Who are we? What are we in the process of becoming within the posthuman condition?

Also deeply etched in nomadic thought is unlocking the affirmative potential (as *potentia*) of alternative visions of the structure of thinking and knowledge. Non-linearity features here also since it proffers a rhizomatic style of thinking that 'allows for multiple connections and lines of interaction that necessarily connect the text to its many "outsides"' (Braidotti 2013: 165). What this could mean for complicated conversations is that it challenges 'the authority of a proper noun, a signature, a tradition, a canon or the prestige of an academic discipline' and resides, instead, in the 'transversal nature of the affects' that complicated conversations can engender through the relations they

enable and sustain (Braidotti 2013: 165). Thinking and knowledge cannot be moulded into linearity, they must move outwards to encourage an 'affective opening-out', as 'webs of encounters with ideas, others [and] texts' (Braidotti 2013: 166). Complicated conversations can then be a space in which to engage with the intensity of these affective forces that shed light on what knowledge can do, what is has done, and how it has impacted on the self and others (human and non-human). Braidotti (2013) avers that central to this is the practice of defamiliarization. This is a process of disengagement from dominant normative visions of the subject and knowledge, evolving into a posthuman frame of reference in a relational connection to multiple others. Termed an 'anthropological exodus' by Braidotti (2013: 168), dis-identification involves the sense of loss and fear since it disrupts habits of thought and representation of 'century-old habits of anthropocentric thought and humanist arrogance'. The geo-centrism vital to nomadic thought must evoke radically imminent planetary dimensions as becoming-earth to break established patterns of thought. So, for complicated conversations to embody nomadic thought, humanist quintessential thought must be deterritorialised to allow for knowledge that fosters 'interdisciplinarity, transversality and boundary-crossings among a range of discourses' (Braidotti 2013: 169). This makes it possible for complicated conversations to take heed of what knowledge might look like or become in the posthuman condition by grappling with the complexity invested in questions such as: Whose and what knowledge is of most worth? What could/ should knowledge look like and become in the posthuman era?

6 Conclusion

Braidotti's (2013: 11) dream for universities resonates closely with my dream for a lived curriculum as complicated conversation. For her,

> it is the dream of producing socially relevant knowledge that is attuned to basic principles of social justice, the respect for human decency and diversity, the rejection of false universalisms; the affirmation of positivity of difference; the principles of academic freedom, anti-racism, openness to others and conviviality.

When this dream is read juxtaposed with the outcry relating to the lived ex-

periences shared by students in this research study, their aspirations for complicated conversations speak vividly to university lecturers and to the curriculum. It encourages them, if not pleads with them, to take heed of students' aspirations and also see the necessity of these as invested in nomadic thought so that they can use their curriculum places and spaces to foster a pedagogical life in which the vision of the subject and knowledge must change. When complicated conversations, as the will to power, unlock the creative potential of what curriculum does or might do (Wallin 2010), then it can deterritorialise and counteract the reactive conceptual force of curriculum (*potestas*) through nomadic thought. Complicated conversations of this nature could be prolific in times when uncertainty is the only certainty, a time like the present when education remains infested and effected by the ills of manifestations resulting from, among others, environmental disasters (water depletion), rapid growth of technologies (fourth industrial revolution), and communicable diseases (coronavirus) and social unrest (calls for colonization of the curriculum). It is here, in lived curriculum as complicated conversation, that the transformative potential (as *potentia*) of curriculum lies. I offer this article as a place and space in which to embrace these constructive tensionalities, since in it I have considered nomadic thought as a departure point for (re)thinking lived curriculum as complicated conversation.

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Shan Simmonds
Associate Professor
Department of Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit
North-West University
Potchefstroom
shan.simmonds@nwu.ac.za

The (Post)human Condition and Decoloniality: Rethinking and Doing Curriculum

Lesley Le Grange
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7096-3609

Abstract

Contemporary society is faced with multiple and complex challenges. These challenges include growing inequality in the world, unprecedented levels of environmental problems and rapid advances in new technologies. These challenges present both opportunities and threats. Rosi Braidotti describes this state of affairs as a (post)human condition characterized by a predicament. The (post)human predicament relates to how one adopts the positive dimension of the (post)human condition by embracing all of life and its interconnectedness, and at the same time to how one resists the potential negative effects of advanced technologies. For decolonial scholars the complex challenges mentioned are the consequence of a colonial matrix of power, which is the legacy of colonialism. The (post)human condition and decolonial turn raise critical existential as well as educational questions such as: How should we live? What is now the unit of reference for the human? How should we learn? What knowledge is of most worth? Whose knowledge is of most worth? In this article I explore potential resonances between (post)humanism and decoloniality and propose *ubuntu-currere* as a concept for reimagining curriculum in the post-Anthropocene.

Keywords: curriculum, Curriculum Studies**,** decoloniality, (post)humanism, *ubuntu-currere*

1 Background and Introduction

Global society is faced with a myriad set of complex problems. There is growing inequality in the world, the planet is on the brink of ecological

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disaster, new technologies producing both benefits and threats are advancing at a rapid rate, and new health risks such as the COVID-19 pandemic are wreaking havoc across the globe. South Africa, as a microcosm of the world, is witness to these same problems. In particular, the country faces the effects of anthropogenic processes in a recent period of human history and a new geological epoch, which scientists have called the Anthropocene[1] (Le Grange 2019a). However, Morton (2013:5) suggests that the Anthropocene is 'a strange term' because in this new epoch 'non-humans make decisive contact with humans'. One reason for this is that human lives have increasingly become entangled with advanced technologies, as depicted in Haraway's (2006) persuasive, *A Cyborg Manifesto*[2]. For her, A Cyborg Manifesto means that the secure boundaries between humans and animals as well as between humans and machines has already collapsed. This development is indicative of what might be termed a late Anthropocene or the beginnings of a post-Anthropocene.

The current planetary/societal condition is a multifaceted crisis that provokes critical questions, both existential and those related to education. The perennial existential question of how we might live in troubled times comes to the fore. Another existential question concerns how we ought to live in the present with an awareness of the possibility of a planet-without-us. Moreover, the very notion of *the human* has come under scrutiny and is captured in the question: What now is the unit of reference for human? Education questions (old and new ones) have also arisen, such as What knowledge is of most worth? (Is this question even still a relevant one?) Whose knowledge is of most worth? Is knowledge enough? How might we learn in the post-Anthropocene?

The challenges mentioned have a bearing on education and are also imbricated with education. For example, inequalities in education systems such as South Africa's reflect the inequalities of the broader society. Moreover,

[1] Haraway (2015) argues that anthropogenic processes go much further back than the time period designated Anthropocene by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000). She argues that it goes back to the invention of agriculture, a time period she names Plantationocene. Moreover, she terms the coextensiveness between past, present, and to come (Plantationocene, Anthropocene, and Capitalocene) as Chthulucene.

[2] The first iteration of 'A Cyborg Manifesto' was published by Haraway in the *Socialist Review* in 1985.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) taught us that schools in capitalist societies such as the United States of America (and South Africa) function to reproduce the dominant values and class structure of that society. Others have argued that schools can be sites of transformation and that languages of critique need to be augmented by languages of possibility (Giroux 1988) and languages of probability (Deever 1996). In the South African context, Le Grange, Reddy and Beets (2012) show that despite efforts by the government to fund schools in poor areas more favourably through its national quintile system, the public schooling system in South Africa remains grossly unequal because of the marketisation of public schooling that began in the late 1980s. With respect to higher education, participation rates are much lower for African and coloured students than for white students. For example, in 2018 participation rates for African, coloured, Indian and white students were, respectively, 19%, 15%, 46%, and 55% (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2020). Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare inequalities in higher education in terms of the digital-divide in the country (Du Preez & Le Grange 2020). But inequalities are deeper than this, as the decolonial moment spurred by the #RhodesMustFall[3] and #FeesMustFall[4] campaigns, has forcibly reminded us. I refer here to the epistemic violence inflicted on black students and staff by a higher education system whose administrative and curricular organization have been based on Western models to the exclusion of other possibilities. The upshot of this has been a call for decolonising of the university curriculum in South Africa (Le Grange 2016) and for decolonising schools (Christie 2020).

When it comes to environmental destruction, formal education has also been implicated. Orr (1992) reminds us that those who are inflicting harm on the planet are not people who have little or no formal education, nor those who are poor, but, instead, those armed with university qualifications. The carbon footprint of the poor person with little formal education is certainly smaller than that of the person who holds a university degree. Orr (1992) pointed out

[3] #RhodesMustFall was a protest campaign at the University of Cape Town where students demanded the removal of the statue of British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. The statue was symbolic of the cognitive colonisation that remained the order of the day at UCT.

[4] #FeesMustFall was a nationwide campaign during which students demanded free higher education for poor students but, more broadly, protested against the influence of neoliberal capitalism on the public higher education institution.

that formal education teaches students the lesson of hypocrisy – it is good enough to learn about environmental problems without needing to do anything about them. However, many continue to believe that education should and could play a productive role in arresting further environmental destruction. The existence of disciplines such as environmental education and sustainability education bears testimony to this.

In relation to health risks, we have seen the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on education as evidenced by the closure of schools and higher education institutions during lockdown periods and, in South Africa, also during certain levels of the government's risk adjusted approach. But the COVID-19 pandemic has also seen some schools and many residential universities pivot from face-to-face contact teaching/learning to what has popularly been called online teaching/learning although experts have suggested emergency remote teaching/learning as a more apposite term (Hodges *et al.* 2020). This development has the potential to open up new pathways for learning but has also laid bare sharp inequalities in South Africa when viewed from the perspective of the digital divide. Moreover, there is a darker trajectory where platform pedagogy (my term for emergency remote teaching/learning that uses learning management systems) morphs into platform capitalism. This will occur when for-profit intermediaries such as platform-based businesses become involved in the delivery of higher education, radically changing institutions such as universities and resulting in the casualisation of labour and deprofessionalisation of academics (see Le Grange 2020).

Needless to say, the challenges discussed are interwoven in complex ways. In the brief discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic, lines of connection between the pandemic, education, technology (emergency remote teaching), inequality (digital divide), economy (platform-capitalism) and labour are evident. And many more connections could proliferate. For example, McKinley (2020) argues that the presence of ever-more-virulent viruses such as the one causing COVID-19 is the result of bad agricultural practices and land use linked to industrial capitalism. He argues that the industrial model of agriculture is based on maximizing profits irrespective of what the consequences are for humans, society, and the environment. The potential links, both conceptual and actual/perceived, that could be generated between/among the challenges discussed cannot be captured fully (or at least not in this genre of presentation). But the point is sufficiently made that there

are multiple and complex connections between and among the challenges mentioned.

Some scholars have argued that the crises mentioned (and many more) are part of a broader problem – the 'crisis of humanism' (Levinas 1987). European enlightenment produced the ideal conception of human that served as the basis for declaring some humans less than human and also separated humans from the more/other-than-human world. Critical responses to humanism gave rise to anti-humanist philosophies and, more recently, to discourses on the (post)human. (Post)human(ist) theories have developed in Western scholarship (of the Global North) and although there is a growing interest in (post)humanism among South African scholars of higher education, it has not penetrated conversations on curriculum significantly.[5] Other scholars have laid much of the blame for the mentioned crises at the door of European colonisation and new forms of colonisation present in an era of globalisation. Scholarly responses to the effects of colonisation on the individual, society, and environment gave rise to postcolonial and decolonial discourses. Whereas postcolonial discourses have been either produced by scholars located in the Global North or by those who have given epistemic privilege to the Western scholars, decolonial discourses have been predominantly produced by scholars located in the Global South. Grosfuguel (2011) argues that the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group's critique of Eurocentrism was weakened by giving epistemic privilege to Foucault and Gramsci. He makes an important distinction between studies about the subaltern and studies with and from the perspective of the subaltern. Although decolonial scholarship has a long history in Africa and elsewhere, in South Africa its migration into curriculum conversations has been recent, mainly in the wake of the student protest of 2015 and 2016 and the calls by students for the decolonisation of the university curriculum.

My aim in this article is to explore points of resonance and dissonance between (post)humanism and decoloniality so as to open up ways of re-imagining curriculum in the post-Anthropocene through invoking the African notion of *ubuntu*. In doing so, I divide the rest of the article into the following sections: The (post)human (condition); decolonisation and decoloniality;

[5] Du Preez (2018), Murris (2016) and Postma (2016) are examples of scholarly work produced in South Africa that has brought (post)human discourses to bear on matters of curriculum.

(post)humanism and decoloniality in conversation; *ubuntu-currere*; some parting thoughts.

2 The (Post)human Condition and Curriculum

Braidotti (2013) argues that the (post)human is a condition that marks a qualitative shift in our thinking about what the unit of reference is for the human. The impetus for this shift is a growing awareness of how human lives are imbricated with other inhabitants of the planet and because of the human's entanglement with advanced technologies. For her, this condition is characterised by what she terms a 'post-human predicament' (Braidotti 2013:11). The (post)human predicament relates on the one hand to a historical moment in which global society finds itself, where the human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on Planet Earth, giving rise to the Anthropocene. And it is in the Anthropocene that we now contemplate what it might mean to live in the post-Anthropocene. On the other hand, the predicament relates to the fact that advanced technologies produced by humans might have capabilities of destroying all life on the planet. In other words, the predicament relates to how one adopts the positive dimension of the (post)human condition by embracing all of life and its interconnectedness, and, at the same time, how one resists the potential negative effects of advanced technologies (robotics, drones, artificial intelligence, biological warfare, commodification of the human body, and ecophages[6]) without being technophobic.

I agree with Braidotti that the (post)human is a condition and contend that intellectual work variously labelled new materialism, speculative realism, non-representative theory, etc. are efforts by communities of scholars to work out 'academic theories' associated with this condition. I shall briefly describe three such 'academic theories' and suggest what makes them (post)human. *New materialism* is an interdisciplinary field comprised of feminist scholars from a range of disciplines in the natural and social sciences. New materialism brings under erasure the privileging of subjectivity and representation and, according to Braidotti (2012), replaces textual and other deconstruction with an ontology of modulated presence. Scholars of this field find inspiration in thinking with Deleuze, and, in particular, the later Deleuze who collaborated

[6] Ecophages are self-reproducing molecular substances that nanotechnology can potentially produce and that will have the capability of gobbling up things.

with Guattari in placing the human on an immanent plane, thereby stripping it of its ontological privilege. Moreover, new materialists hold that all matter (including organic matter) has agential capacities. This idea is depicted in Barad's (2007:132) concept of 'agential realism'. Another important contention of new materialism is that ontology, epistemology, and ethics are inseparable, captured in Barad's (2007:409) neologism, 'ethico-onto-epistemology'. This means that the human is not a self-contained individual entity but is, instead, transformed by the interconnections it produces. The connections it produces cannot be known in advance and are immanently present in the human-human-nature-technology assemblage.

Speculative realism designates a range of thought produced by a community of philosophers. It concerns a return to speculating on the nature of reality independently of human thought and holds that continental philosophy (phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism) has descended into an anti-realist stance in the form of what Meillassoux (2008:5) terms 'correlationism'. Put simply, correlationalism means that reality appears only as the correlate of human thought. In other words, we can access only that which is such a correlate. The limit of correlationalism is the reason why conventional continental philosophy might be considered to be anthropocentric. Furthermore, some speculative realists share a commitment to a flat ontology or object-oriented ontology (OOO), which holds that all entities are objects and that they should be treated equally by not prematurely reducing some to others (see Harman 2013; 2018; Morton 2018). A chair, a rock, a magnetic wave, a work of fiction, a giraffe, a flower, a seed, capitalism are all objects. According to Harman (2018) an object-oriented ontology jettisons the distinctions thought /world and human/ non-human. He goes on to argue that an object cannot be reduced to either one of the 'two basic kinds of knowledge: what something is made of, and what it does' (Harman 2018: 257). What this means is that an object can form unique relations with other objects and that such relations are independent of any predetermined qualities imposed by humans. In such relations it cannot be predetermined what an object will do or what it will become and, more importantly, objects forge relations with one another that transcend human thought and perception. As Snaza *et al.* (2014:47) write,

> ... OOO marks a renewed ethico-ecological commitment to *geophilosophy* ... while advancing the image of a new or ungrounded

> earth teeming with ecologies of relation *prior* to their presumed enlivenment by human thought (italics in original).

Non-representational theory was first developed by human geographer Nigel Thrift and colleagues and the genesis of these ideas is captured in several of his own works; see Thrift (1996; 1997; 1999; 2000; 2003; 2007). Non-representation theory is not a single theory but denotes, rather, a disposition that calls into question the overemphasis on representations (products of the human mind) and instead places emphasis on performances and practices – the embodiment, materiality, and processes of performing geographical work. Non-representational theory has, of course, application beyond geography and also resonates with work in the sociology of knowledge performed by scholars such as David Turnbull (1997; 2000).

I argue that new materialism, speculative realism, and non-representational theory are intellectual endeavours involved in developing 'theories'[7] in the (post)human condition. Each of the endeavours discussed does not represent a single 'theory' but a range of perspectives or strands of thought. However, what all (post)human 'theorists' have is common is their opposition to human exceptionalism. (Post)humanism questions the primacy of the human in the cybernetic triangle of human/animal/machine. In other words, the human does not enjoy ontological privilege and is placed on an immanent plane alongside all modes of life (or, for OOO scholars, all objects).

Rejecting human exceptionality entails opening politics to nonhuman subjects and, by implication, also to those who have been viewed as less than human by modern imperialist states (Wolfe 2012). The sphere of distributive justice becomes expanded from social justice to a multi-species ecojustice. Rejecting human exceptionalism also has implications for education and curriculum because much of Western education has been based on human exceptionalism. Snaza *et al.* (2014) aver that schooling in western(ised) societies has served to civilise us, to tame our wild animal impulses by privileging 'rational' thought in relation to our bodies, which is captured in Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* ('I think therefore I am'.) Human exceptionalism is evident in the hidden curriculum of western(ised) schools and universities

[7] I place 'theories' in scare quotation marks because many (post)human scholars would reject the notion of theory and see new materialism, speculative realism, and non-representational theory as dispositions rather than theories.

because we learn that we are unlike animals and we can do with them whatever we wish. As Snaza *et al.* (2014:45) cogently put it,

> ... in schools [and universities] ... we learn a whole set of humanist ideas about human exceptionalism (in biology, social studies, languages, etc.) while learning to ignore both the ways some humans are treated as 'more human' than others (which then justifies waging all sorts of horrors against other humans) and also the concrete ways that humans and other animals actually relate in schools: dissections in biology class, eating dead animals and the byproducts of their killing in cafeterias and hallways, wearing animals on our feet, tossing balls made of their skins in gym class.

Reconnecting humans to their animality would imply a radical reimagining of education. But Snaza *et al.* (2014) remind us more specifically of another challenge for education and curriculum. They point out that in educational thought correlationalism is manifest in the privileged place given to epistemology and portrayed in the perennial curriculum question, What knowledge is of most worth? And I would add even the more radical question, Whose knowledge is of most worth? This raises a new question about how we might think curriculum in the (post)human condition and how we might conceive of the field Curriculum Studies, which is concerned with understanding curriculum. Snaza *et al.* (2014) suggest that Curriculum Studies should return to its emphasis on democratic forms of being-together (or being-with) in learning without reference to human exceptionalism. I shall return to some of these matters later in the article but turn now to a discussion of decolonisation and decoloniality.

3 Decolonisation and Decoloniality

In this article decolonisation[8] refers to the undoing of colonisation. It began when colonised peoples fought and pushed back against colonial admini-

[8] Decolonisation continues to be used by indigenous peoples across the world to denote their struggle for self-determination, to correct the deficit ways in which they have been defined, to retell stories of their past, and to envision the future (see Smith 1999; Chilisa 2012).

strations until we witnessed the end of colonial rule. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (in Omanga 2020) argues that in Africa South of the Sahara decolonisation needs to be understood as phases beginning with primary resistance movements such as the Ndebele-Shona Uprisings in southern Africa (1896–1897) and the Maji Maji in east Africa (1905–1907), which formed the basis for future nationalist-anticolonial struggles, exemplified by the Mau-Mau Uprisings (1952–1960). Most African countries obtained independence in the mid-twentieth century, with South Africa being the last African country to be decolonised in 1994, following decades of anti-apartheid struggles. Natsheni-Gatsheni (2013a) argues that apartheid was a form of internal white colonialism.

However, the end of colonisation did not mean the end of coloniality. Fanon (1967) understood this when he lamented at the end of the Algerian war that decolonisation did not take place, only the Africanisation of colonialism did. Nkrumah (1965) understood this, too, with his coinage of neo-colonialism. However, Latin American scholars have been particularly helpful in articulating what the legacy of colonialism is. They do so by distinguishing between colonisation/colonialism and coloniality and therefore between decolonisation and decoloniality. The Latin American scholars include Anibal Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Walter Mignolo. It was Quijano (2007) who gave new meaning to the term that depicts the legacy of colonialism. He argues that the legacy of colonialism is the colonial matrix of power that has four interlocking domains: control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources); control of authority (institutions, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education, and identity formation). Grosfoguel (2007) avers that the removal of colonial administrations produced the myth of a postcolonial world. He writes,

> We continue to live under the same colonial power matrix. With juridical-political decolonisation we moved from a period of 'global colonialism' to the current period of 'global coloniality'.

Similarly, Maldonado-Torres (2007:243) points out that coloniality refers to,

> long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations,

> and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.

Moreover, Mignolo (2007; 2011) argues that coloniality is the darker side of modernity. By this he means that there is no European modernity without coloniality. In other words, the darker side of modernity is the slave trade, imperialisms, violent genocides, racism, sexism, all forms of oppression suffered by colonised peoples, and the current neoliberal order. Some of the 'crimes' of the darker side of modernity are the murdering and displacement of pre-existing knowleges (epistemicide); the killing and displacement of the languages of colonised peoples (linguicide); and the killing and displacement of peoples' cultures (culturecide) (Ndlovu & Omanga 2020). Drawing on the work of these Latin American scholars Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) argues that coloniality has three interlocking concepts: coloniality of power; coloniality of knowledge; and coloniality of being. Coloniality of power relates to the current asymmetrical global power structure that is a consequence of the benefits of modernisation that has been enjoyed by the West through imposing the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, and apartheid on the rest. Coloniality of knowledge relates to how the genesis of disciplines in the West resulted in epistemicides in the Global South and how Africa is now burdened with irrelevant knowledge that disempowers rather than empowers. Coloniality of being relates to how whiteness gained ontological density that far exceeds that of blackness and how Descartes's 'I think, therefore, I am' morphed into 'I conquer, therefore, I am' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a:12).

Decoloniality is an analytic of coloniality. It concerns a critical awareness of the logic of coloniality (the colonial matrix of power), it is a critique of coloniality, resists expressions of coloniality, and takes actions to overcome coloniality. In other words, decoloniality is more than the elimination of colonial administrations and entails the decolonisation of the interlocking domains of knowledge, power, and being. As Maldonado-Torres (2006:117) writes,

> By decoloniality ... is meant ... the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geopolitical hierarchies that came into being or

> found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world.

In relation to Curriculum Studies Le Grange (2018:9) argues that decoloniality demands asking critical questions such as:

> Who controls the field internationally and in South Africa? Who controls the institutions and organisations of the field? Who produces knowledge in and of the field (including its histories)? How are identities (per)formed or constructed through and in discourses on Curriculum Studies?

With respect to decolonising of the school and university curriculum, decoloniality petitions more than the dismantling of Western conceptions of knowledge to entail also dismantling the deficit ways in which colonised peoples have been defined, the correction of unequal power relations, and the undoing of the current idea of the contemporary school/university and its actualisation. Le Grange (2016) argues that the curriculum-as-lived by students and lecturers should be legitimated so that the concept curriculum is understood as broader than the explicit curriculum, so that attention is given to the hidden curriculum and the null curriculum.

4 (Post)humanism and Decoloniality

As mentioned, what (post)human theories all have in common is the rejection of human exceptionalism. This means that the human is stripped from its ontological privilege and placed on an immanent plane with all modes/objects of life. For (post)humanists the human is not an isolated individual but is entangled in an assemblage of living and 'non-living.' If assemblage is the unit of reference in the post-Anthropocene, then this raises a critical question of what 'human' now means. And for our discussion, also what this invites in relation to the concept curriculum and the field Curriculum Studies. Decoloniality seeks to disrupt the colonial matrix of power that is the legacy of European colonialism. It challenges the asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and Global South within nations and between and within institutions such as schools and universities. Moreover, it challenges the dominance of Western epistemic rationality and the deficit ways in which

colonised peoples have come to be defined. Decoloniality thus demands the disruption of the dominant notion of curriculum and calls for the disruption of the field of Curriculum Studies.

(Post)humanism and decoloniality may have some things in common. Zembylas (2018) argues that both (post)human and decolonial perspectives challenge the individualistic, possessive, and competitive subjectivity that is constructed as ideal in the neoliberal university and therefore potentially opens up pathways for reimagining university curricula and pedagogies. This holds true for schools, too. Moreover, the two perspectives aim to remove from its pedestal the ideal human (white male) constructed by European enlightenment. However, de Oliveira and Lopes (2016) argue that (post)human and decolonial perspectives might have different priorities. (Post)humanism's rejection of human exceptionalism and belief in the entanglement of humans in assemblages of living and non-living may be viewed by decolonial scholars as further denial of the humanity of colonised and racialised peoples – a humanity denigrated by persistent coloniality of being. Or as Zembylas (2018:262) puts it,

> decolonial scholarship exposes posthumanism as another false universal brought by the post-Enlightenment subject, offering an alibi for the sustained denial of the humanity of colonised and racialised peoples.

He goes on to ask a critical question: How does the pervasive idea of a 'more-than-human' perspective of post-humanism dismantle the hidden agendas of colonial practices at all levels of society (including the university) without returning to an idealized anthropocentric past? I shall attempt to respond to this question in the next section of this article by introducing the concept of *ubuntu-currere* as a portal to a reimagined notion of curriculum that could take us beyond the impasse of (post)human and decolonial scholarship. While the humanity of colonised and racialised bodies might be a blind spot of (post)humanism, it does foreground what might be neglected by decolonialists, which is a concern for the more/other-than-human and an acknowledgement of our imbrication with advanced technologies in a human-human-nature-technology assemblage.

(Post)humanism and decoloniality provide languages for critiquing the contemporary Western university and school and its notion of curriculum – the

former for the privileging of knowledge and the latter for the privileging of Western knowledge, which has resulted in the denigration and well as decimation of the knowledges of colonised and racialised peoples. Both perspectives would therefore trouble the perennial curriculum question of what knowledge is of most worth, which was first used as the title of a book by Hebert Spencer (1884). (Post)humanists would suggest that this question might be the wrong one because it privileges knowledge above being and human action in the world and negates the imbrication of epistemology, ontology, and axiology as captured in Barad's (2007) *ethico-onto-epistemology*. (Post)humanists would also reject the perennial curriculum question because it implies that knowledge is only the product of human thought (with an emphasis on the individual) and that human thought transcends human embeddedness in the web of life. Decolonial scholars might agree in part with (post)humanists but would ask a different question: Whose knowledge is of most worth? This question draws attention to the killing and marginalisation of the knowledges of colonised and racialised peoples.

However, although (post)humanist and decolonial perspectives are useful analytics of the Western(ised) school and university and its curriculum, these perspectives offer little insight into how to imagine or disrupt this curriculum. It is with this mind that I introduce *ubuntu-currere* as a concept that might open possibilities for imagining the different curriculum that enables (post)human and decolonial perspectives to meet each other halfway. This is because *ubuntu-currere* captures at least some dimensions of both (post)human and decolonial perspectives.

5 *Ubuntu-currere*: Towards a (Post)human-decolonial Curriculum

Ubuntu-currere is an amalgam of the African notion of ubuntu and a conception of curriculum that draws on the Latin origin of curriculum which means 'to run.' *Ubuntu*/ Botho is a concept that is derived from proverbial expressions (aphorisms) found in several languages in Africa south of the Sahara. It is not only a linguistic concept but has a normative connotation embodying how we ought to relate to the other or, in other words, what our moral obligation is towards the others. *Ubuntu* derives from the aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which cannot be translated easily but generally means that each individual's humanity is expressed in relationship with others.

Metz (2007) argues that this aphorism not only describes the way African people relate to one another but also the way in which they ought to relate to one another. Therefore, *ubuntu* means that our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human and, if one is to achieve this, it requires one to enter more deeply into community with others. However, *ubuntu* should not be equated with humanism. As Ramose (2009, pp. 308–309) writes,

> Humanness suggests both a condition of being and the state of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding. It is thus opposed to any '-ism', including humanism, for this tends to suggest a condition of finality, a closedness or a kind of absolute either incapable of, or resistant to, any further movement.

Moreover, Le Grange (2012) argues that *ubuntu* needs to be understood as a microcosm of the Shona construct *ukama*, which means relatedness of all things in the cosmos. Drawing on the work of Guattari (2001), he points out that the interrelatedness of the three ecological registers, the self, social, and ecology ('nature'), needs to be understood transversally; destruction in one register will be witnessed in the other two and so, too, healing in one of the registers would be witnessed in the other two. A human who authentically cares for another human being would also care for the self and for the more/other-than-human world.

There are four insights that might be gained from the discussion on *ubuntu* and *ukama*. First, the human-human-nature connection depicted in *ubuntu-ukama* resonates strongly with the (post)human perspectives described in this article. In other words, ontological privilege is not ascribed to the human. Second, the oneness of all of life captured by (post)humanism and *ukama* does not deny the ethico-normative distinctiveness of the species *Homo Sapiens*. Therefore, through affects unique to its species, humans can express attributes of love, hate, caring, joy, (com)passion, and so forth. Third the ethico-normative distinctiveness of the human, which *ubuntu* embodies, means that social justice need not be sacrificed at the altar of multispecies ecojustice. Fourth, the moral obligation implied in the aphorism from which *ubuntu* is derived, petitions humans to care for both humans and the more/other-than human world. Harming other humans and non-human nature would therefore be counter to *ubuntu*. This includes all forms of discrimination, which resonates with the decolonial critique of the coloniality of being.

Currere is the second concept of the amalgam *ubuntu-currere*. Forty-five years ago, Pinar (1975) first invoked the etymological root of curriculum, the Latin *currere*, which means 'to run the course.' He did so to refocus curriculum on the significance of individual experience irrespective of the course content or alignment with society or the economy (Pinar 2011). Wallin (2010) revisited the notion of *currere* by thinking with Deleuze and Guattari (1994) and their assertion that a concept is not a name attached to something but a way of approaching the world. Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) interest was not in what a concept is but what it does or what it could become. In other words, what it wills to power. Wallin (2010) draws attention to the paradoxical character of *currere's* etymology given its active and reactive forces. He suggests that curriculum could be thought of as an active conceptual force which means that it does not have fixity or closedness; it does not convey an *a priori* image of a pedagogical life. Instead, it relates to the immanent potential of the becoming of a pedagogical life, the multiple coursings of a pedagogical life that exists prior to thought. The active force of *currere* relates to the creative power within all of life including human beings. It is the same power that enables objects (as understood in OOO) to create flows, to connect, and to expand difference. The active force of *currere* resonates strongly with *ubuntu* in its concern with the unfolding of the human being in relationship with other humans and the more/other-than-human world.

The conceptual power of *currere* implies newness, creation of things unforeseen, experimentation, expanding of difference, and movement. This notion of curriculum opens up multiple pathways for the becoming of pedagogical lives and therefore the basis for decolonisation. The active force of *currere* is decolonising in that it opens up (not closes) what a body (a concept, a person, an organisation etc.) can do/become. Through its movement *currere* creates new connections, new assemblages, and unlikely fidelities. *Currere* signifies a life of experimentation through the release of immanent flows rather than constructing transcendent ideas that are imposed. In other words, the becoming of the person is constrained only by life itself; freedom is constrained only when human actions harm other humans or the more/other-than-human world. Here the alignment with *ubuntu-ukama* and the different (post)human perspectives discussed in the article is evident. In its reactive form, *currere* colonises, where one way of knowing becomes *the* way of knowing. The reactive power of *currere* severs curriculum from its immanent potential to become other. It is *currere*'s reactive force that has dominated

conceptions and practices of curriculum in Western(ised) schools and universities as evidenced by the normalising and homogenising effects of various iterations of the Tylerian rationale such as competency-based education, outcomes-based education, and constructive alignment (Gough 2013).

Ubuntu-currere shifts the register of reference away from the individual human being to an assemblage of human-human-nature-technology. In other words, subjectivity is ecological. This resonates with what all (post)humanist perspectives have in common, which is the rejection of human exceptionalism and acceptance of the assemblage as unit of reference. The assemblage is comprised of objects (as in the OOO of speculative realism), which all have agential capacities (as in new materialist thought) and the human is one such object. This does not mean that the ethico-normative distinctiveness of the animal species we call human to express love, joy, caring, compassion, anger and to seek justice (cognitive, social, linguistic), etc., is denied. This makes possible the invigoration of lines of connection between *ubuntu-currere* and decolonialility. Moreover, *ubuntu-currere* embodies the idea of the subject as always in becoming and that the becoming of a pedagogical life is relational – the subject becomes in relation to other humans and the more-than-human-world. The notion of in-becoming ensures that the human cannot be defined nor have fixity and therefore *ubuntu-currere* is (post)humanist/anti-humanist. The concept embraces the right to live and thrive, free from any force that imposes, except the constraint of life itself, and therefore resonates with decoloniality. *Ubuntu-currere* has resonance with new materialist post-human theory in that it embraces an ontology of immanence – that there is a material immanent plane that connects everything in the cosmos and from which all actualised forms unfold/become. As Le Grange (2019b:223) writes,

> *Ubuntu-currere* opens up multiple coursings for developing post-human sensibilities driven by the positive power of *potentia* that connects, expresses desire and sustains life .... But it also makes possible conversations with the more-than-human so that we can listen to the rhythm and heartbeat of the earth so that our conversations do not happen on the earth but are bent by the earth.

Ubuntu-currere is an educative performance where there is no a priori image of a life and where there are no predetermined outcomes, goals, aims, etc. In such an educative performance, objects (as in OOO) such as books, classrooms/lecture venues, a national curriculum framework, etc. do not represent what curriculum is nor what a body could become; the becoming of a pedagogical life occurs in intra-action with objects such as the ones mentioned and objects in the more/other-than-human-world. *Ubuntu-currere* therefore aligns with non-representational theory.

6 Parting Thoughts

Ubuntu-currere disrupts dominant notions of curriculum that predetermine a pathway for pedagogical lives, akin to the Grecian notion of *currere* which means 'chariot track' – the course to run. It calls for a life of experimentation through engaging with all the complex challenges facing Planet Earth: growing inequality; environmental destruction; violence of all kinds; the benefits and treats of advanced technologies; global health pandemics; and so forth. *Ubuntu-currere* petitions an ethic of just doing (just acting) in whatever way that will enhance life (both human and non-human) and learning with such doing/acting.

For Curriculum Studies, *ubuntu-currere* calls on scholars of the field to listen respectfully to others in the transnational spaces that globalisation affords, akin to Pinar's (2004) notion of curriculum as complicated conversation. Pinar (2004) averred that complicated conversations require frank and ongoing self-criticism when listening to others. Le Grange (2018:7) elaborates,

> Frank and ongoing self-criticism is an important dimension of complicated conversations because it mitigates against hierarchical power relations that could impede productive conversations from happening. Power relations are always present when humans engage in educational exchanges. However, complicated conversations are constructed to lessen hierarchical power relations and their colonising effects. When this *potestas* (negative power) is moderated through self-criticism and respect, the positive power of the *potentia* can flourish and productive curriculum work can be performed in new knowledge spaces. *Potentia* is not a power that is external,

> hierarchical, or imposed, but is an immanent power that connects to life's creative force ....

And for the (post)humanist and many indigenous peoples, our conversations are never purely human ones because our thoughts and being are always already embedded in the web of life. I do not wish to conclude by putting what I have said in a nutshell for the reader, but, instead, invite ongoing complicated conversations on (post)humanism, decoloniality, and curriculum.

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Lesley Le Grange
Distinguished Professor
Department of Curriculum Studies
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch
Email: llg@sun.ac.za

Higher Education Curriculum Transformation in and of Radical Immanence: Towards a Free and Creative Ethics

Anné Verhoef
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9627-1969

Petro du Preez
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9100-6461

Abstract

The purpose of higher education curriculum transformation has often been justified amidst calls for decolonisation, the redressing of social injustices, preparing students for the world of work, and so on. Noble as this might sound, these justifications lead to an instrumentalist view of higher education curriculum transformation that reinforces a reductionist approach to transformation that is fundamentally transcendentally motivated. A transcendental motivation tends to overlook education as meaningful in and of itself. The problem with such transcendental accounts, goals, or justifications of education is that they deny the immanent meaningfulness that education already has. Gilles Deleuze, with his philosophical concept of the plane of immanence, represents one of the most radical positions on this notion. We examine the implications of Deleuze's radical immanence on discourses of higher education curriculum transformation. We argue that this transformation needs to be complemented by other, more open notions of immanence to open up avenues for a new kind of ethics. First, we offer an analysis of Deleuze's radical immanence. After this, our focus shifts to what higher education curriculum transformation in relation to this plane of immanence entails. Then, we argue that transformation discourses, based on or within such a radical immanence have some significant benefits that should be considered seriously. However, there are also aspects that are not philosophically and educationally

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tenable. This does not mean that Deleuze's radical immanence should be rejected, but, rather, that the pedagogical value of it should be exploited in combination with other philosophies of immanence, like those of Jean-Luc Nancy and Slavoj Žižek.

Keywords: curriculum transformation, Deleuze, ethics, higher education, radical immanence

1 Introduction

The 21st century poses unprecedented challenges and opportunities for higher education curriculum transformation (Howard 2018; Lourie 2020). Its opportunities are far-reaching and its challenges perhaps even more so. Engaging in any form of research pertaining to education in the 21st century necessitates a critical engagement with higher education curriculum transformation as a complex matter that is influenced by social, economic, and political agendas[1]. It is often loosely defined and this does not necessarily denote a crisis; it offers opportunities to rethink and research the subject (Du Preez *et al.* 2016). Such rethinking and researching curriculum transformation is especially important in the 21st century where what constitutes the purpose and nature of higher education is fundamentally disrupted. Such disruption is pivotal to the process of redefining the limits and possibilities of curriculum transformation insofar as it provides a space in which one can engage critically with the transcendental (and, to a lesser extent, the immanent) justifications of higher education. One example of such disruption was the decolonial turn that resulted from the 2015/2016 nation-wide student protests in South Africa during which urgent pleas were made to higher education institutions (HEIs) to radically transform their curricula. (For a more detailed account of this debate, see Du Preez 2018; Du Preez *et al.* 2020; Le Grange 2016 2017). One might ask to what extent, if any, have these interruptions challenged the hegemonic views about the nature

[1] Apart from the social, economic, and political agendas that influence curriculum transformation, there are also historical moments that have had contextual influences on transformation. One example concerns the instrumentalist orientation of education that was augmented by Enlightenment philosophies. Another example is how the positivist, colonialist agenda informed apartheid's interpretations of education.

and purpose of higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a second challenge to HEIs that, under emergency circumstances, have had to transform their daily workings despite severe socio-economic divides in the country (Du Preez & Le Grange 2020). HEIs have to grapple with these realities but there has always been a tendency to react to disruptions in reactive ways that could mean that higher education curriculum transformation becomes nothing more than a bureaucratic exercise, performed in line with neo-liberal principles such as competitiveness, performativity, and so forth. Under these circumstances, education is mostly instrumentally justified with some sort of transcendental purpose in mind – usually to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate in the world of work.

In this article, we do not concern ourselves with the discourses that necessitate curriculum transformation in higher education since much has been written about this. We affirm the need for curriculum transformation in higher education contexts, but we challenge transcendental, instrumental justifycations of curriculum transformation which are mostly the result of reactive measures taken in times of crisis. First, we employ Deleuze's concept of the plane of immanence as the starting point for thinking about how radical immanence could be understood and what it could entail. Second, we explore education on the plane of immanence. In the third part of the article we examine the implications of radical immanence for higher education curriculum transformation and consider some benefits along with possible concerns in this regard. We argue that Deleuze's notion of radical immanence should not be rejected and, instead, its pedagogical value should be exploited in combination with other philosophies of immanence, like those of Nancy (2008) and Žižek (2004). We conclude by arguing that radical immanence is crucial for our way of thinking about higher education curriculum transformation since it offers the possibility for a clear affirmation and celebration of life. It also allows for a new kind of ethical approach which is appropriate to higher education curriculum transformation insofar as it promotes an ethic that is immanent, non-normative, and one that is in-becoming, creative, and truly free.

2 The Radical Immanence of Deleuze

Deleuze represents one of the most radical philosophical positions of immanence. He developed the concept of the plane of immanence in various works, but particularly in *What is Philosophy?* (with Félix Guattari, published

in French in 1991) and in his *Two Regimes of Madness* (published posthumously in 2007). His radical immanence can be described as absolute immanence, and, according to Žižek (2004), '[I]f there ever was, in the twentieth century, a philosopher of absolute immanence, it was Gilles Deleuze, with his notion of life as "the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence ... sheer power, utter beatitude"' (p. 235). But what does this mean?

Absolute immanence implies a closed world with no escape to the outside, no crossing over, and a denial even of the limits or boundaries themselves. As explained elsewhere (Verhoef 2017), a radical immanence renders the concept of transcendence redundant because transcendence virtually disappears into immanence. It implies that all transcendence is completely within this world, within our experience, within our grasp, and there is nothing more and nothing outside. Such absolute immanence positively acknowledges our interconnectedness as human beings with the material world in which we find ourselves, and our connectedness to nature and matter in being of nature and matter ourselves.

Deleuze defended such a notion of absolute immanence explicitly and passionately. He considered immanence not as a concept, but as the pre-philosophical horizon against which thinking can be creative and productive – a plane of immanence where 'immanence is immanent to nothing except itself' (Deleuze 2007: 385). With his passionate acceptance of immanence, Deleuze rejects any form of transcendence, connecting it with the problem of representation (Deleuze *et al.* 1994: 136) as 'a site of transcendental illusion' (see, also, Deleuze 2004: 334). Such representation creates the dualism of form-matter that brings with it a transcendent judgement of mind over matter. For Deleuze, it is Being that should be liberated from these chains of representation. We must thus relocate ourselves on the plane of immanence, where we will discover that 'Being necessarily only expresses Itself in all beings, because Being is all there is' (Justaert 2012: 98).

Deleuze rejects therefore all types of transcendence – epistemological and (in particular) the metaphysical. One must discover on the plane of immanence the true power and beauty in immanence, in Being, and live a life not divided into categories or hierarchies. To live on this plane of immanence is liberating – free from the illusion of transcendence and representation, hierarchy and dualism, and free to be truly creative and ethical. For Deleuze it is pure immanence that allows or calls one to be creatively and freely ethical because one is not bound to a prescribed (transcendent) morality.

Deleuze gives two examples of how one lives on (or may experience) this plane of immanence where Being is all there is. It is important in both these examples that Deleuze speaks of 'Immanence: a life ...' (2007: 386) where the indefinite article, *a*, plays a crucial role. Being on this plane of immanence, for Deleuze, is not about the representation of life as such or in general that is important, nor the transcendent effort to live as someone, but what is beneath it, as the absolute, the immanent. Such *a life*, in its singularity, as impersonal, defines the plane of immanence.

We clarify this in the following two examples. First, the plane of immanence, *a life*, is what is experienced at the moment between life and death in the simple moment when an individual life is confronted with universal death. When someone is dying, there 'is a moment where *a life* is merely playing with death' (Deleuze 2007: 386). At those last few moments, before the person dies, it is not the life of the individual anymore, but an impersonal and yet singular life. This foregrounds for Deleuze (2007: 386) 'a pure event that has been liberated from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and the objectivity of what comes to pass'. This life, says Deleuze, attains a pure power and beatitude. It is 'no longer an individuation, but a singularization, a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil' (Deleuze 2007: 387). All there is on this plane of immanence, is *a life*, a singular immanent life of a person who no longer has a name. Being is all there is.

The second example Deleuze gives of *a life*, the plane of immanence, is in relation to babies' lives. Deleuze says 'infants all resemble one another and have hardly any individuality; but they do have singularities – a smile, a gesture, a grimace – such events are not subjective traits' (2007: 387). With babies, there is no subjectivity yet, no identity, no representation or thoughts of their own. In our relation to babies we experience life – a life. It is not life in general, but life-as-singularity. It is not about a universal category called life, nor the potential of the baby's life, but rather about being alive in a singularity. It is being itself that is found here. Deleuze argues that we have some meaningful affection or sympathy towards new-born babies exactly because of this pure immanence that we experience, the 'immanent life which is pure power, and even beatitude during moments of weakness' (Deleuze 2007: 387). No further justification is needed to make it meaningful. Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019: 65) summarise this well:

Deleuze suggests that in our contact with the new-born, we experience

> a life in a 'pure' form: as life that is not yet conscious, nor attributable to any individual subject. Therefore, the life that is valuable in and of itself – immanently – is not life as we understand it from our (adult) perspective as a conscious and personal life.

Although these two examples might seem like the extreme poles of our lives (being newly born and one's moments before death), Deleuze emphasises that *a life* (the plane of immanence) should not be limited to only these moments. He says that *a life* 'is everywhere, in every moment which a living subject traverses ... an immanent life carrying along the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects' (2007: 387). It is on this plane of immanence, on this level of preconscious and pre-subjective life, that we all live, that we all constantly move away from through representation, subjectivity, identity, etc. For Deleuze, this underlying life-as-singularity, a life, should be valued as life in its fullest sense where being is all there is. Nothing else is needed to give it value.

The radical immanence of Deleuze can thus be described as absolute immanence, as *a life*, as a plane of immanence, where Being is all there is. The implication is that (on this plane of immanence) '[b]eing has absorbed us as it were: our life has become a Life, an expression of Being' (Justaert 2012: 97). Such a life is impersonal, not divided into categories, and not separated from (or higher than) other beings, but a univocity of being; 'a human being's life is literally equal to a life of a rock' (Pearson 2001: 141). It is on this point, the univocity of being, that Spinoza's influence on Deleuze becomes apparent. Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 48) write about Spinoza:

> Spinoza was the philosopher who knew full well that immanence was only immanent to itself and therefore that it was a plane traversed by movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates. He is therefore the prince of philosophers. Perhaps he is the only philosopher never to have compromised with transcendence and to have hunted it down everywhere.

Deleuze follows Spinoza as the philosopher of radical immanence, of One-ness or Substance. Substance, for Spinoza, (as in the description of the plane of immanence) is the fact that there is no mediation between attributes and only a univocity of being, 'the motif on which Deleuze insists so much' (Žižek 2004:

235). This univocity of being means there is no tension between the 'ordinary phenomenal reality and the transgressive Excess of the Real Thing' (p. 243). There is for Spinoza only a 'One-Whole Real' within our closed immanence, and Deleuze develops this idea further with his plane of immanence which implies a flat ontology in which all heterogeneous entities can be conceived of at the same level, without ontological exceptions or priorities (Verhoef 2017). Spinoza understands this univocity of being as purely positive: 'all that he admits is a purely positive network of causes and effect in which, by definition, an absence cannot play any positive role' (Žižek 2004: 236). There is no absence, gap, or crack in the Real for Spinoza. In such a universe of necessity that Spinoza portrays, there is only pure positivity of forces; there is no life-denying negativity and only the joyful assertion of life. Deleuze follows Spinoza (and Nietzsche)[2] in this affirmation of life, of this univocity of being, in this One-ness of Reality – our oneness with nature, plants, animals, and rocks, by implication. We (humans) share and participate in these positive forces of being, not as the starting point, but as being taken up into it, as *a life* on the plane of immanence. Deleuze compares this with modern sports like hang gliding and surfing, where there is no origin or goal (as in shot-put for example), but rather moving into an existing movement of airstreams and waves. Deleuze says that in these sports the 'key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to 'get into something' instead of being the origin of an effort. And yet in philosophy we're coming back to eternal values, to the idea of the intellectual as custodian of eternal values' (Deleuze 1995: 121). This last remark is critique (again) on transcendent notions (of, for example, morality), as part of all his critique on transcendence. We discuss next the implication this has for morality, ethics, and specifically higher education curriculum transformation.

[2] Nietzsche's *amor fati* is reiterated by Deleuze. Deleuze also follows Nietzsche's rejection of transcendence, so there is quite a clear line of thought between Spinoza, Nietzsche and Deleuze. Deleuze writes, for example: "We must draw up a list of these illusions and take their measure, just as Nietzsche, following Spinoza, listed the 'four great errors'. But the list is infinite. First of all, there is the *illusion of transcendence*, which, perhaps, comes before all the others (in its double aspect of making immanence immanent to something and of rediscovering a transcendence within immanence itself)" (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 49).

3 Education on the Plane of Immanence

We have seen that Deleuze's plane of immanence – a life – implies that there are no hierarchies and no representations. There is a univocity of being where our oneness with nature is celebrated on a flat ontology with no exceptions, no priorities, but only a consistency of the Real. A first significant implication of Deleuze's radical immanence is the recognition (with Spinoza) that there are only pure positive forces in life in which we should participate on this plane of immanence, in our univocity of being. This joyful assertion and affirmation of life is not found outside of the world, but in it. Life, the here and now, is fully affirmed and meaningful; it has value in itself. It testifies to a love that is fully a worldly one – *amor fati* (worldy love). There is no Heideggerian onto-theology, no external grounding, and no transcendent authority (notion or Being) needed to give life meaning or value. It is, rather, the case that all life (more-than-the-human) is important and valuable.

The first implication of this for higher education curriculum transformation is that the autotelic nature of education should be appreciated and should be informed by this flattened ontology by our keeping in mind that humans have no special place in the cosmos. With the affirmation of life on this plane of immanence, it is not human lives that are affirmed, but all life and, thereby, our interconnectedness to, and inter-dependence with, all beings should be recognised. A second implication of Deleuze's plane of immanence is that there is no prescribed or transcendent morality. With radical immanence we are free from representation, free from hierarchies, and free from eternal values. Pure immanence allows or calls one, however, not to be unethical, but to be creatively and freely ethical.

To apply these implications of radical immanence to higher education curriculum transformation is quite challenging. A recent, meaningful attempt in this regard was made by Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski in their book, *Towards an Ontology of Teaching* (2019). In chapter five they specifically focus on 'Immanence and Transcendence in Education' when they discuss the work of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben. They claim that 'a transcendent account of education is dominant today' and against this, they 'call for a fully immanent view' (Vlieghe & Piotr Zamojski 2019: 63). They highlight that radical immanence implies that there is no external ground for and/ or of education. Education is meaningful in and of itself. This notion stands in opposition to the dominant transcendent accounts of education which

motivate, or justify, education in terms of external goals such as a just society, ethics, and religious notions.

For example, the transcendent goal of education can be to create a flourishing society; education will then be focussed on the formation of productive, accountable, and responsible citizenship. In practice we see this in versions of emancipatory pedagogy, through which education is seen as an instrument for bringing about a more just, tolerant, and equal society (e.g. Freire 2005; Giroux 2011; McLaren 2000). When education becomes the instrument for emancipation, it becomes politicised, and education is then justified, corrected, or directed from a point outside the sphere of education. Education is thereby not only instrumentalised but reduced to nothing more than the means for a transcendent goal and justification, which, in this case is to secure a well-functioning society. This transcendent goal or justification can be extremely positive and justifiable – like emancipation – but it still reduces education to a means and renders it meaningless without an outside goal.

Other examples in this regard can be seen when education is practised for economic reasons, for employability, for sociability, for qualifications, for religious purposes, and even for ethical reasons (to develop accountability, responsibility, trustworthiness, etc.). Some of these goals can easily be criticised and dismissed for various reasons, but even a fairly good goal, like an ethical account of education (see, for example, Biesta 2010; 2017), instrumentalises education because it 'is still another version of transcendent thinking: the meaning of education practices, and of teaching in special, needs to be justified by and grounded in a calling that comes from the outside' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 74). With such external justifications, education will always be exposed and subjected to neo-liberal ideals such as effectivity, optimisation, and measurable outcomes, as with any other instrument we use.
The problem with such transcendental accounts, goals, or justifications of education is that that deny the immanent meaningfulness that education already has. An immanent account of education 'is one that doesn't look for external justification: *education is good in and of itself*' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 69, emphasis in original). With transcendent notions of education which makes it valuable, the immanent life itself is pushed to the background. Life (as immanent) is not affirmed, but a distrust exists. The logic is that life, with all it contains, like education, is only worthwhile if it gets justified from the outside. In other words, a transcendent account of education 'is only a coherent position to hold because it first denies the immanent meaningfulness which

education *already* has' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 70, emphasis in original). The basic assumption behind a transcendent educational approach is therefore one of distrust. This distrust is fundamentally part of the distrust and fear of radical immanence in general. Deleuze says that we fear immanence and therefore continually move back to notions of transcendence.

> The problem of immanence is not abstract or merely theoretical. It is not immediately clear why immanence is so dangerous, but it is. It engulfs sages and gods. What singles out the philosopher is the part played by immanence or fire. Immanence is immanent only to itself and consequently captures everything, absorbs All-One, and leaves nothing remaining to which it could be immanent. In any case, whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to Something, we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 45).

With his embracing of radical immanence, Deleuze is affirming life as meaningful in itself. No gods, no sages, no Something is needed to give meaning to life. This immanence is so overwhelming, so absorbing, that it sounds dangerous. It leaves us with uncertainty of life's value itself, because we are used to justify it on transcendent grounds.[3] However, Deleuze says the opposite is true: it should not instil fear or uncertainty, but joy and affirmation. This notion of radical immanence creates the possibility of a free, joyful affirmation of life. The implication for higher education curriculum transformation is that we should not be afraid to reject transcendent perspectives that education is useful only if it serves non-educational purposes. Rather, it should be seen as a meaningful endeavour in itself; education for education's sake is not dangerous, but meaningful. We should trust life. That is the underlying assumption about, and affirmation of, radical immanence in relation to higher education curriculum transformation.

To spell this out more directly we need to see education as an autotelic activity. It has its own value and goal; it is intrinsically worthwhile; it is

[3] The most obvious example of how we value life on transcendent grounds is found in religion. It is, for example, argued that "all higher religions require something really transcendent" (Verhoef 2013: 179), otherwise we can no longer really talk about religion.

meaningful and important in its own right; and it is a part of life that we can and should conceive of in a purely positive way. As such, education testifies to *amor fati*, which brings about the possibility of transformation in the here and now. The meaning of education can thus be described as 'a free gift to the new generation and as a gift of truly free time, [and] is all about *affirmation*' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 76, emphasis in original). This affirmation should be deaf to desires of a transcendent final ground. The danger lies in transcendence, not in immanence, because such a final ground might provide some comfort and safety, but in the end, it can suck away life from education.

Practically this means that one should not start with the questions of what education is all about (as if there were an external answer) and whether we are effectively reaching that goal when curriculum transformation is at hand. Rather, one should think again about the physical spaces (the here and now) and the embodiment of education. Education takes place in a 'very concrete and material *arrangement*, an organization of time, space, bodies and souls around a thing of study' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 76, emphasis in original). Our starting point should therefore be concerned with 'what might happen and what we might experience against the backdrop of these arrangements' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 76). In such a pedagogy the emphasis should be on 'experimentation, role-playing, and the questioning of power games. At the heart of this practice are an affinity with environmental concerns, the non-human world, and the subversion of commercial culture' (Cole 2016: 5). Such a pedagogy has thus an openness to new structures of thought, new forms of scientific investigations, a distancing from the canonical tradition of disciplines, and 'high degrees of social accountability' (Butler & Braidotti 2010: 325).

This social accountability is something Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019) also highlight and discuss as an outcome of education in and of radical immanence. It is an accountability based on the univocity of being, on our interconnectedness and inter-dependence with all beings which is fully affirmed. It is an accountability that is part of the truly free and creative call on the plane of immanence, a deep or fundamental ecological response that should be part of pedagogical practices.

This accountability is not again a transcendent justification or goal of education, but is, rather, part of a responsibility that develops from our emancipation from transcendent morality. It is not an emancipatory education which will still be of conceived of in functional terms but a logic of

responsibility principled by radical immanence. In other words, there is,

> no fixed ground, there are no procedures or readymade answers that might guide us. Responses have to be invented in each situation. It is impossible, therefore, to know in advance exactly what caring for the good of the world consists of . . . There are only some points of orientation that come from the subject matter itself (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 94).

Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019) furthermore explain, again without being prescriptive, that teaching in such a context requires 'connecting the present and particular situation (where a particular good is at stake) to the event of falling in love with a subject matter' (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 94). This is a notion that links back to the affirmation of life and the worldly love (of the here and now) of radical immanence.

4 Rethinking Immanence and Higher Education Curriculum Transformation

A pedagogy on the plane of immanence (in Deleuzian terms) where one is freed from representation, hierarchies, normative-transcendence, dualisms, and distrust has several positive implications: it allows for affirmation of life, of education as autotelic, for a flattened ontology with human beings having no special place in the cosmos, and emphasises interconnectedness and inter-dependence between and among all beings. While good reasons have been provided for a fully immanent pedagogy, questions about it should also be raised. For example, when does a pedagogy on the plane of immanence become too radical? Can the non-normative immanent nature of this pedagogy become dangerous, violent, and predatory? Is a pedagogy on the plane of immanence not destructive if it starts to destroy life? And why would that be wrong if that is part of our human nature? Is that not what a non-normative immanence entails?

These questions are comparable to Spinoza's naturalised ethics; 'humans should be naturalised, instead of nature being humanised' (Le Grange 2017: 8). Spinoza's ethics should be understood in terms of his notion of being as purely positive; of univocity of being; and of the One Whole Real (Substance). As discussed elsewhere (Verhoef 2017), Spinoza's strong

assertion of the positivity and univocity of Being grounds his equation of power and right in a radical way. A right is for Spinoza to act upon things according to one's nature. In other words, 'justice means that every entity is allowed to freely deploy its inherent power-potentials, that is, the amount of justice owed to me equals my power' (Žižek 2004: 236). In a closed network of cause and effect, my power equals my right. This is an anti-legalistic notion of rights as not something which one has, but something one does according to one's nature. Spinoza uses this, for example, as his key argument for what he saw as the natural inferiority of women. He contends that '... women have not *by nature* equal right with men' (Spinoza 1951: 387, emphasis added).

In Spinoza's work, this equation of rights and power eventually culminates in the radical suspension of any deontological ethical dimension. He proposes an ethic of is and not of ought. Ethical laws have only been given, he argues, because of our limited connection to seeing the true causal connection in things (or in our acts), because of our lack of knowledge. There is, however, only necessity involved and not freedom and choice: '... in reality God acts and directs all things simply by the necessity of His nature and perfection, and ... His decrees and volitions are eternal truths, and always involve necessity' (Spinoza 1951: 65). While one may argue that the human being is thus not necessarily deprived of its 'ethico-normative distinctiveness' on this plane of immanence (Le Grange 2017: 6), it seems that the knowledge humans obtain in this process is only about 'the accurate insights into the necessities which determine us' (Žižek 2004: 237). This means that we have no freedom of choice within this closed determined One Whole Real in which we find ourselves. For Spinoza, as for Deleuze, there is no gap or crack in the Real. We can have insights only into the cause and effect of our actions in this closed system – insights that might testify to an assertion of life, but also to an indifference towards it.

With such a naturalised ethics, there seems to be no real choice (freedom), and consequently no real ethics left. All we have is the determinacy of nature (cause and effect within a closed system) and power (equated to rights). We can only say how things are, and not how they ought to be. We can even exercise our power as a right – as given by nature – as we desire. It is clear that such a non-normative or natural ethics can quickly become destructive, violent, and even life denying. A pedagogy based on such a radical immanent non-normative ethic could become unsustainable and untenable. It is not only ethics that is a problem here, but also the loss of freedom with

complete determinism and necessity. It seems that we are doomed on this plane of immanence, within a closed whole Real, to have no real free choices. These two issues, the possibility of an ethics, and the possibility of freedom, are, however, both addressed by Deleuze in his philosophy, and it is crucial that we should examine this further.

As mentioned above, Deleuze (2007), with his plane of immanence, insists on the univocity of being. This plane of immanence implies a flat ontology, in line with Spinoza, in which all heterogeneous entities can be conceived of at the same level, without ontological exceptions or priorities. This implies that we (as subjects) and the objects are both constituted by each other. Deleuze emphasises that both are becoming in this univocity of being. What 'seems to separate us from the way reality really is out there is already the innermost constituent of reality itself' (Žižek 2004: 244). That we cannot ever fully know reality is not a sign of the limitation of our knowledge, but 'the sign that reality itself is 'incomplete', open, an actualization of the underlying virtual process of Becoming' (Žižek 2004: 244). There is thus an openness, a dynamic becoming on this plane of immanence within this univocity of Being. This differentiates Deleuze from Spinoza in a crucial way in terms of ethics and freedom.

Ansell-Pearson (2017) and Le Grange (2017) explain clearly that Deleuze's Spinozism does not flatten ontology without a concern with issues of normativity (as some new materialists will read Spinoza). Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza allows, for example, an ethical task of human emancipation in that Spinoza first allows for a better understanding of 1) how nature works (how we are implicated in it), but also 2) how we (as humans) are moved, in and by nature's forces, from passivity to a better active condition. Deleuze emphasises that we are in becoming. We have an active position within reality (this One Whole Real of Spinoza) where 1) an understanding of nature involves a sensibility of our interconnectedness, and 2) the appreciation that 'the human animal holds no special ontological place, but concerns a deep awareness of the need to *take action* in respecting and caring for the more-than-human-world' (Le Grange 2017: 6, emphasis in original). This is possible because of the human animal's individual and separate *conatus* (a Spinozian term that refers to the essence of modes or that which makes the individual thing persist) which allows it to have a greater number of affects. Affects are not about feelings or affections, but the 'potential-power of the body' (Deleuze *et al.* 1994: 154). Affects are '*beings* whose validity lies in themselves and

exceeds any lived' (Deleuze *et al.* 1994: 164, emphasis in original).[4] For Deleuze, one should define an animal or human being 'by the number of affects it is capable of' (Deleuze 1988: 124). Although there is no ontological privilege for human beings on the plane of immanence, there is a difference between humans and animals (and rocks) in terms of their affects. We should discover this as part of a life of experimenting because we do not know what affects we are capable of. Ansell-Pearson writes,

> In terms of our becoming-ethical we can say that we do not know what a body can do: it is a mode of practical living and experimenting, as well as, of course, a furthering the active life, the life of affirmativity, for example, cultivating the active affects of generosity and joyfulness, as opposed to the passive and sad affects of hatred, fear and cruelty (2017: 6).

For Deleuze and Guattari (1994) our becoming is happening at the same time as everything else's becoming. There is a continuous flux of pure becoming, on this plane of immanence (the flat ontology), one that is dynamic and open ended. It is a process of infinite becoming wherein we (as humans) may become aware of (or develop a sensibility to) our affects, our 'energetic relationships' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 132) and the affects and forces of which we are part. A Spinozian ethics calls one to cultivate active affects 'through being open to be affected by non-human modes, including non-sentient ones' (Le Grange 2017: 6). It means that we as humans do not inhabit earth, but that earth (and all its forces) inhabits us; we (as subjects) are getting absorbed. There is a rendering of the subject of imperceptible that should take place on this plane of immanence. Such active affects should (and here we find the normative of Deleuze's Spinozism) be an active becoming on this flat ontology: in other words, we should use our power (affects) to promote the

[4] Affect is discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in chapter seven of *What is Philosophy?* (1994). Important, in terms of our argument, is that they describe affect as "[t]his something can be specified only as sensation. It is a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons ... endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation. This is what is called an *affect"* (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 173).

interest of all life thus enhancing all life. This asks for understanding and experimentation on how to construct viable notions of good and evil in order to enhance life. Le Grange formulates the implication for this for education clearly.

> [A]lthough Deleuze's Spinozism does not privilege the human on an ontological level, it does not deny its ethico-normative distinctiveness. It is this ethico-normative distinctiveness of the human animal that is at the heart of an education aimed at cultivating (post)human sensibilities; an education that involves expanding the powers that enhance all life. Such an education involves a life-long affair of experimentation. But it does not simply mean exposing students to a range of different experiences, but in breaking old associations and forging new ones through a process of reasoning (2017: 8).

Deleuze's (1994) emphasis on the notion of becoming on the plane of immanence thus allows for a reading of Spinoza's ethics where there is an immanent normative at play. This is not a transcendent, deontological, eternal truth (etc.) that is normative, but an open one, and one that is constantly discovered and experienced on the plane of immanence where human beings exercise their bodily power and are affected by all forces of nature. It is a becoming where life itself is crucial. It is a non-normative ethic in that it denies a transcendent norm, but normative in the sense that we are interdependent and interconnected with all beings in a fundamental way. It implies an awareness of the univocity of being on the plane of immanence, but one where human beings retain an ethico-normative distinctiveness.

The question remains, however, whether there is not a loss of freedom, and of complete seizure of freedom by determinism and the necessity on this plane of immanence, within Spinoza's closed whole Real. If there is no gap or crack within this radical immanence, we seem to be trapped within the determinacy of nature (cause and effect). Deleuze emphasises that the plane of immanence is one of consistency (in agreement with Spinoza), but he adds that everything is becoming on this flat ontological plane. This creates an 'openness which aims to avoid the deterministic, all-totalising, Spinozan One-Whole Real' (Verhoef 2017: 10). Although it aims to avoid this, there is a question of whether it succeeds. In other words, if the ontological consistency of Deleuze's plane of immanence is taken seriously, it limits the Real, because for Deleuze

there cannot be any exceptions of priorities within this flat ontology. The human being has, for example, no priority or ontological privilege on this plane of immanence. There is no gap, no crack in Deleuze's radical immanence. There is, however, movement, along with becoming, dynamic forces, and affects, but one may argue (as Žižek 2004) does, that these are still confined to the limited space (the Real) of the plane of immanence.

It is on this point that it is crucial that Deleuze's radical immanence should be complemented by the work of Slavoj Žižek (2004) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2008). This will not entail a move away from immanence. It will not deny the importance of an immanent view of higher education curriculum transformation, as argued above in agreement with Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019), but a more nuanced understanding of immanence that will allow more human freedom, and a tenable appropriation to education.

Žižek (2004) speaks of a crack or a gap in immanence, which for him allows some inconsistencies on the plane of immanence, without moving to a transcendent position. As explained elsewhere, Žižek follows Hegel, who

> broadens the Real (and by implication freedom) with his acceptance of the irreducible rupture of/ in immanence which is in phenomena themselves and which amounts to an inconsistency within phenomena. By accepting this inconsistency within phenomena and the inconsistency within immanence itself, a gap or crack is allowed (albeit immanent) which disturbs the 'plane of consistency', the 'flat ontology'. In this way the all totalising Real is 'ruptured', becomes more inclusive for the transcendental dimension, and allows for the 'transcendent Beyond' (as immanence) to 'shine through' (Verhoef 2017: 10).

Žižek (2004) thus allows for a gap in immanence, for a disruption of the flat ontology, so that everything is not simply reduced to causality. He allows something imperceptible, for a light to shine through, for the gap that will allow human freedom.

In the same vein, Jean-Luc Nancy (2008) maintains that we have only this world. Nancy is also a radical immanent thinker and rejects transcendence completely. He does, however, move away from the notion of a closed-off immanence, or the radical immanence of Deleuze, with his concept of *transimmanence*. With transimmanence (trans + immanence) there seems to be

a definite choice for immanence, but a trans, a type of crossing over takes place from this immanence. This, according to Nancy, happens in our existence per se, 'in our infinite relationships where sense cuts across (trans-) between others, not as a crossing that goes outside, but passes toward an outer within world' (Verhoef 2016: 12). Nancy remarks that '[w]hat 'is not of this world' is not elsewhere: it is the opening in the world, the separation, the parting and the raising' (2008: 48). The opening in the world is the sense (meaning) that continuously circulates, which we continually create. There is thus, for Nancy, an opening (a gap) within immanence, but as with Žižek, it remains an opening within immanence.

There is a minimal difference here that separates Deleuze's immanence (as a flat ontology) from Žižek's gap in immanence and Nancy's transimmanence (as both still being immanent). The importance of this minimal difference (gap, crack, or trans in immanence) is that it avoids a complete full totalising Real (plane of consistency) – the deterministic Spinozan One-Whole Real – to allow more human freedom, and eventually a tenable appropriation of radical immanence to higher education curriculum transformation. It is on this point that we move beyond the work of Le Grange (2016 2017), and Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019) (among others) and where we aim to evoke further conversation on the importance of this gap or crack in immanence.

5 Conclusion

Deleuze's radical immanence is of crucial importance for our way of thinking about life (as such) and therefore also of higher education curriculum transformation. His plane of immanence offers the possibility for a clear affirmation and celebration of life. This has significant (and exciting) implications for pedagogy, namely that it allows for a move away from restrictions, prescriptions, or justification of education from any transcendent point of view. Education is understood as autotelic and it should celebrate itself – and life – as such. It furthermore allows for a flattened ontology where human beings have no special place, and where interconnectedness and inter-dependence between all beings are emphasised.

The question could be raised whether such a pedagogy in and of radical immanent might not be too radical? Will it not be a complete unethical pedagogy, even a destructive one? The answer to this question is that Deleuze's

radical immanence does allow for a new kind of ethical approach which is appropriate to higher education curriculum transformation – an ethic that is immanent, non-normative, and one that is in becoming, creative, and truly free. It is an ethic of in becoming, of exercising one's power with and within other beings – one where human beings retain an ethico-normative distinctiveness on a flat ontology. This flat ontology, or plane of immanence, should, however, not be understood as a closed One Whole Real (where determinism rules), but one where there is a possible gap, crack or trans within the immanence.

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Anné Verhoef
Professor
School of Philosophy
North-West University
Potchefstroom
anne.verhoef@nwu.ac.za

Petro du Preez
Professor
School of Professional Studies in Education
North-West University
Potchefstroom
petro.dupreez@nwu.ac.za

Contributors

Fouad Asfour is a writer and researcher working in collaborative frameworks on publications, exhibitions, performance and art exchange projects. He holds an MA in Linguistics from Vienna University, Austria, and an MA in Creative Writing from Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa. In 2008, he was a grant recipient of the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory. He is currently visiting researcher at Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. fouad.asfour@gmx.net; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1087-2879

Prof. Sylvan Blignaut is Professor in the Department of Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela University. His research interests centre on curriculum policy and theory, educational change, teacher epistemologies and decolonisation of higher education. During 2010- 2011 he was a Fulbright postdoctoral fellow in the USA, at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he focused on social justice issues in the curriculum. He has lectured a course work M Ed degree in Curriculum Policy, Development and Management at centres across Southern Africa. sylvan.blignaut@mandela.ac.za; sylvan.blignaut@mandela.ac.za

Dr. Gamuchirai Chakona has a PhD in Environmental Science from Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa. She is currently working as a Research Assistant at Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) where she provides academic research support in Amanzi for Food Project and administrative support for Research Ethics reviews in the Faculty of Education at Rhodes University. G.Chakona@ru.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3784-8980

Prof. Lesley Le Grange is Distinguished Professor in the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He has 230 publications to his credit and serves on editorial boards of nine peer-reviewed journals. He has delivered

more than 170 academic presentations and is recipient of several academic awards and prizes, the most recent the SAERA Honours Award (2019). Lesley Le Grange is President of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (IAACS), a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology (UK), a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa and rated as an internationally acclaimed researcher by the National Research Foundation. llg@sun.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7096-3609

Dr. Oscar Koopman is a Senior Lecturer in Chemistry in the Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town, South Africa. His primary area of research focusses on phenomenology, science education and curriculum issues. Dr Koopman is also the author of two monographs titled Science Education and Curriculum in South Africa published by Palgrave MacMillan and Science Education and Pedagogy in South Africa, published by Peter Lang. Additionally. In 2019 he received the global scholar award as an international visiting professor to Brock University in Niagara, Canada where he also serves on the advisory board of the Teaching Nelson Mandela Project which advocates for the advancement of Human Rights through education. koopmano@cput.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1508-3967

Prof. Suriamurthee Maistry is a professor in the School of Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He leads "The South African Textbook Research Project" and, "The Higher Education Pedagogy Project". His latest project entitled "Decolonising postgraduate supervision" focuses on research supervision practices in the context of decolonization debates in South Africa. maistrys@ukzn.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9623-0078

Dr. Mfundo Mandla Masuku is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Mpumalanga in the Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences. He holds a PhD in the field of Development Studies. His research interests include inclusive education, food security and scholarship of teaching and learning. Mandla.Masuku@ump.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3743-0779

Dr. Paul Mason has a PhD in Literary Studies from Rhodes University in Makhanda, South Africa. He lectures and supervises in the MA in Creative

Writing Programme and the Department of Literary Studies in English at Rhodes University. He has published four journal articles and presented papers at five conferences, locally and internationally. He has also published poetry, prose fiction, a play and critical reviews. He is currently working toward completion of a semi-fictional memoir. pm6308@gmail.com; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8100-792X

Yanela Ndabula is a PhD candidate in the Psychology Department, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa. She is also a researcher at the Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction unit and is currently undertaking a project on the effects of the Protecting Life in Global Health Health Assistance policy in South Africa. Her research interests are in contraception, reproductive health, youth sexualities and decolonialisation. y.ndabula@ru.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8436-8827

Dr. David O. Oluwole obtained his Doctor of Philosophy in Chemistry at Rhodes University, thereafter, he worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Rhodes University Institute for Nanotechnology Innovation and also as a Writing Group Manager at the Rhodes University Center for Postgraduate Studies. David is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Chemistry at the Cape Peninsula University Technology, South Africa. davido.oluwole@gmail.com; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3018-327X

Prof. Petro du Preez is a Professor in Curriculum Studies at the North-West University in South Africa. Her research interests includes Curriculum Studies in higher education, Philosophy of Education and human rights education in diverse cultural and religious contexts. She has published widely on these topics. She is the South African representative of the General Assembly of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies and on the Advisory Board of the International Network of Philosophers of Education. Petro is also the Chair for the Special Interest Group in Curriculum Studies of the South African Education Research Association. petro.dupreez@nwu.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9100-6461

Dr. Lindelani Qalukubona Qwabe is a senior lecturer at Mangosthu University of Technology in the Department of Chemistry. He obtained his PhD (Chemistry) in 2016 and has research interest in Catalysis and

Environmental Chemical Engineering. He has contributed publications in international and peer reviewed journal in processing of hydrogen for use in fuel cells. He secured NRF funding on various occasions and reviewed articles for accredited internal journals. lqwabe@mut.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2266-2104

Prof. Labby Ramrathan is a Professor at the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a NRF rated researcher. He simultaneously serves as President of the South African Education Research Association (SAERA). He has been in leadership positions within the School in various capacities including Head of School, Acting Deputy Dean and Acting Dean. He has been involved in teacher education for more than 30 years spanning faculty administration, academic teaching, researching higher education, teacher development and curriculum studies. He has been involved in several institutional, national and international project works and has published widely in these areas of scholarship. Currently he is leading the College of Humanities curriculum transformation process within the context of decolonization. ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9963-0675

Dr. Primrose Thandekile Sabela is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Mpumalanga in the Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences. She holds a PhD in the field of Development Studies. Her research interests include rural and sustainable development, gender, human security and development, diversity and inclusivity in higher education. Thandeka.Sabela@ump.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7189-9194

Prof. Shan Simmonds is an Associate Professor in Curriculum Studies and a member of the Edu-HRight research unit (Education and Human Rights in Diversity) at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). She is an NRF-rated researcher in curriculum studies, higher education and human rights education who publishes actively. Research leadership positions include Associate-Editor for the journal Transformation in Higher Education, deputy secretary on the executive committee of the South African Education Research Association, on the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies's publication committee and on the editorial board of the International Journal of Doctoral Studies. shan.simmonds@nwu.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5005-9906

Prof. Anné Hendrik Verhoef is a Professor in Philosophy and Director of the School of Philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities at North-West University. He studied at the University of Stellenbosch and at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. His research interests are in the philosophy of religion, metaphysics, the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutics, ethics, and the philosophy of happiness. He published various works on transcendence and the transcendent in contemporary culture, and its relation to ethics, politics, meaning of life and happiness. He is the associate editor of the academic journal *Transformation in Higher Education*. anne.verhoef@nwu.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9627-1969

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