

Theorising Open Curriculum Charges as Pathway to Responsiveness in South African Higher Education

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Abstract

Curriculum discourse in South African higher education has always involved debates around responsiveness and how best to make the curriculum respond to local needs. This was amongst the reasons for the call to decolonise the curriculum. With encounters in education being a function of the curriculum at play, it follows that the curriculum shapes the educational experience, and how prepared students are for the job market, be it to create employment or to seek such. With the rate of unemployment in South Africa increasing, the nation needs graduates who are job creators, not jobseekers. The open curriculum offers an excellent pathway for educational encounters which are not only responsive, but uniquely career-oriented. This chapter adopts Aoki's conceptualisation of the curriculum as lived experience, making three fundamental arguments. First, the chapter argues that there is a need for the deconstruction of academic curriculum standardisation. Second, the chapter argues for an itinerant curriculum; and lastly, the chapter argues for curriculum encounters propelled by responsive curriculum matters in the South African higher education. The chapter concludes that career pathways have been hindered by poor curriculum choices. Such has been engendered by curriculum standardisation and hegemonic curriculum practices adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. For a higher-education curriculum to be responsive, students, as co-constructors or creators of knowledge, need to be part of the process, driving the change they want to see in their future.

Keywords

open curriculum – responsiveness – higher education – students – experiences

1 Introduction

In 1994, South Africa began immediately to revise its curriculum at all levels after the election, so as to purge it of every vestige of controversial and racially offensive content. Over the years, the curriculum has been reconstructed to reflect the interests and values of the South African people; however, these transitions are yet fully to produce the expected deliverables (Chisholm, 2005). According to Chetty and Pather (2015), the curriculum construction issue of the South African higher-education system is somewhat complex. Classrooms are filled with students who suffer from extreme inequality in terms of primary- and secondary-school education foundation, race, and class. Such students also lack financial and other available resources. This implies that the education system is in dire need of a curriculum that is deliberate in its construction of knowledge, and which can identify with each individual it applies to. A curriculum is part of the foundational elements of effective schooling, teaching, and learning; with scholars defining such according to their understanding of the concept. According to Wen Su (2012), even though experts are divided in their perception of the term 'curriculum,' a common meaning can be derived from the origin of the word itself, which is 'currere.' 'Currere' is the Latin word for 'to run the racecourse' used by chariots. Such courses are planned to keep each racing horse on a particular path, completing particular tasks, and scaling certain hurdles before reaching the finish line. For students, these tasks and hurdles include study periods, sporting activities, cultural events, tests with examinations, and others. The path includes sets of objectives, courses of study, study plans, documents, and the learning experiences of the student.

As stated in the Glossary of Education Reform (2015), a curriculum encompasses the learning standards and objectives/outcomes expected to be achieved by teachers/students, including the mode of assessment that will eventually be used to evaluate performance. The curriculum plans the whole course or programme of the student, giving details of academic content, structure of the lessons to be taught, learning materials to be used, and requirements for assessing and grading the student at the end of the course/programme. Sindhu (2017), on the other hand, defines curriculum using four points. First, it is a plan of the vision and structure of educators compiled to guide students in acquiring knowledge and gaining skills. Second, it is a product of the school which contains courses and syllabi, defining the purpose of the school, and revealing its entire learning programme. Third, the curriculum expresses intended learning outcomes (ILO) for students, giving clear definitions of how these skills and knowledge will be acquired through materials and activities. Last, the curriculum is a planned learning experience revealing the eventual learning outcomes of the student.

From the above definitions, a common understanding is that a curriculum is pre-planned, most times giving little or no consideration to the changing state of knowledge. This is the dilemma of the South African higher-education system, resulting in issues that question whether adequate learning actually takes place in these institutions of learning. Global societal interests and needs, economic orientation, and the activities of the global market have continued to change in recent times, with technological advancements and inventions infiltrating every aspect of human life, changing environments. This implies that the planned learning process in South African institutions of knowledge must continually adjust to respond to these needs and changes. Such response will produce well-trained individuals with the knowledge and skills required to handle the opportunities and challenges that will make a difference. This feat can be achieved with an open-ended curriculum that gives students the freedom to learn and pursue knowledge compatible with their background and interests, thereby creating a different learning experience. This chapter adopts the concept of the curriculum as explained by the well-known curriculum scholar, Ted Aoki, who made a distinction between the curriculum as a plan, and the curriculum as a lived experience.

2 Ideologies of Ted Aoki's Concept of a Curriculum

In Aoki's lecture on "legitimizing lived curriculum: toward a curricular landscape of multiplicity," the researcher clearly explained the relationship and complexity of the curriculum both as-plan and as-lived (Aoki, 1993). Aoki posits that curriculum as-plan is compiled by education stakeholders outside the learning environment. The as-plan details the activities and study guide for students and educators, resources to be used during the learning process, and the eventual mode of assessment for evaluating students. This implies that this curriculum is put together without the knowledge of the dynamics of the classroom and the uniqueness of students that it has planned to guide: and therein lies the problem. The curriculum as-plan will not only be interpreted differently by educators; its implementation will also vary. The planned curriculum, which embodies what students are expected to learn, rarely coincides with what they actually learn in school. In fact, the planned curriculum creates a tension for educators. Educators are caught between ensuring that students satisfy the requirements contained in the curriculum on the one hand, and promoting the construction of knowledge through their classroom experiences on the other hand.

This "tension site," according to Alonso and Garcia (2017), is revealed in four dimensions. First is the tension created by the planned curriculum being

structured on the assumption that the needs of the students are already known: the educator is expected to satisfy these needs. The educator who may now be faced with students with different needs not considered in the planned curriculum, struggles to unify both, at the same time achieving the expected objectives. Second is the tension that originates because the educator is expected to achieve the objectives of the curriculum within a specified amount of time. Such must be achieved without due consideration for real-life factors that may hinder this. The educator is now forced to rush these lessons, even when faced with students who do not learn at the same pace. The third origin of tension, as identified by Alonso and Garcia (2017), is the issue of language. The educator is caught between speaking technically, as expected by the planned curriculum, and speaking from the point of experience of the students the educator is contending with. Uncertainty is the last dimension discussed by the authors, who explain the educators' tension emanating from the struggle to adapt the planned curriculum to the reality faced in the classroom with these students. Aoki pushed for the acceptance of diverse research orientations to curriculum, tailoring the curriculum to accommodate, involve, and reflect the views and socio-cultural imperatives of the people it has been designed to guide (Aoki, 1993, 2005).

Aoki campaigned for the adoption of a unique space (a bridge) between curriculum as-plan and curriculum as-lived. The author illustrates this kind of learning using his experience with a Grade 5 teacher named Miss O (Aoki, 1986/2005). As stated by Aoki, Miss O dwelt between "the horizon of the curriculum as-plan as she understands it and the horizon of the curriculum as-lived experience with her pupils." This implies that Miss O taught her pupils using a plan. However, Miss O also sought new ways of understanding and interpreting the subjects to reflect current situations (Lee, 2017). Aoki (1986/2005) insists that a curriculum should be constructed to dialogue across cultures, while encouraging dynamic relationships among these cultures. However, the curriculum should be authentic and relevant to its original societal environment (Pinar, 2005). Magrini (2015) opines that most educators find themselves dwelling in between the curriculum as-plan and curriculum as-lived experience, as did Miss O. This creates some sort of tension, ambiguity, indecision, and uncertainty for them. To ensure the proper acquisition of knowledge in South African higher institutions without this "tension site," the curriculum should be constructed in such a way that its implementation will be relevant to the unique potentials of the educators and students involved in the learning process.

One of Aoki's earliest curriculum projects was the Hobbema curriculum-development project for the Hobbema natives of Alberta, Canada. This project had two major objectives. The first was to adjust the curriculum content of

their schools to include the educational goals as defined by these people. The second was to change the process of curriculum development to meaningfully involve the Hobbema community parents, students, and teachers (Aoki, 2005; Kerr, 2016; Magrini, 2015). Such clearly defines the curriculum as a lived experience. This implies that the curriculum now acknowledges individual and societal differences, accommodating lived meanings and legitimate, thoughtful, everyday narratives. As Aoki (2005, p. 365) states, “an educated person, first and foremost, understands that one’s ways of knowing, thinking, and doing flows from who one is. Such a person knows that an authentic person is no mere individual, an island unto oneself, but is a being-in-relation-with others, and hence is, at core, an ethical being. Such a person knows that being an educated person is more than possessing knowledge or acquiring intellectual or practical skills, and that basically, it is being concerned with dwelling a right in thoughtful living with others.”

Okyere (2018) postulates that curriculum, as a lived experience, is reconceptualised to take into consideration the dynamics and uniqueness of the teachers and students involved in the learning process. The implementation of the curriculum as-lived should see educators and students applying the curriculum as-plan to their individual situations and unique experiences. This simply means that knowledge acquired in institutions of learning should directly connect to knowledge acquired from the realities of life. Curriculum developers should therefore consider the possibilities available in obtaining knowledge through understanding and lived experiences as they develop the curriculum (Okyere, 2018). Experience precedes any kind of learning, therefore, this curriculum that constructs and reconstructs knowledge through experience is greatly valued. It affords the students and their teachers the freedom to enact their uniqueness on the curriculum. The foundations of the open curriculum are built on this “freedom to learn.” Just as Aoki tailored a curriculum for the Hobbema natives to reflect their worldwide view, professional scholars in the South African education system have continuously pushed for the same, so as to facilitate changes in the South African higher-education landscape.

3 Contextualising Open Curriculum in South African Higher Education

According to Kelly (2017), “an open curriculum system is one which incorporates an educational approach designed to accommodate the learning needs and career goals of students by providing flexible opportunities for entry into and exit from the educational program, and by capitalising on their previous

relevant education and experience.” This curriculum gives the students the option to design their own programmes of study, majors, or concentrations. It also constitutes a recognisable tradition, with shared values and common experiences among the different stakeholders of education, distinguishing it from other models (Teagle Foundation, 2006). In the South African higher-education system, most students study at public universities and further-education training colleges that use a planned curriculum, as endorsed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and Council on Higher Education (CHE). These institutions that offer qualifications such as national certificates, undergraduate degrees, diplomas, and postgraduate degrees are autonomous, but subsidised by the government (Moloi et al., 2014). The South African higher-education system, over time, has configured and reconfigured these institutions and the curriculum used. This has produced quality graduates who would promote social and economic development in the country. The role of these graduates in advancing the country is of some importance; and this has made the process of their knowledge construction equally important. It is widely argued that the South African higher-education curriculum is a relic of the past, containing streaks of the Apartheid era. As such, it should be decolonised to reflect the interests of the South African learning space (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). As argued by Maila (2010), an open curriculum will therefore ensure that the learning process is constructed such that students do not only seek knowledge about the world they live in, but also create knowledge that can be applied to their individual environments.

According to Moloi et al. (2014), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa commissioned a task team to investigate the undergraduate curriculum structure. Findings of the task team reveal three major issues. First was the issue of discontinuity between secondary and higher education. Second was the issue of students being inadequately prepared to understand the curriculum transitions which have made the South African education curriculum intellectually demanding. Third, and most important, is the issue of the inability of the curriculum to prepare South African graduates to engage the complex local and global environments, thriving in them. This implies that the curriculum needs to be restructured to become responsive to contextual issues and the current realities of life, in general. Creating a responsive curriculum is a solution that an open curriculum will proffer, in the quest to make South African higher-education students relevant to the ever-changing local and global society. Maila (2010) posits that a curriculum not constructed to be open-ended hinders the creation of multiple perspectives in knowledge acquisition. This makes it impossible for academic institutions to produce students

who can prosper within environments having a complex economic, political, bio-diverse, and socio-cultural setting. An open curriculum gives students the freedom to innovate. This makes it possible for students to engage multiple perspectives, creating connections to the realities of life, such as hunger, conflict, and pollution. Such positive and pertinent responses will help students flourish in these complex environments. This multiplicity of perspectives in the higher-education learning process is not realisable in the traditional, fragmented teaching and learning process.

Kridel (2010) opines that an open curriculum revolves around the student, with emphasis on personal interests. The open curriculum reveals the influence of the learning process on each individual student. An open curriculum is implicitly fluid, flexible, active, and individualised. It therefore encourages students to pursue learning compatible with their background and individual interests. As stated by Jaschik (2019) and Brown University (2019), students become innovative, rather than confining themselves to a specific, traditional academic setting.

4 Curriculum Responsiveness in South African Higher Education

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is one of the initiatives by the government to restructure and reconfigure the educational landscape in South Africa (CHE, 2013). SAQA has an eight-level framework grouped into three bands, namely, the general education and training (GET), the further education and Training (FET), and the higher education and training (HET), covering levels five to ten. As stated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013), higher education is defined as a level of education provided at academies, universities, colleges, vocational universities, and institutions of technology. Higher education is also provided by certain other collegiate-level institutions, such as vocational schools, trade schools, and career colleges, that award degrees or professional certificates. The South African higher-education institutions and its curricula play an important role in the social, cultural, and economic development of the nation, and the global society. Its curricula must therefore be structured to provide the necessary skills and innovation-oriented education experience needed to achieve this (Department of Education, 1999). Since the globe is rapidly changing, higher-education curricula easily become obsolete if they do not reflect the realities in society. Therefore, the curriculum must be reviewed to respond to these changes, creating a relationship between it and everyday life. This implies that the South African higher-education

curriculum must be responsive to the ever-changing global environment, equipping students with new ideas and knowledge to combat new challenges as they spring up.

Ameyaw et al. (2017) posit that a curriculum should be flexible and adaptive, bridging the gap between abstract theories on education, universal knowledge, and the realities of life. A responsible curriculum is one that is relevant, diverse, integrated, and flexible. Emphasising the need for a flexible curriculum, Peters (2000) argues that a curriculum must no longer be made uniform and fixed for long periods: it should be variable and adaptable to current realities of life. The curriculum should not only include the learning requirements of the student: it must consider the challenges and demands of the present, while anticipating the future. It is therefore an expectation that higher-education curriculum improve its responsiveness to the South African societal interests and needs. Such have continually changed over time. The curriculum should be structured to be relevant to these interests and needs. Moll (2004) developed a multi-faceted, stratified model of curriculum responsiveness, in which four dimensions were employed to evaluate the relevance of a curriculum to societal interests. First is economic/policy responsiveness; second is institutional/cultural responsiveness; third is disciplinary responsiveness; and fourth is pedagogical/learning responsiveness. All four dimensions will be discussed so as to reveal their implications for curriculum construction; however, the focus will be on the institutional/cultural responsiveness dimension. This is in line with this chapter's discussion on tailoring a curriculum as a lived experience, as proposed by Ted Aoki. Each society is unique; and the construction of knowledge within its institutions of learning should reflect the identity of the students, and their cultural orientations.

Economic responsiveness essentially refers to responsiveness to the labour market and the development of work-related skills. This means that the curriculum generally prepares students for employment. Higher education is therefore a vital investment in human resources as it involves promoting knowledge that will eventually translate to economic development. Experts insist that there is a vital relationship between education and economic performance: education is central to global economic competitiveness. Even though the world does not operate one economic system, the levels of productivity and competitiveness are brought about by knowledge. This makes the connection between higher education and the economy important, and the responsiveness of the curriculum key (Francis et al., 2010). South African graduates should exhibit critical and analytical ability, flexibility in their application of knowledge to changing situations, independence in planning and executing tasks, self-motivation, and initiative and willingness to adapt to an

ever-changing economic environment. A responsive higher-education curriculum will ensure that South African institutions produce 21st century graduates who can meet the needs of the South African society, and can also compete on the global front. The formation and development of knowledge in these higher institutions of learning will not only prepare students for employability. Such preparedness will impart flexibility and sensitivity towards global economic and policy changes.

When a curriculum is discipline-based, it will give students the opportunity to practise their disciplinary skills throughout their fields, allowing for later courses to build on this foundation. A discipline-based curriculum will encourage specialisation, depth of content of knowledge, and integrity in the conventions of the discipline. As stated by Ogude et al. (2005), disciplinary responsiveness implies that university curricula provide students with an effective and appropriate induction into the explanatory concepts, techniques, and practices that have been developed in various disciplines and academic fields. Fomunyam and Teferra (2017) suggest that a curriculum be updated with current research. It must also produce new knowledge in the field. A responsive curriculum should ensure integration between the way knowledge is produced and the way students are educated and trained in the discipline area. Designing a curriculum that is discipline-based will ensure that it is articulate, research-oriented in generating new knowledge, appropriate in knowledge acquisition, and applicable to both classical disciplines and interdisciplinary studies. A pedagogically responsive curriculum is designed to be sensitive to the diverse cultural and educational background of students (Ogude et al., 2005). Every student has different needs; meaningful learning cannot take place if the curriculum is not sensitive to these needs. Students have different approaches to learning: some struggle more than others. This may be owing to the challenge of adapting to the new epistemic culture which is unfamiliar. As stated by Fomunyam and Teferra (2017), the teaching strategy entailed in the curriculum should be skilful. The strategy should provide learning opportunities. It should respond to the learning needs of each student, creating access to the epistemic context of the institution. Students should therefore be taught in terms that are accessible to them and assessed in ways that they can comprehend. The curriculum should be designed using strategies that can identify with students' needs, transforming their cognitive and knowledge structures. Economic, disciplinary, and pedagogic responsiveness can only be achieved if the curriculum first identifies with the culture, individual identity, and diverse ethnicity of the student. This justifies the focus of this chapter on cultural responsiveness.

South Africa has had a corrosive and discriminatory past (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). The country's democratic institutions are new and fragile, and

social issues such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice still need attention. Therefore, higher-education institutions in South Africa should be sensitive to these issues, while strategising on knowledge generation and dissemination. A culturally responsive curriculum will adopt cultural knowledge, past experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students, to make learning encounters more relevant and effective. Higher-education curriculum should therefore be responsive to the cultural diversity of the students. Such can be achieved by incorporating multiple cultural reference points that acknowledge diversity, and constitute various alternative pathways for students. Even after the curriculum is Africanised to engage the South African student, in order to support effective learning, the curriculum should not be dominated by the culture of an ethnic majority, whilst ignoring students of non-majority origin. It should respect the legitimacy of different cultures, encouraging students to value all cultures, and relating new information to students' life experiences.

A culturally responsive curriculum connects the home to the school, while meeting societal expectations and needs. It utilises the background, knowledge, and experiences of students to inform how decisions are made (Misco, 2018). This brings about multidimensionality in curriculum design, the process of learning, the climate of the classroom, and teacher-student interaction. A culturally responsive curriculum is one that creates cultural sensibility and sensitivity among teachers and students. As stated by Raisinghani (2016),

this would enable them to engage deliberately in teaching and learning moments as (trans-multi) cultural human beings who are willing to transcend self-absorbed hegemonic identities of 'I think, therefore I am' [cogito, ergo sum], and understand relational existence as 'ubuntu' – I am because we are.

5 Theorising Curriculum Charges as a Pathway to Responsiveness

As stated by Miller (2014), the process of curriculum theorising involves thinking, imagining, positing, reconsidering, reinterpreting, and envisaging anew various situated and contingent conceptions of curriculum and their obvious and inextricably intertwined relationship with teaching and learning. This assertion by Miller (2014) implies that a curriculum can only be theorised through experience with the active involvement of educators and students. All participants in the teaching and learning process should be constantly involved in the process of constructing the curriculum. This is opposed to the

usual practice of constructing a one-size-fits-all type of curriculum plan, by stakeholders who are mostly not directly involved in the teaching and learning experience. For the purpose of clarity, this chapter will discuss the operations of the open curriculum, based on some curricular charges, as discussed by Fomunyam and Teferra (2017). These curricular charges determine the responsiveness of a curriculum within the higher-education landscape, further exposing its application to the development of a discipline. These charges are responsibility, consciousness, commitment, and project-related learning. The above-mentioned charges are discussed to reveal how the open curriculum will encourage South African students to self-reflect, engage with their environment, and shape their curricula to reflect their interests and aspirations.

Responsibility is a multidimensional curricular charge which sees students first playing an active role in the direction of their learning process, making them responsible for how they learn. Second is the reflection of responsibility of their teachers and mentors on how students transform their immediate community, and, by extension, the society in general, as a result of the teaching and learning process. According to Fomunyam (2014), curriculum theorising should be done from an individualist standpoint, reflecting students' application of responsibility in handling assignments, introducing initiatives, and their general participation in classroom activities. The teaching and learning process sees students gaining understanding at different levels and frequencies. It is therefore logical to allow them to assume more responsibility in the process. Students' involvement in the curriculum could include determining curricular goals, content, methodology, activities, materials, and means of assessment. As stated by Carpenter and Pease (2013, p. 38), "students learn more when they are active participants in their own learning." When asked about the abandoned outcomes-based education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005 of the South Africa education system, a participant in a study by Fomunyam (2014) attributed the failure to incompatibility with the South African student. As stated by this participant, "we as students were supposed to actively participate in the knowledge creation process thereby gaining critical skills and self-confidence." This shared responsibility will help students to think carefully and in specific terms about their personal educational goals. Students can then express these goals to their teachers, whose duty will be to guide them in reaching such goals. This can be achieved with the use of an open curriculum. Such will allow for shared responsibility. This will optimise student performance, as learning will correspond with their needs, interests, and abilities. The open curriculum offers flexibility and independence. It combines mentorship with engaging content, developing confidence, and encouraging critical thinking. The practice of making the teacher the installer of the curriculum, thereby

limiting students to the understanding of the teacher, is counterproductive. This situation creates superficial levels of comprehension, which mostly does not guarantee success beyond the classroom. This charge of responsibility involves elements such as targeted instruction, flexible content, student reflection, and ownership. As potential collaborators in the design of their own education, participation in the curriculum will make for a more active and critical citizenry, who will then have the power to transform their communities, and by extension, the global society.

Discussing consciousness as a charge for curriculum responsiveness, Fomunyam and Teferra (2017) reveal that most teachers and mentors are unaware that their actions during the teaching and learning process exert great influence on the students. A responsive curriculum is one that awakens the consciousness of teachers and students to their roles in the teaching and learning environment. In 1971, Paul Freire addressed the concept of consciousness in education. Freire argued that the main focus of education is to ensure that students develop an understanding of the social, economic, and political problems that surround them. Students become critically conscious of these issues, driving them to undertake actions that would bring change. This implies that the teaching and learning process is a veritable tool in shaping the lives of students: it can either make or mar them. As depicted by Madeleine Grumet's understanding of a curriculum, "when we say we are educating someone, we are introducing that person to ways of being and acting in the world that is new to his or her experience" (Grumet, 1995, p. 8). Grumet's views bring to light the role of teachers and instructors who are of great importance in this charge of making the curriculum responsive. The researcher's perspective also exposes the importance of the role of the curriculum in shaping the thought processes of the students. For example, as observed by Robinson (2018) in discussing historical consciousness in South African education, the way teachers educate students on Apartheid history is critical. Apparently, South African students are taught about the events of some of the turning points of this history, such as the Sharpeville massacre, the Langa march, the Soweto uprising, the release of Nelson Mandela, and the cumulative ending with the 1994 democratic elections. Most teachers describe these events as though all of South Africa's problems, including poverty, racism, discrimination, and violence ended with this election. They do this, totally ignoring the link between these past events and the current problems faced by South Africa as a nation. This leaves students with little or no, or at best inaccurate understanding of how their present reality connects with their history. As stated by Zacharais (2004), working with the concept of curriculum as making sense of the world presupposes a strong

interest on the teacher's part. The teacher's own curriculum is necessarily in place as personal, yet in a complex integration with all lifeworlds, including the curricula and lifeworlds of the students.

Profound comprehension requires the active participation of the student, who will become persistent and enthusiastic about achieving academic success. Such enthusiasm is one of the most important factors in learning (Kim & Schallert, 2014), and is only made possible through commitment. Commitment, as a curricular charge, is also multidimensional. The students' commitment depends, in most cases, on the teachers' commitment. This re-echoes the charge of consciousness, as the efforts of the teachers rub off onto the students. The role played by the modern teacher is much more extensive than in the past. Teachers are now situated along major lines that resonate between classrooms and the larger community (Oloruntegbe et al., 2010). This implies that teachers need to be fully devoted to continuous self-improvement, for concerted promotion of a self-regenerating educational system, for a self-regenerating society. A responsive curriculum is one that is fully implemented so as to ensure its application. However, this can be completely achieved through commitment by both students and teachers to the school and to society. Fomunyam and Teferra (2017) postulate that some teachers lack commitment owing to low remuneration, or archaic institutional architecture. In the words of a participant in the study by Fomunyam and Teferra (2017), some South African professors "are very backward in their thinking" and most times just "want to remain in their comfort zone." This lack of commitment will discourage innovations and initiatives in their implementation of the curriculum on the part of the teachers. This will, in turn, affect the approach students will have to school work, which will further cause a whole array of economic, social, and cultural issues (Oloruntegbe et al., 2010).

Project-related learning is sustainable because of its symbiotic link with the environment. However, some South African academics initiate irrelevant socio-political projects in order to avoid the "rigor and vigorousness of disciplinarily" (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). Teachers need to understand that their projects meet a real need in the world beyond their classroom. To add relevancy to these projects, teachers must partner with their students. This implies that, if teaching and learning is problem-based or project-driven, it fosters collaboration between students and teachers. Through critical thinking, both parties develop sustainable ideas and concepts, while presenting solutions. These projects encourage student, teacher, and curriculum interaction; all of which, therefore, need to be relevant. Another participant in this study by Fomunyam and Teferra (2017) described the research some South African

educators conduct as “baffling,” being backward, archaic, and irrelevant. While carrying out disciplinary research, teachers should ensure that quality, authenticity, and relevance has potential societal relevance. In order to strengthen the ability of the curriculum to become responsive, experience from these projects encourages students’ intellectual development. Such is vital to their immediate learning environment, and to society as a whole.

6 Conclusion

Curriculum responsiveness has become a highly prioritised issue in the South African education system. This is because the inability of the curriculum to respond economically, disciplinarily, pedagogically, or culturally presents detrimental effects to the student, teacher, and to society, in general. Higher-education institutions in South Africa are faced with many and varied challenges. In their bid to enhance curriculum responsiveness, several solutions have been suggested, for example, decolonisation of the curriculum (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). This chapter argues for the deconstruction of the curriculum, so as to enhance its relevance locally, regionally, and globally. This demands that the curriculum be structured as uniquely South African, born of the needs of South African society, while also addressing global relevance. This was inferred from Aoki’s campaign for the implementation of the curriculum as a lived experience. Such will see the curriculum constructed as relevant to the unique potentials of the educators and students involved in the learning process.

This chapter by no means implies that the South African Department of Education should give students the ultimate responsibility or authority to plan their curriculum and research. Rather, it is supporting only to a certain degree the full participation of students. An open curriculum is student-centred; as such, it will encourage students to reflect on what they are learning, and how they are learning it. A student-centred curriculum is based on four major objectives. The first is to tailor each student’s programme to personal needs, interests, and abilities. The second is to promote each student’s independence and dependability; while the third objective is to enhance the student’s social skills. Last, a student-centred curriculum with relevant project activities will increase the student’s sense of responsibility towards others. It will also improve students’ critical thinking skills, and not merely rote knowledge required for success in the real world. An open curriculum will further encourage individuality and learning through experimentation and integration of the various disciplines.

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