

Theorising Curriculum Approaches and Praxis

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Curriculum studies is at the core of the educational endeavour: it informs what happens in every educational institution. As a result of the criticality or primacy of the curriculum, every educational practitioner appears to claim expertise in curriculum matters, and in the direction the field of curriculum studies should take. The curriculum practitioner, especially in Africa, has been given little or no space to theorise, orienting the future of the field in Africa. Instead, European and American curriculum theorists have been allowed to exert a marked influence on the nature and direction of African theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, especially in relation to curriculum studies. This situation raises fundamental questions about the future of education in Africa in general, and curriculum studies in particular. While Europe and America seem to be experimenting with new philosophical paradigms in curriculum studies, Africa seems to be trailing behind by ten or fifteen years. A case in point is the implementation in South Africa in the late nineties of outcomes-based education (OBE) (a European and American theoretical enterprise), although there was clear evidence that it would not work. Is Africa, therefore, doomed to repeat the mistakes of Europe and America in curriculum studies? Has education in Africa preconditioned the theoriser only to explore traditions from the global North, rather than experimenting and articulating alternative pathways for education in Africa? Must curriculum theorising in Africa slavishly follow the traditions of theorising laid down by the global North, or can such traditions be used as springboards for the articulation of alternative perspectives, as we strive to develop African curriculum matters?

This edited volume seeks to answer these questions and many others related to curriculum theory, theorising, and the theoriser. The publication seeks to arrest traditions and experiments on alternative approaches and pathways, rather than recycle worn-out theories and traditions. This book seeks to incite or spark a revolution in the field of curriculum studies in Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular, by exploring, amongst other things, ways in which African contextual matters can form the basis of curriculum theory and theorising. The book also seeks to take into consideration the person and agency of the theoriser, to forge new paths for the future.

Berkvens, van den Akker, and Brugman (2014) see curriculum as a plan for teaching and learning, while Khoza (2019) sees it as a plan of teaching and learning. On the one hand, curriculum is referred to as the plan for teaching and learning if it is at the intended stage. At this stage, planning that produces a prescribed document for teaching and learning takes place before the teaching and learning processes unfold. On the other hand, curriculum is defined as the plan of teaching and learning at the practised and assessed stages (Khoza, 2019). At these stages, planning that produces a reflective document is generated after the processes of teaching and learning have taken place. These basic definitions of curriculum result in different approaches to curriculum, namely, descriptive, operational, and pragmatic approaches. The chapters in this book use one or more of these approaches to theorise different stages (intended, practised, and assessed) and levels (international, national, institutional, teacher, and learner) of curriculum. Therefore, this introduction discusses the three approaches, three stages, and five levels used in theorising the curriculum.

1 Curriculum Approaches

Theorising a curriculum tends to follow one or more of the dominating curriculum approaches. Approaches are categorised into descriptive, operational, and pragmatic approaches. Descriptive approaches are driven by prescribed content and objectives that produce a specific system of dealing with curriculum. When scholars theorise within the frames of the descriptive approaches, subject or discipline content becomes a common factor: such are motivated by a system of claiming powerful knowledge (Biesta, 2015; Hoadley, 2018; Tyler, 2013). In other words, content and objectives are specified before any teaching action takes place. Content is the school knowledge taught, and objectives are short-term goals for teaching (Hoadley, 2018). Other important concepts of this approach are teaching activities and assessment of learning (summative assessment). Teaching activities are driven by specific instructions from the teachers that drill students to master their subject content, so that the teachers may claim to achieve their objectives. Summative assessment, as a system of gathering, analysing, and storing information from the students in order to grade them, is positioned at the end of the teaching spectrum. Summative assessment is used to establish whether students have mastered their subject content, establishing what the students are cognitively missing in order to pass or fail (Fomunyan, 2017). Although there may be other curriculum concepts involved in dealing with the curriculum under the descriptive approach, these

four become the pillars of this approach. The descriptive approach is the opposite of the operational approach.

The operational approach is driven by achievement of outcomes. Outcomes are operational statements that are expected to be achieved by learners at the end of a learning process (Hyland, Kennedy, & Ryan, 2006; Maharajh, Davids, & Khoza, 2013). Outcomes use operational verbs that are observable or measurable from students after they have learnt. However, there are various resources that produce activities used to generate the content to be assessed in order to establish whether students have achieved the outcomes (Dlamini, 2018; le Grange, 2016). In other words, content is not prescribed in this approach, but it is generated through activities driven by learning resources. When curriculum is developed or designed under this approach, stakeholders are invited to discuss and decide on the type of curriculum to be designed through sufficient consensus. After the curriculum has been decided by stakeholders, curriculum developers or designers develop or design the curriculum.

When curriculum development or design is driven by curriculum users such as teachers, it is said to be pragmatic in its approach (Esau, 2017; Van den Akker et al., 2009). In the pragmatic approach, teachers' knowledge, skills, and values, together with attitudes, are used to frame the curriculum. Teachers implement or enact the curriculum in order to establish whether all curriculum components work according to their knowledge, skills, and values together with attitudes, so that the curriculum parts that are not working are revised, removed, or replaced. Teachers keep implementing or enacting the new revised curriculum in order to improve it. The process follows educational-design research or action-research principles (plan, act, observe and reflect) (Esau, 2017; Mpungose, 2018). This suggests that the process of improving curriculum has no limit if the curriculum is driven by a pragmatic approach.

2 Stages of Curriculum

Theorising a curriculum involves one or more of the three curriculum stages, which are the intended, practised, and assessed stages (Khoza, 2018; Pather, 2017). The intended stage is an initial stage of a curriculum that produces a formal curriculum document. This stage is also known as a planned, formal, official, or documented curriculum. This stage involves extensive reading of various sources and analysis (needs, problems, and context) on the specific approach to be used in the design or development of the curriculum (Fomunyam, 2014). Theorising this stage is the theorisation of the intended curriculum (Berkvens, 2009; Sodje, 2018). This stage starts by articulating

curriculum visions, continuing to other curriculum concepts such as curriculum goals, content, assessment, resources, environment, time, stakeholders, roles, activities, and methods (Berkvens et al., 2014; Khoza, 2019).

The second level after the intended stage of curriculum is the implemented stage, which is also known as the enacted curriculum, the practised curriculum, or the curriculum in action. This stage is about putting teachers' experiences into action. Teachers use their teaching experiences to interpret the intended curriculum in order to produce the implemented curriculum. The success of the implemented curriculum is measured through the attained, assessed, or achieved curriculum.

The achieved curriculum is about the experiences of learners after they have learnt, based on both the intended and implemented curriculum. In other words, the achieved curriculum involves assessment of learners after learning (Hoadley & Jansen, 2014) at nano level (Van den Akker et al., 2009). The nano level, as the learners' level of curriculum, is formally or informally designed or developed by learners for their learning. This level is developed from the teachers' level; the teachers' level is developed from the institutional level; the institutional level is developed from the national level; and the national level is developed from the international level of curriculum. As a result, theorising the curriculum, whether directly or indirectly, involves approaches, stages, and levels, as presented in the chapters of this book. The chapters presented in this book are grouped into six different sections as follows:

2.1 *Part 1: Curriculum Theory (Theorisation of Curriculum)*

The three chapters in Part 1 draw from specific curriculum theories. Chapters flesh out the theories within the context of teaching and learning, with the aim of proposing or producing new approaches or theories.

Chapter 1, "*Uzifozonke: Healing the Heart of Curriculum in a South African University*," describes how authors developed their theories and praxis of curriculum renewal, considering alternative and unique approaches, and the ways in which the African and South African contexts matter. Central to these processes, and both their theory and praxis, were 'the people and agency' elements. The outcome of these processes was the development of ten curriculum statements, approved by their university community, which serve to guide their curriculum framework and praxis. This is a living framework, subject and responsive to constant change, based on the fluid dynamics of context in the country and the sector, locally and globally known as *Uzifozonke* (medicine that heals all diseases).

Chapter 2, "Rethinking Curriculum Theory that can Deliver a Decolonised African Curriculum," proposes an *alternative curriculum theory* that accommodates

diversity and is practical and emergent. This theory has three arguments that have at least three implications for the field of curriculum studies, and curriculum theory in particular: 1) that curriculum studies scholars need to raise the importance of theory in curriculum development, practising it more than at present, 2) that the current theories are moribund. Such theories are therefore unable to present methods and principles providing answers confronting education and schools, and 3) that there is a need to advocate for curriculum theories that are not prescriptive, but nomadic, rhizomatic, and always emergent.

Chapter 3, “Theorising the Open Curriculum as a Pathway to Responsiveness in South African Higher Education,” adopts Aoki’s conceptualisation of the curriculum as lived experience. Chapter 3 therefore makes three fundamental arguments in order to produce an *open curriculum*. Firstly, the chapter argues that there is a need for the deconstruction of academic curriculum standardisation. Secondly, 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, in itself, has been engendered by curriculum standardisation and hegemonic curriculum practices which adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. For the 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.

2.2 *Part 2: Indigenous Knowledge and Curriculum (History of Curriculum)*

The three chapters in this part propose the consideration of the historical issues of curriculum that address the contestation between indigenous knowledge and Western theories.

Chapter 4, “Curricular Innovations in a Small Island State: Developing Intercultural Competences in Pursuit of Holistic Growth,” presents postcolonial and indigenous issues of curriculum within the context of Mauritius. The chapter demonstrates how curriculum developers – by pursuing agendas that are altogether internal, national, and international – have produced a model of intercultural education specific to the complex socio-ethnic fabric of the country. Such a model does not seek to replicate known discourses about interculturalism as an imported ‘northern’ phenomenon. Concurrently, this model aims at departing from the complacent and dated notion of multiculturalism, paving the way to the more desirable but more taxing challenge of transculturalism.

Chapter 5, “Moving Toward Indigenisation of Knowledge: Understanding African Women’s Experiences,” uses existing literature to form conclusions and recommendations. The analysis affirmed, elaborated, and took further the assertion established by scholars, of the importance of using indigenous theories (African feminisms) to understand the experiences of African women. It was also found that theorising African women with Western and Anglo-centric knowledge is fraught with contextual factors leading to questions – the question of origin (where was the theory constructed); the question of subjectivity (who approves); and the question of whose interest is being legitimised. The imperial nature of theorisation needs to be further questioned to give legitimacy and validation to African indigenous theories.

Chapter 6, “Can IK and Western Science be complementary in an IK-SCIE Agricultural Curriculum? Theorising for an Appropriate Agricultural Curriculum,” is an analytic review of literature on the curriculum as a contention between two power blocks of knowledge systems: Western science, and IKS. Chapter 6 presents a road map, showing the interface between the two knowledge systems. This connection has resulted in the silencing and the subsequent subjugation of the voices of IKS, and the implanting of a monopolistic, dominant, Western-science knowledge system, through curricula whose values are embedded in Western culture. Thus, Chapter 6 examines the silent struggle between Western culture and indigenous culture, resulting in the near annihilation of the latter.

2.3 *Part 3: Decolonisation of Curriculum*

The three chapters in Part 3 raise the issues of theorising curriculum by decolonising it within the African context.

Chapter 7, “Curriculum Theorising in Africa as Social Justice Project: Insights from Decolonialism Theory,” presents as a real conundrum for African scholars, who have in recent times come under pressure, in view of the return to vogue of curriculum transformation and decolonisation imperatives. Chapter 7 therefore explores two key issues. In the first instance, it argues the reasons for the framing of curriculum theorising in the African context as necessarily a social-justice project. This is especially in the context of congenial traditional gatekeeping of curriculum theorising in South Africa. Secondly, it explores how insights offered by Latin American decolonialism theoretical frameworks might offer conceptual apparatus for both disrupting contemporary curriculum theorising and envisaging alternatives for the peculiar African context.

Chapter 8, “Curriculum Ecologies: Paradigmatic Shifts in Discourses of Change in Post-apartheid South Africa,” opens with a broad focus to accommodate

different discourses of curriculum decolonisation, not to say the scholarship culture of curriculum studies. Chapter 8 does not blinker the thesis with disciplinary scholarship traditions which often limit cross-pollination of ideas. Taking the multi-disciplinary road allowed the chapter to borrow from unusual disciplines, such as history, philosophy, sociology, and political science, to argue a case for curriculum discourses. Consequently, swinging in different directions provided it with access to rich theories which would have been difficult to gain entry to had it been blinkered; only working from a pure curriculum-studies body of knowledge, without bringing in issues of decolonisation.

Chapter 9, “Brave New World: Decolonising Shakespeare in the Drama Education Curriculum,” examines a doctoral research project in which co-author Nellie Ngongo developed a methodology to transform interpretation-through-performance of the Shakespearean texts, which are the traditional property of drama departments. The chapter draws on postcolonial theory, which highlights the domination of the South African theatre curricula by a canon of work whose values enshrine the colonial domination from which higher education is still struggling to emerge. However, there is the danger that postcolonial theory can ‘ghetto-ise’ indigenous cultures by identifying them, and not Shakespeare, as the ‘other’. The theory rather embraces the concept of decolonising, or making education relevant to its actual, present-day context and student populations.

2.4 *Part 4: Trends in Curriculum (Modernisation and Curriculum)*

The three chapters presented in Part 4 used interpretive paradigm issues as trends for interrogating the curriculum phenomena of reflections, needs, and experiences that bring about modernisation of the curricula, making them relevant to the 21st century curriculum users.

Chapter 10, “Theorising Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement: Teachers’ Reflections,” presents a qualitative interpretive case study of seven teachers who reflected on their teaching of various curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) subjects in theorising curriculum in a South African school. Teachers are reluctant to reflect on their practices in teaching CAPS subjects; and this hinders them from theorising the curriculum. Hence, the main purpose of this chapter is to explore teachers’ reflections on the teaching of CAPS subjects in theorising the curriculum. The chapter produced the theory of equilateral sides of reflections (TESR), which emerged from the findings and literature.

Chapter 11, “Can Alignment of Digital Resources with Needs Produce a New Curriculum Theory for Teaching?” presents an interpretive case study of eight

academics who taught students specialising in curriculum development at a university in South Africa. The study explored and understood the alignment of digital resources with human needs involved in the teaching of Master of Education (MEd) students. Semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, and document analysis were used for data generation. Purposive with convenience sampling was used to select the eight most accessible participants. The study revealed that, when digital resources were used for teaching, this created competing spaces, both perceived and conceived, that had to be integrated into lived space.

Chapter 12, “Theorising Teachers’ Experiences of Teaching Reading in the African Context,” explored the experiences of teachers who taught English in the context of deprived students. This was an interpretive case study of three teachers who taught reading in Grade Five classrooms under CAPS in township primary schools. These teachers had been teaching English in the intermediate phase (Grades 4–5) for over ten years. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers who taught in townships, to achieve its aims of exploring their experiences of teaching reading in township schools. One-on-one semi-structured interviews and reflective activity were used as methods of data production. Findings of the study indicate that teachers find it difficult to teach reading, because the theoretical underpinnings in the curriculum were foreign to them.

2.5 *Part 5: Curriculum and Social Discourses (Self-Identity)*

The two chapters of this part argue for the curriculum discourses that are driven by action research and self-studies, in order to help teachers to improve their practices and to understand their identities.

In Chapter 13, “The African Theoriser: A Sense of Mistaken Identity?”, the author critically argues for deconstructing the perceived notion that the Western understanding of what Africa needs in terms of curriculum theory is the only proper interpretation. Africa needs to be able to make a mark in curriculum studies. The author begins with musings on who determines Africa’s sense and ways of knowing; and how this shapes curriculum development. The chapter further presents discourses in curriculum that demand that teachers initiate teaching and learning by understanding their self-identities.

Chapter 14, “Sustainable Professional Curriculum Practice for School Leadership Capacity-building,” reports on how leadership capacity of school-management teams was enhanced through systemic praxis in professional curriculum practice, in the small, rural community of Hobhouse in the Free State province of South Africa. The chapter reports on ways in which the school community consciously intervened in the learning processes of 68 matric learners. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how an indigenous African

practice of involvement and engagement in community matters, known as *letsema*, was used to turn the situation around in order to improve the low matric pass rate. Critical leadership theory, anchored in African critical theory (ACT), was applied as the lens through which this study viewed the topic. A participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) approach was used as methodology. Through PALAR, the school community contributed positively to professional curriculum practices, and to leadership capacity building.

2.6 *Part 6: Curriculum Implementation (Curriculum in Use)*

The four chapters in this part present curricula that work in specific countries in Africa. The authors report on the studies of the implementation of these specific curricula, proposing new theories or frameworks of implementation.

Chapter 15, “Theory of Enactment Strategies as a Way forward in Enacting the French Integrated Curriculum in Lesotho,” argues that the French integrated curriculum in Lesotho is said to have adopted the communicative approach to curriculum design. However, the actual characteristics displayed in the curriculum depict the technical approach pattern, influenced by international standards and content. This dilemma, thus, seems to present a challenge for educators, who are apparently overwhelmed by two different curricula: integrated and performance curricula. It is against this backdrop that this chapter seeks to explore the theory of enactment strategies, and its effects on the enactment of the French integrated curriculum.

Chapter 16, “Alternative Pathway for Implementing Curriculum in Africa,” argues that traditions in Africa should guide the theorisation of the curriculum to create a relevant teaching and learning environment. Growing up in a typical African rural community within Zimbabwe and South Africa, some learners had the opportunity of attending formal education in schools, unlike their peers. Prior to this form of education, they were subjected to oral cultural traditions in the home and community that served to undermine what education strove to instil. The impression that was created as result of the latter form of education, was that what happens at school had little relevance for what prevails at home. Such notions were also buttressed by some parents who constantly reminded their children that when they come back home from school, they must begin learning their cultural traditions. Such traditions relate to how to become a mother or a father. Africa is really a unique continent with its own distinct culture.

Chapter 17, “Curriculum Differentiation for Diverse Learners: Transforming Teacher Practices,” argues that South African classrooms have become so contemporary that teachers in the foundation-phase classrooms have to adopt various teaching and learning approaches to suit the diversity in classrooms.

The differentiated curriculum is individualised to meet the diverse learner needs in each classroom. Therefore, foundation-phase teachers must use a differentiated curriculum that depends on a number of approaches to make it achievable.

Chapter 18, “The Tri-Star Curriculum Theory: Lens for Viewing Curriculum,” makes an argument for the tri-star curriculum theory. This theory considers the nine curriculum concepts as basic units for scrutiny under each point of the three-pointed star. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a working curriculum theory that unifies all other gainsaying theories from the works and scholarship of Simon Bheki Khoza. The chapter argues that, without careful engagement with the various strands of the theory, curriculum implementation would be problematic.

The above six parts dealing with curriculum theory (theorisation of curriculum), indigenous knowledge and curriculum (history of curriculum), decolonisation of curriculum, trends in curriculum (modernisation and curriculum), curriculum and social discourses (self-identity), and curriculum implementation (curriculum-in-use) all form the basis and core of this book. Each part (in its own right) makes for a congruent theorising process, and adds another voice to the curriculum studies landscape in Africa.

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