1 CURRICULUM CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

A decade ago and 11 years after the birth of a new democratic political dispensation in South Africa, an important contribution to inquiry into higher education curricula saw the light. But, in writing their well-commended book *Engaging the curriculum in higher education*, Ron Barnett and Kelley Coate (2005) struggled with a problem that they articulated through a number of bothering questions (2005:161-162), for instance: Should we, in higher education, refer to "the" curriculum or "a" curriculum? Is the concept of curriculum more of an adjective than a noun – meaning that a curriculum represents intentions and hopes rather than an entity? Is curriculum necessarily singular or can one talk about a generic curriculum as a kind of Platonic ideal in higher education? The point made by Barnett and Coate is that if the language of curriculum inquiry is problematic, even more serious are the difficulties in involving "ordinary" academics and students in curriculum matters and their discourse. This is far from saying that academics and students fail to engage with curriculum issues, but it does point to the fact that curriculum constituents may not always know how their direct involvement shapes curricula and, moreover, that they do not necessarily use the "right" or applicable curriculum language.

What is therefore needed, as we are reminded by authors such as Barnett and Coate, is strong curriculum leadership at different levels in higher education institutions – leadership that encapsulates imagining a culture of new and renewed curricula that reach out to future demands, that develop conversational spaces and promote the involvement of academics and students. What may also be needed is curricula that create new energies, which is nothing short of involving universities and other higher education institutions in their own core business, namely to educate for an unknown future. In South Africa, a country in the process of building a new African democracy,

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the issue of higher education curricula and their potential role in promoting critical citizenship is of utmost importance. This we hope to show as this volume unfolds.

Recently, in his preface to a book on curriculum inquiry in South African higher education, Ron Barnett stated that to him there is no more important matter in higher education than its curricula and so, there is in turn no larger matter for inquiry than the curriculum (in Bitzer & Botha 2011). And yet, the matter of the curriculum still does not attract the attention it deserves among those who conduct research into higher education – whether that is through theorising or empirical research. Perhaps one reason for this near absence is that the curriculum falls into an intermediate level of inquiry. On the one hand, it does not seem to require the elevated level of analysis as in policy framing, national funding or internationalising higher education. On the other hand, it may seem to be too large a topic to bring into view when one is engaged in studies of, for instance, the student learning experience or academic dentity.

There may also be other reasons to explain part of the paucity of interest inquiring into higher education curricula. One is that the university curriculum spans disciplines, but many institutions continue to be structured around individual disciplines and any talk of "curriculum" requires a horizontal level of analysis, while the structures of academic life run vertically, separating disciplines and departments from one another. To continue Barnett's (in Bitzer & Botha 2011) argument: High and somewhat abstract theory engages with large and universal ideas such as globalisation, the knowledge economy, knowledge capitalism, neoliberalism, managerialism, the public sphere and the new digital environment and it does so employing concepts such as epistemology, ontology, postmodernity and now even post-postmodernity. This kind of intellectual work, while crucial to a proper understanding of the place of the university in the world, is probably pitched at a philosophical level which makes it difficult to engage directly with the curriculum at departmental or modular level.

Barnett (in Bitzer & Botha 2011:15) adds that there appears "to be no large constituency with an interest in inquiring into experimenting with curricula". For instance, the political and policy sphere considers, much too often, that its reshaping of the funding contours of higher education has no bearing on the internal life of institutions, such as the curriculum. For them, the curriculum is simply a matter for the academic community to attend to. Also students, often regarded as "consumers", have no immediate interest in the curriculum, but may only be interested in the experiences with which they are presented. It follows that there is no constituency with an interest in curriculum as a general category that, in turn, would justify and generate broad and deep inquiry into the matter.

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In higher education institutions, curricula hugely matter and they matter in increasingly important ways. All around the world, universities are considering market situations in which they are increasingly placed. They want to ensure that their programmes of study are likely to offer their students (sometimes, students as demanding customers) the kind of credentials and capabilities that they seek in going into the world, especially into the labour market. They are doing it, therefore, in part so as to ensure a better alignment between higher education and the world of work. In managing their tight budgets, universities are also looking to curriculum "reform" for "efficiency gains", not least in exploiting digital technologies (Garraway 2009; Illeris 2003b). Some universities, as part of their own self-understanding and even their strategic positioning, are doing it also so as to inject a particular value orientation into their curriculum offer. Here we often find, for example, the idea of the student as "global citizen" (Barnett 2009; Jansen 2009b) – understood as that students will make their way into the world in various ways and that the world is increasingly global in its processes and demands. So university curricula, their direction and their management are increasingly becoming key issues, but remain under-researched.

What we try to point out in this volume is that engaging with university curricula from a critical citizenship[1] perspective contributes to exploring its rich complexes. The ways in which university curricula, particularly in young democracies, are developing in both its national and global environments makes for important inquiry. But the challenges that such inquiry may open up are considerable: organisational, disciplinary, theoretical and methodological. It also presents important citizenship challenges that we might consider as ideological. For instance, what kinds of values do we wish university curricula to represent? What kind of culture in the wider world might universities help to promote? What kind of world (or country, as in South Africa) do we have in mind as a horizon for our higher education curricula and what would be the nature of development that higher education institutions want to engender among their students?

Thinking seriously about curricula is therefore to do no less than think of the kind of world and country higher educationists and researchers into higher education want to help to bring about and of the kind of student development that would be fitting for that world. There is nothing less at stake behind a volume such as this.

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1   Promoting critical citizenship in higher education curricula can be seen as enhancing in student learning a common set of shared values such as tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy (after Johnson & Morris 2010:77-78). As an educational pedagogy, critical citizenship encourages critical reflection on the past and the imagining of a possible future shaped by social justice to prepare people to live together in harmony in diverse societies. Critical citizenship education is therefore specifically aimed at the transformation of thinking on a personal level towards a wider public good.

SOME SOUTH AFRICAN CURRICULUM CHALLENGES

The decision to focus this volume on the topic of curricula as it relates to critical citizenship in South African higher education was urged by the fact that although there are intense debates on the forces that are currently shaping the curriculum in South African higher education, surprisingly little has been published on this topic (also see Walker 2012). The extent of the influence of these forces and debates on university curricula is co-determined by the context and nature of South Africa as a developing democracy and the legacies in its higher education system as well as those of any particular university – which means, in the South African context, any of its 25 existing public universities and 81 private higher education institutions (the latter figure as registered by 2008, according to *University World News*).

The debate on what the orientation of any particular university could be is far from exhausted. Coate (2009), for example, asks whether the regional, national or international concern should be the main focus of university curricula. Botha (2009) also indicates some dimensions of this reigning debate by referring to the internationalisation of universities as compared to their localisation. In South Africa, localisation often points to being situated on and being part of the African continent. Many South African universities are therefore grappling with identifying the "most appropriate" balance or focus in this regard, especially against the background of local skills shortages on the one hand and pressures to compete internationally and globalise on the other.

In addition, continuous demands of the so-called world of work contribute to the shaping of South African higher education curricula. While Donoghue (2008) refers to moving away from an inward looking image towards a greater responsiveness to the needs of society and the utilitarian ideal, we know that some disciplines that do not directly serve this purpose are often deemed to be of little use to society and are struggling to survive (Adam & Cross 2009; Garraway 2009). Some have even lost the struggle or have made drastic changes, as departments of philosophy, history and languages have been closed down or merged with others at some universities. Other views contend that the world of work needs increasingly deeper specialisation, which bodes for significant impact on university curricula (Virkunnen, Markinen & Lintula 2010), while others add that the purpose of higher education is inevitably to improve students' life chances. The argument goes that knowledge and skills that are in demand in society should therefore predominantly feature in university curricula (Partesan & Bumbuc 2010), ameliorated by the fact that the unemployment rate of the 18 to 25 age group in South Africa is close to 50% (Perold, Cloete & Papier 2012).

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The role of the workplace in co-determining university curricula in South Africa manifests in arguments for a particular mix of curricula in, for instance, comprehensive universities (i.e. those universities in South Africa that were formed as mergers between former technikons/polytechnics and universities) as compared to the curricula of universities of technology and research-oriented universities. The curriculum needs of comprehensive universities are discussed later in this chapter (also see Muller 2009; Shay, Oosthuizen, Paxton & Van de Merwe 2009), while Botha (2009) points to the debate whether comprehensive universities should focus stronger on vocational or liberal curricula.

As in the international arena, where authors point out that universities and their curricula need to link more closely to society through engagement with external non-academic communities through civic engagement (Barnett & Coate 2005; Coate 2009), university curricula are often seen as instrumental to societal transformation (Jansen 2009a; Terwel & Walker 2004; UN 2010). This issue has manifested in some South African universities through strategic restructuring (Smart 2008) and curricula sensitive to transformation (Hannon, Baron & Hsu 2006; Isern & Pung 2007). However, increased emphases on community engagement in curricula are not without challenges, and this is what we focus on next.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In his most recent book, *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*, Henry Giroux (2014) suggests that many academics in higher education are either unwilling to address the current attacks on the university curriculum or befuddled over how the language of specialisation and professionalisation has cut them off – not only from connecting their work to larger civic issues and social problems, but also from developing any meaningful relationships with a larger democratic society. To Giroux it appears as if higher education has nothing to say about teaching students how to think for themselves in a democracy, how to think critically and engage with others and how to address through the prism of democratic values the relationship between themselves and the larger world. According to Giroux, students are often treated like commodities and data to be ingested and spit out as potential job seekers, for whom their higher education has been reduced to a form of training.

Earlier, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) published a consultation document proposing the engagement of universities with their external communities as a core value in university curricula. The document suggests that the university's mission be expanded to avoid perpetuating the life of scholarship for its own sake (ACU 2001). Community engagement is described as "strenuous, thoughtful,

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argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; taking on fuller responsibilities as neighbours and citizens" (ACU 2001:i).

However, Coldstream (2003) has argued that community engagement embraces much more than mere links to the outside world. To him it is also a matter of inter-penetration of universities and the wider society. Along with the perspective of the ACU, he suggests that the contemporary university should increasingly be seen as moving from aloofness to engagement. In addition, Watson (2003) points out that engagement is not an entirely new idea and that the historical centrality of universities in the production and evaluation of knowledge is uncontested. What have changed in a contemporary era are the size, scope and connectivity of the information and knowledge in which universities participate. In other words, the nature of curricula has to change, because universities are increasingly seeing the evolution of a knowledge society where knowledge is not the sole terrain of universities. It therefore remains a challenge for university curricula and academics to take note of the challenges related to societies where knowledge and information are increasingly valued and produced.

Curriculum engagement challenges – particularly within upcoming knowledge societies

It is widely accepted (though not uncontested – see, for instance, Le Grange 2005) that the so-called knowledge society is increasingly driven by a "knowledge economy" (Muller 2009; Pinar 2008; Terwel & Walker 2004), not least by the rapid speed at which knowledge travels over far distances, but also its "commodification" – how it is packaged and sold on the global and local market. Le Grange refers to Watson (2003:27), who argues that the role of the university in a knowledge society is changing as a consequence of two sets of pressures: "inside-out" and "outside-in" developments. The inside-out developments refer to intrinsic pressures concerned with a set of epistemological challenges. Watson, in turn, refers to the theoretical intervention of Gibbons *et al.* (1994), who pointed to the shift from Mode 1 knowledge, which implies pure, disciplinary, homogeneous, expert supply-driven, hierarchical, peer-reviewed, and almost exclusively university-based knowledge to Mode 2 knowledge, which implies applied, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, hybrid, demand-driven, entrepreneurial and network-embedded knowledge (Gibbons *et al.* 1994). In contrast, outside-in developments refer to social concerns that pressure for change to include aspects such as socio-economic

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patterns of participation – for instance, who gets access to education, health care and other services. It is these two sets of pressures for change that are increasingly influencing the nature of universities' engagement with society through their curricula.

More recently, it has been argued that although intrinsic pressures may not be felt as strongly in Africa as in Europe, African universities have not been left unaffected by the epistemological challenges presented by the Mode 1/Mode 2 knowledge debate (see, for instance, Erasmus 2007; Le Grange 2009). In South Africa, scholars have added to this debate (Erasmus & Albertyn 2014; Jansen 2002; Kraak 2000; Le Grange 2002, 2004; Waghid 2002), while the Mode 2 thesis of Gibbons *et al*. (1994) and Scott (1995) significantly influenced post-apartheid South African higher education policy. These influences were obvious in policies such as the final report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE 1996), the Department of Education's Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (DoE 1996), the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE 1997) and the Higher Education Act of 1997.

A point that has been well emphasised is that in emerging knowledge societies, universities are no longer considered to be the sole agents for research and teaching. Mass higher education has resulted in the fact that research graduates are consequently employed in government departments, research foundations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), resulting in knowledge systems that are increasingly socially distributed. Le Grange (2009) points out, for instance, that two sets of pressure are strongly felt: intrinsic pressures that are related to epistemological challenges and external pressures cognate to the idea of engagement and the "African university" in the 21st century. In view of the rapid pace of dissemination of information as well as the commodification of knowledge, socially distributed knowledge systems increasingly require partnerships between universities and other knowledge agencies such as industry, business, government, NGOs and societal communities – not only for purposes of research, but also to shape their curricula.

However, socially distributed knowledge systems also imply new ways of producing knowledge. In this regard, Gibbons *et al*. (1994) have argued that we are witnessing a shift in knowledge production from almost exclusively university-based Mode 1 to Mode 2 knowledge. Gibbons (2003) further argues that engagement of universities with the wider society should be a core value of a Mode 2 society. However, developing countries, particularly those in Africa, experience pertinent challenges such as inadequate financial resources for essential research, knowledge legacies of colonialism, longstanding social crises, political interference and nepotism and environmental degradation. Moreover, indigenous ways of knowing that reside

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among the majority of Africa's people create epistemological challenges for students when they are exposed to Western epistemologies upon entering schools and universities. Similarly, when "Westernised" students and graduates enter typical African communities, they experience the stress of being previously epistemologically distanced from such communities.

The argument therefore thus points to a socially distributed knowledge system in Africa that slightly differs from that which Gibbons and his colleagues proposed – one where university curricula also engage with communities so as to help address Africa's most imminent challenges such as establishing true democracies, alleviating poverty, turning around environmental degradation and finding cures for diseases. Such an engagement requires a creation of new knowledge spaces that is the result of negotiation between university academics, different peoples and their cultures, whereby disparate social strategies and technical devices are employed to produce new knowledge and teach their students (Le Grange 2009; Muller 2009; Pinar 2008; Terwel & Walker 2004). In these knowledge spaces, knowledge is decentred and can be equitably compared and universities and society are enabled to work together. In such spaces, negotiation will inevitably involve disagreement and struggles in terms of domination and power, but the argument is in favour of a new form of engagement between university and society in which the boundaries between typically Western, indigenous and community-enhanced knowledge become dissolved and new knowledge is produced to address pressing differences in views and the problems many developing countries face. This brings into question the different ways universities engage with their "outside" communities.

The notion of community engagement

Metaphorically, "engagement" is a term that implies the meshing of two cogs generating power. When the metaphor takes a more personal character (i.e. applied to individuals), it implies a more long-term, mutual interconnectedness, often of an emotional character. In contrast to the first mechanical engagement, the latter transactional form creates a multiplication of energy that sustains the engagement. Barnett and Coate (2005:123) compare engagement between a university and the rest of society to students and their engagement with the curriculum. The student's identity and unique way of integrating the self into processes of knowing and enquiry is similar to what is intended with the integration of community engagement into the university's core functions. Four forms of engagement may be distinguished: non-reflectional or blind, extractional (only serving one's own interest), impositional (driven by state-imposed expectations) and realisational (taking responsibility for the way it sees itself and fulfilling its role accordingly). The first three forms of community

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engagement personify self-centredness and represent an unsustainable way of approaching engagement (Barnett 2003). In the light of our (the authors') stance that the relevance and sustainability of universities much depend on interacting with their environment, we also argue that the way in which institutions employ the community engagement project in close relation to their core educational function determines the relevance and effectiveness of their curricula. We return to this point later.

At this junction, it may not be appropriate to refer to a "theory of community engagement". Most literature emphasises that community engagement is mostly institutionally conceptualised within the context in which it is practised, while the same concept is often differently interpreted and used in other university contexts (Bender 2008a, 2008b; CIC 2005; Mouton & Wilschut 2007). Community engagement as a concept was earlier referred to by alternative terms such as "community interaction" (SU 2009), "community service" (UFS 2006) and "community responsiveness" (UCT 2008). Despite this implied earlier differentiation at the institutional level, a definition was developed through a process that included representatives of a number of universities in South Africa. Community engagement was thus described as a "combination and integration of teaching and learning, professional community service by academic staff and participatory action research applied to identified community development priorities" (HEQC/CHE 2006:11). More recently, the concept has been used as integral and core to higher education in South Africa whereby universities are called upon to demonstrate social responsibility and make available their expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes in a commitment towards common good. One of its most important goals is to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness among students. Community engagement normally rests upon four pillars: community service learning, community-engaged research, external partnerships and community service or volunteerism (UFS 2015).

Whether one may identify with such a definition or not, community engagement inevitably relates to the core functions of many South African universities. Implicit in the notion of community engagement is collaborative relationships between universities and the actors and institutions beyond the boundaries of the university. The act (process) of engagement (specifically through experiential learning methodologies) presupposes second party involvement – in this case the community. It is no wonder that the term "community" as in "community engagement" is a highly debated concept that needs to be unravelled in any framework for curriculum planning and implementation (Bhattacharyya 2004; Hustedde & Ganowitz 2002). Contemporary discourse designates "the community" as individuals and groupings in society with whom university staff and students engage (Smith-Tolken 2011).

What might be lacking in the conceptualisation of community engagement thus far is a proper theoretical grounding for the actions it performs and for the processes that emanate from engagement activities in off-campus community sites. This gap was highlighted in a recent contribution (Smith-Tolken & Bitzer 2014) – one of the sources we tap into in the next section that points to some of the challenges posed by closer links between university curricula and its "outside" communities. Three salient examples are touched on: the question of institutional autonomy, of public accountability and of differentiated curriculum emphases within a unitary higher education system in South Africa.

LINKING CURRICULA TO SOUTH AFRICAN REALITIES

In the first decade after apartheid, the higher education system in South Africa took some time to map the future and develop appropriate transformation policies, but since the early 2000s universities have witnessed considerable changes in the higher education landscape. Among these changes were a proliferation of policies that were focusing mainly on governance, funding, quality assurance and student access and success; the merging of several higher education institutions; and institutional changes such as the introduction of elaborate strategic plans, quality assurance directorates and equity plans. Clearly, most of these changes represented important transformational initiatives, but many excluded implications for university curricula and, perhaps more importantly, curricula as vehicles to enhance critical citizenship as a concern of higher education transformation in South Africa.

This situation is not unique to South Africa. Barnett and Coate (2005:1) have pointed out that while higher education was expanding internationally and governments were conducting inquiries into higher education, more institutions became involved in running programmes of study. More money was spent on higher education – not least by students themselves. Such education became increasingly important to larger numbers of people. And yet, despite the growth debate, very little attention was devoted to revising curricula. What students should be learning and experiencing for an improved future barely offered a topic for debate. What the building blocks of their learning might be and how curricula should be put together were conspicuously absent from the general discussion. The very idea of curriculum was missing altogether (Le Grange 2009).

The term "curriculum" was at least alluded to in some of the important earlier policy documents on higher education (Le Grange 2009). The Education White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) did make reference to curriculum in particular instances, including the headings related to institutional autonomy, public accountability and a programme-

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based approach to qualifications. The White Paper (DoE 1997) supported the principle of institutional autonomy, which refers to a high degree of self-regulation concerning matters such as student admissions, curriculum, methods of teaching and assessment. Under public accountability it suggested that higher education curricula had to be responsive to the national and regional contexts. It also proposed a programme-based approach to promoting the diversification of access, curriculum and qualification structure. In hindsight, these issues have proved to be challenging to higher education curricula.

Institutional autonomy and curricula

In terms of institutional autonomy there might be a danger when curricula become "private" domains, that is, when self-regulation in practice means that individual departments and academics alone determine what is taught. Le Grange (2009) argues this point well by suggesting that as curricula are central to the transformation of the South African higher education system and its institutions, they should be sensitive to the needs of the diversity of its constituents, including diverse student bodies, diverse bodies of staff as well as societal and community needs. For instance, although increased access for diverse groups of students has increased, it remains questionable whether access has shifted beyond formal access to include epistemological access. Morrow (2007:2) has argued, for instance, that formal access concerns providing access to institutions of learning and depends on factors such as admission rules and personal finances. Epistemological access, however, is concerned with access to knowledge, which implies access to the knowledge that universities generate and distribute.

Le Grange (2009) pleads for an expanded notion of epistemological access (also see Giroux 2014), as the knowledge that universities (ought to) distribute is a contested terrain. In recent years there has been an increased contestation about what and whose knowledge should be included in university teaching and learning programmes as feminists, post-colonialists and sociologists of science, among others, have questioned the dominance of Western knowledge in university courses and research programmes. Le Grange and others (Jansen 2002; Kraak 2000) suggest, however, that epistemological access does not only involve giving access to knowledge comprising the dominating Western canon, but also providing access to alternative ways of knowing, including indigenous ways of knowing. To achieve this notion of epistemological access, the development of gender and culturally inclusive curricula seems crucial and, even more so, determining when and where this is appropriate.

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The need for higher education curriculum matters to be more critically debated in the public sphere seems essential in developing democracies such as in South Africa. On the one hand, this implies that university curricula cannot be the narrow concern of individual lecturers or groups of lecturers located in their particular institutions (Le Grange 2009). On the other hand, while institutional autonomy and by association academic freedom should in a certain sense be curtailed, generally speaking, institutional autonomy and academic freedom are desirable ideals.

However, there are developments with respect to teaching programmes that might pose threats to institutional autonomy and academic freedom. For example, teaching programmes have been affected by the ascendency of an audit culture associated with the rise of neoliberalism in recent decades. The emergence of an audit culture (and related terms) in discourses on higher education might be understood against the backdrop of a rising culture of performativity in society in general, and in education more specifically (see Lyotard 1984).

For instance, the efficiency of teaching – what Bearn (2000:253) calls "pedagogical performativity" – aims at smooth, easy and fast pedagogies that have become prevalent in contemporary global society. This concerns teaching with the aim of increasing grades by offering students neatly packaged online study guides and readers, encouraging students to use the Internet so as to extend the reach of their lectures, and encouraging them to work on their own or with peers. The efficiency of teaching is increased by decreasing contact time with students or by offering massive open, online courses (see HERDSA 2014). With respect to teaching, what can be measured is valued and what might be of value is not measured. The challenge is therefore how to develop and design curricula that will give expression to the personal capacities of students amid a dominant culture of performativity on the one hand and, on the other hand, will avert the development of curricula that narrowly suit the desires of individual lecturers or students (i.e. only of private concern) and are therefore not publicly answerable. This brings us to the question of public accountability and the "public good" of university curricula.

Public accountability and the "public good" of university curricula

The South African Education White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) specifically states that higher education curricula should be responsive to national and regional contexts. One could broaden this view by speaking of responsiveness to the African context (DHET 2014; Le Grange 2009; Leibowitz 2012). The number of international students at South African universities has increased significantly over the past few years.

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Although no formal figures are available in the statistical reports of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET 2014), at Stellenbosch University there are more than 2 000 international students out of approximately 30 000 – many from African countries. International students bring benefits to South African universities in many ways, one of these being that they provide an important source of income to universities. But the question that must be answered is to what extent curricula at South African universities have changed to accommodate a diverse (African) student corps.

An even more fundamental question is whether the curricula of South African universities reflect the context in which they are located. This is not to suggest that curricula of South African universities should narrowly reflect mainly local content. It goes without saying that South African universities should contribute to the production and "transmission" of an international body of knowledge. An important curriculum project might be to reclaim African knowledge – that African traditions and cultures should occupy a central place in what is learned in universities. Such a project might be necessary because even though Africa has a long academic history and boasts the oldest existing university, Egypt's Al-Azhar, it is the only African university still organised according to its original Islamic model. According to Teferra and Altbach (2004), all other African universities have adopted a Western model of academic organisation. African universities have been shaped by colonialism and organised according to European models – or as Teferra and Altbach (2004:23) put it: "[H]igher education in Africa is an artefact of colonial policies". Colonial education policies had the following effects on African higher education: There was limited access, as colonial authorities feared widespread access to higher education; the language of instruction was the language of the coloniser; academic freedom and institutional autonomy were limited; and the curriculum was limited, as colonisers supported disciplines such as law that would assist with colonial administration (Teferra & Altbach 2004). Not all of this may apply to South Africa, but some issues are very relevant.

The point is that curricula in South African universities remain largely organised according to Western academic models (Le Grange 2009; Leibowitz 2012). Arguing for the centrality of African interests in curricula does not mean that curricula should exclusively include African concerns, but that curricula include knowledge forming part of a world corpus of knowledge. Importantly, African universities should contribute to a world corpus of knowledge in the same manner in which Harvard, Oxford and St Andrews do, while remaining unmistakably American, British and Scottish respectively (Makgoba & Seepe 2004).

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The challenge is how to develop and design curricula that are locally and regionally relevant when Western epistemologies continue to dominate and power relations are unequal. A stepping stone for meeting this challenge might lie in work explored in detail elsewhere (see Le Grange 2002, 2007, 2009) and drawing on insights from inquiry in the field of the sociology of scientific knowledge (Turnbull 1997, 2000). Turnbull examines the way in which knowledge has been produced in different periods and places and what these knowledge production processes have in common. In particular, he examines the building of Gothic cathedrals, Indonesian rice farming, Polynesian navigation, modern cartography and research into the malaria disease. He shows that in all instances, knowledge production processes connect people, places and skills and that empirical verification is not the golden standard, but the social organisation of trust. Drawing on Turnbull's work, Le Grange (2002, 2007, 2009) has argued that a focus on the performative side of knowledge might be more useful in integrating seemingly disparate knowledge – more so than a focus on the representationalist view of knowledge, which includes abstract representations of knowledge and its hierarchical ordering into different forms, plenty of which is seen in present-day university curricula.

Moreover, inspiration can be sought from shifting power relations, as we are witnessing a rhizome of movements across the globe, also referred to by some as "new social movements", challenging the dominance of Western knowledge (Le Grange 2009). Globalisation also affords spaces for the formation of new solidarities. For example, there are indications of the internationalisation of indigenous knowledges and how these knowledges are deconstructing, deterritorialising and decolonising Western knowledge in traditional Western academic spaces such as mainstream academic conferences. The American Education Research Association, for instance, now has special interest groups focusing on indigenous knowledge, gender issues, post-colonialism and others. This also calls for shifting the emphases in South African higher education curricula, which we shall refer to next.

Different emphases in higher education curricula

There are 25 public higher education institutions in South Africa. Of these, eleven are generally regarded as "traditional" universities, six are universities of technology, formerly known as "technikons", six are comprehensive universities established from the merger of traditional universities and former technikons, and two are recently established provincial institutions in their early phases of development. The broader debate on differentiation in higher education therefore provides an important perspective on prospects for the promotion of access to and articulation among

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universities. Bleiklie (2003) argues that within unitary higher education systems such as in South Africa, the manner in which institutions define their academic identities is influenced by the value that they, and the policy and regulatory environment in which they operate, attach to hierarchical prestige over functional specialisation.

A hierarchical higher education model implies standardisation and therefore prestige based on a common set of criteria that are typically shaped by the norms of traditional research universities. A model of functional specialisation provides space for different institutions and institutional types to make differential contributions to higher education provision, thereby creating a framework within which institutions that offer vocationally oriented qualification may play as valuable a role as research-led institutions (Shay *et al*. 2009).

The tension between an orientation towards hierarchical prestige and functional specialisation plays itself out within individual institutions as well as higher education systems such as the South African one. These tensions and struggles over academic identity play out at the curriculum level in, for example, what is generally referred to as the phenomenon of academic and vocational drift (Codling & Meek 2006). This drift implies greater vocationalism in traditional universities and drifts towards more theoretically oriented work in universities of technology.

The implication for higher education institutions in general, and South African comprehensive universities in particular, is that ideological and cultural assumptions about academic, and therefore hierarchical, prestige will invariably influence the manner in which members of academic staff view the value of different curricula and qualification types (Shay *et al*. 2009). The overall institutional educational philosophy, the culture of specific academic units and the signals that are sent out by the policy environment will shape the extent to which academic staff and, more importantly, those outside of institutions, are able to appreciate the value of curricula and qualification types that fulfil distinctly different, but equally valuable, functions.

With respect to the policy environment, South African higher education discourse exhibits a tension similar to that of many other national systems. On the one hand, the university funding framework privileges' hierarchical status through a differentiated scheme for subsidising qualification programmes by privileging, for instance, medical and engineering programmes (highest subsidy categories) to education (lowest category). On the other hand, statements such as the Declaration at the 2010 South African Higher Education Summit affirm the need to develop a more differentiated higher education system that provides for a continuum of institutions and programmes of study with diverse strengths and purposes. Nico

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Cloete, director of the Centre for Higher Education Transformation, reacted as follows to the differentiation debate at the Summit:

> There are many factors in favour of differentiation. Important for South Africa is that high student participation and high differentiation go together, and that supports development. In a high participation system, there should be a large number of different institutions catering for many kinds of students.
>
> (*University World News* 2010:1)

However, not all arguments for curriculum differentiation have been exhausted. As an example: For the past number of years, comprehensive universities have had to offer professional and general formative qualifications typically associated with universities, and vocationally and career-focused qualifications typically associated with technikons, without any principled basis for curriculum differentiation, progression or articulation. A recent study on curriculum differentiation at one comprehensive university, drawing on the work of the South African Norway Tertiary Education Development project at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), offered a conceptual framework for knowledge and curriculum differentiation with a particular focus on the differentiation between curricula of diploma and the degree qualifications (Shay *et al.* 2009). This framework was applied to the analysis of a number of curriculum case studies. Based on the findings of the study, a set of provisional principles for curriculum design, progression and articulation was proposed.

With respect to NMMU, where the study was conducted, its policy discourse signals an endorsement of functional specialisation. The university's mission emphasises its commitment to offering "a diverse range of quality educational opportunities that will make a critical and constructive contribution to regional, national and global sustainability" (NMMU 2010:18). The reality for NMMU is that it attracts 70% of its student population from its own province, the Eastern Cape, the most economically and educationally impoverished of South Africa's provinces. For the majority of the students who qualify for university, the diploma is their only access route. As a result, one of the underlying premises of NMMU's developing academic plan is that of a strong suite of diploma curricula, with differential approaches to admission and placement, which makes a major contribution to providing access opportunities, as well as addressing education and training needs at a local and regional level.

Arguably, NMMU's choice for functional curriculum specialisation is facilitated by the fact that a large percentage of its undergraduate programmes have a professional or vocational nature. Institutions that have a more balanced mix of curriculum types may find it more difficult to navigate the tension between the hierarchical status

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and the functional specialisation of their curricula. The key issue is, however, that strategic decisions about the re-curriculation of qualifications and the consolidation of qualification structures will be influenced by the relative power of hierarchical and functional views of universities in South Africa. The navigation of epistemological boundaries within a conceptual framework for curriculum planning takes place within the context of contestations regarding the "real value" of different types of qualifications.

CONCLUSION

What we have come to in this chapter involve three main issues: Firstly, we have highlighted some of the elements related to the debate on international curriculum challenges. Secondly, we have pointed at some national (South African) curriculum challenges, also as they pertain to knowledge production and dissemination by universities in the African context; and thirdly, we have referred to challenges linked to differentiated curricula as they increasingly engage with communities outside of universities.

Within the international arena, curriculum challenges that seem imminent are the following:

- A lack of common terminology and language as related to conducting a proper curriculum discourse
- A paucity of curriculum leadership at all levels of the university
- Too little interest in curriculum inquiry
- A lack of debate involving the underpinning values that higher education curricula should promote, particularly in evolving democracies.

Within South African universities, the following three prominent curriculum challenges also prove evident:

- A paucity in the debate on the focus of university curricula, whether it be the tension between internationalisation or globalisation, or the tension between international, regional or local curriculum emphases
- The demands on university curricula as increasingly utilitarian in view of pressures exerted by "the world of work" and employability
- Challenges related to curricula that need to be more accommodating towards "outside" communities and constituents.

On the question of an increased engagement between curricula and communities outside of universities in South Africa, we highlighted the following three salient questions:

- The question of institutional autonomy and how this affects university-community relations
- The public good of universities and how they can engage more productively and reciprocally with communities outside of universities
- The question of curriculum emphasis within a unitary, but differentiated South African higher education system.

Chapter 1 has therefore set the scene for further exploring the main issue or focus of this volume, namely how university curricula may contribute to promoting critical citizenship in an emerging South African democracy. To reiterate the meaning of critical citizenship, we have pointed out that promoting critical citizenship in higher education curricula can be seen as enhancing in student learning a common set of shared values such as tolerance, appreciation for diversity, respect of human rights and democracy. As an educational pedagogy, critical citizenship curricula therefore encourage critical reflection on the past and an imagining of a possible future shaped by social justice to prepare people to live together in harmony amid diversity. Critical citizenship education specifically aims at the transformation of thinking on a personal level. These issues link exceptionally well with views on critical pedagogy, in particular how it proves to play out in curriculum thinking and trends within the modern university. This is what we refer to next by pointing to the thinking and contributions of Henry Giroux.