

Realigning the Curriculum for the Societal's Needs in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The debate surrounding curriculum, change and its management has reached the highest level for sometimes now, because stakeholders involved do not see eye for an eye owing to their ideological differences. Broad discussions around curriculum issues in South Africa have been ongoing for quite sometimes but no effective and tangible results could since being shown. The discussions might be clouded with some biasness's of omissions and distortions of information thus why results are hard to come forth. The debates, however, failed to deal with the root cause of misunderstandings. Discussion on pertinent issues such as realigning the curriculum to match challenges of the 21st Century, as well as focus on the legitimacy and ownership of the curriculum and its content, management and other related aspects which makes the debates relevant. This article seeks to address some of those issues and it deemed it fit to focus its attention to the following purposes: (1) to find out how the curriculum can be realigned in order to meet the challenges of the 21st Century; (2) to explore different ideologies which are central to the curriculum debates; and (3) to present and explain an ideal approach that can be found to be viable for curriculum control in the 21st Century.

Keywords: Curriculum change, ideology, transformation, stakeholders, control, management.

1. Introduction

We commence this discourse by highlighting and reflecting on certain imperatives which include the area of interest and the value attached to the curriculum as witnessed and confirmed by the Minister for Basic Education in South Africa, Angie Motshega (2012) in her opening address during the launch of Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) presentation in Pretoria. "Our national curriculum is the culmination of our efforts over a period of seventeen years to transform the curriculum bequeathed to us by apartheid". From the start of democracy we have built our curriculum on the values that inspired our Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). The Preamble to the Constitution states that the aims of the Constitution are to:

- heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;
- lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; and
- build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations (RSA, 1996).

Education and the curriculum have an important role to play in realising these aims. For the purpose of this article, curriculum will be discussed in the light of the preceding statement.

Curriculum designing is a mammoth task in the world of today; designers are faced with many challenges especially in the democratic era. Dednam (2012:926) confirms this by adding that determining curriculum content for education is a difficult task in any context, because almost everything has been democratised and politicised in all systems of government. In the 21st Century, it will no longer be possible for curriculum experts, government officials, teacher unions or any other person to plan or control the curriculum from outside and on his own. Instead, the curriculum

will emerge as a result of dialogues between teachers and students, politicians and pressure groups in the society. Therefore, curriculum will not be taken as given quality assurance programmes or activities, but it must be accorded the seriousness it deserves in ongoing, deliberate, collaborative and reflexive engagement processes (Karimi, 2008). The quality of the dialogue will determine the quality of the outcome which, in a postmodern view, is the transformation of school or university curriculum.

Dednam (2012:926) posits that "whilst some lecturers still feel that all their students should know nothing less than all of the subject matter that is available in their specialised fields, the market is inclined to expect graduates with specialised skills in a specific field." Contrary to the popular wish of the university which would prefer to develop the student as a societal human being in a holistic way, the market prefers to receive ready-made practitioners. In his view, Dednam (2012:926) is strongly of the view that "higher education tends to emphasise rather the generic skills development of students as opposed to the accumulation of mere knowledge of facts or practical skills." He further argues that "some view a curriculum more as a composite of educational subject matter, whilst others include the learning activities and experiences of a broader generic skills development into their definition of curriculum."

The National Curriculum Statement stresses high knowledge and high skills for all. This has been a feature of envisaged curriculum for the South African education system, but it has been argued that more emphasis on progress and less on integration will lead to more possibilities of achieving high knowledge and skills for all South Africa's students, especially the historically disempowered (Chisholm, 2003). Dednam (2012:927) laments that "finding equilibrium between these competing forces is already a daunting task." Having further to consider non educational factors in the equation makes the task even more complex. These additional contextual forces include expectations of such as the historically advantaged faculties in South Africa, expectations of transformation and redress. It is important to note that how all of these forces influence the curriculum and the resultant knowledge, skills and values bases of graduates from such a faculty. This idea holds water that change is to introduce an innovation that brings something better, hence the strategies of designing, managing, implementing and evaluating the curriculum.

History reminds us that South Africa embarked on a radical transformation of education and training between 1989 and 1994. One of the most challenging aspects of this transformation has been the adoption of an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) approach that underpins the introduction of the new Curriculum (C2005). OBE views itself as a drastic break from current educational practices and a means of providing educational success for all the students. Steps in designing a learning programme include the understanding and interpreting of existing learning programmes, the study of prescribed policies by the Department of Education and the selection and preparation of suitable textual and visual resources for learning (Carl, 2005).

The greatest question that needs attention in this discussion is how to put Curriculum into its rightful place amongst all stakeholders since there are different opinions about the roles which are played by different stakeholders regarding Curriculum control. There are war of words or hot debate that has erupted amongst different groups regarding curriculum design, implementation, evaluation and control which has always been proved to be the biggest problem of teaching and learning in different schools in South Africa. However, if this situation can be left unattended it will have a negative impact on our education system on the 21st Century. A particularly manifestation of community participation is that of stakeholders' participation. This implies that in educational governance structures, legitimate stakeholders should be granted the opportunities to participate in designing the curriculum (Van Huysteen, 2005:51).

2. Conceptualising Curriculum

Curriculum is a broad term with a variety of meanings and has a wide range of definitions. The term is derived from Latin word *curro*, which refers to a racecourse (Abrahams, 1994:4). However, a more recent position with regard to the term emphasises the verb form of curriculum, *currere*, which, instead of taking its interpretation from the racecourse etymology of curriculum, actually points to the running of the race and emphasises the individuals' own capacity to conceptualise his or her life experiences (Matshe, 2005:68). What is important is the fact that curriculum refers not simply to a course of study, content or subject matter, a list of goals or objectives, or a programme of planned activities that takes places in a learning environment.

As Abrahams (1997) writes, "curriculum actually encompasses the total sum of the learning experiences learners are exposed to or under the direction of the learning organization. It involves the development of attitude, skills and knowledge and it includes activities generated by the school or a higher authority, which takes place inside or outside the classroom or lecturing hall. It also refers to activities such as community services planned in the learning environment and taking place and properly executed after formal schooling hours in the communities, as well as activities of school societies and clubs. Curriculum also includes unplanned and unprogrammed sets of activities, for example the many

informal social interactions among learners in corridors, playgrounds, youth clubs, resource centers, libraries, social gatherings, educational tours and excursions." These unplanned activities often serve as even greater learning experiences than planned activities. Central to the concept, it is the optimising of human potential under the direction and supervision of the organized institution of learning or a school. What should not be overlooked is how skills, norms and values, as well as knowledge, for example are developed by the learner's impact on the broader community. It is therefore necessary that the curriculum be contextualised, taking into account not only the learners' own environment but also the concerns of his immediate surroundings, interests, needs and aspirations of the local communities.

Curriculum theorists usually distinguish between the "formal curriculum" and the "hidden curriculum". The former is, or "overt curriculum" as it is sometimes termed, is the intended or explicit curriculum, which schools admit they teach or offer to learners (Abrahams, 1997:5). The formal curriculum is that which is official, public and made available to all who ask for it, and it is meant to be explicit. It incorporates, for example, the concepts and skills to be developed. It also spells out policy, purpose and mission that appear in curriculum guides. The hidden curriculum, on the other hand, is that which is taught implicitly, rather than explicitly by the learning organisation. These are less obvious learning experiences but have an impact on the learners' perception of the world around them. The pattern of power play in the schools and the types of social interaction, according to Schubert (in Abrahams, 1997:6), it can give children strong messages, not only about the school but also the world around and their places in it. The notion of hierarchical management, structure, participation and decision-making, all form part of the hidden curriculum. It is not just about pictures and ideas around walls but empowerment for the future. The curriculum is often used by educational authorities in shaping students' perceptions of the world around them in such a way as to maintain the *status quo*. Educational authorities can play a major role in determining what knowledge is to be taught and what values are to be shaped in the school. Abrahams (1997:6), asserts that in portraying various images of curriculum, writes of the image of "curriculum as a cultural reproduction". In terms of this view of curriculum, the main task of modern schooling is to reproduce salient knowledge, skills and values to be taught, and it is the job of the professional teachers to see that these are transformed into a curriculum that can be delivered to students.

3. Different Philosophies in View of Curriculum in the 21st Century

It is necessary to highlight these differing viewpoints, so as to avoid creating a false impression that this article agree with everything set out. The history of curriculum draws back from time immemorial until recently in 1994 and has been based on a particular ideology as advocated by Lofthouse (1994:1430) who identified seven groups who held different ideologies with regard to curriculum content, namely:

- *The neo classical or humanists* put more emphasis on the conversation of an authoritative cultural tradition and stressed the need for curriculum to embody worthwhile knowledge.
- *The vocational theories* defined the curriculum in terms of the transmission of useful knowledge that would capacitate an individual to become employable to serve the needs of society.
- *The liberal-meritocratic theorists* believed in competitive equality of opportunities. Thus, there was need to define the curriculum that would accentuates the need for learners to acquire personal autonomy within a framework of egalitarian freedoms against the background of a minimal state.
- *Liberal progressive* - embraces an interventionist approach as opposed to a minimal state. These stresses individual development, self-expression and cultural pluralism, this group depends on the state to encourage tolerance and understanding rather than competition and elitism.
- *The social critical theorists* were in favour of the curriculum that can empower individuals to adopt a critical stance towards society. This group defines curriculum in terms of encouraging social change through transformative educational action.
- *The religious theorists* place secular knowledge in the context of transcendental values and wish the curriculum to explicitly convey spiritual values and beliefs.
- *Pragmatic theory* argues that a stance to planning enables a proper focus to be placed upon coherent and mutually productive problem solving and learning capacities of individuals and social groups.

As compared to the above mentioned seven curriculum theories that were identified by Lofthouse (1994:143), in current year's curriculum theories that gained prominence during the 20th century are divided into two broad categories, that is, the traditional paradigm and the inquiry paradigm. Curriculum paradigm is a representative set of curriculum theories which are characterized by one particular approach to curriculum problems. According to Jacobs *et al.* (2010:39), among the large number of traditional curriculum theories, those that are currently deeply embedded in the curriculum

thinking are the following:

- (i) The liberal theory: The main purpose of the curriculum should be to develop students' minds in such a way that they gain substantial insights into the great ideals of life such as truth, beauty, goodness, liberty, equality and justice. The teacher is regarded as the chief policy maker. In terms of this theory, curriculum is seen as being synonymous with content.
The curriculum must produce a moral person, and a well-ordered society. The conception of the moral person must include those features of human personality relevant to the choice of principles of justice. The origin of a well-ordered society must also be intended to depict those aspects of human social life that principles of justice must encompass and support. Lastly, the idea of the curriculum must be viewed solely as to finally produce students who should select first the principles of justice for a well-ordered society (Galston, 1982:494).
- (ii) Dewey's Experiential Theory:
According to this theory, learners can only acquire knowledge through personal experiences. Thus, the purpose of a justifiable curriculum should be to facilitate personal growth by exposing each student as a person to as many relevant real-life experiences as possible. Justice must be done by focusing on each learner's interest, and not necessarily on material prescribed by the state.
- (iii) The Behaviorist Theory (The Tylerian Theory):
The behaviorists stress that each lesson in the curriculum should be divided into definite components and sections as determined by bureaucracies appointed to implement state policy and each lesson should result in a desirable change in the behavior of a learner. According to Jacobs *et al.* (2012:38), this theory was initiated by Tyler in 1949 who builds his theory around four fundamental questions each of which led in due time to the development of perennial curriculum.
- (iv) The Pragmatic Theory:
This curriculum theory approaches learning through experience. The child's interest, needs and experience are taken into account. It advocates for knowledge construction by the student.

Thus, the NCS builds its learning outcomes for Grade 10-12 on the Critical and Development Outcomes that were inspired by the Constitution and developed through a democratic process (DoE, 2003:3). Students are expected to be able to identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking; to work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organization and community; to collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information; to communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and or language skills in various modes; to use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others; and to demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognizing that problem solving context do not exist in isolation.

In terms of the Developmental Outcomes required students to be able to: Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively; participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities; be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social context; explore education and career opportunities, and to develop entrepreneurial opportunities.

4. Spheres of Curriculum Influencing

The curriculum can be influenced by different spheres. South African Development Community (2000:22) identified the following spheres of influence in the changing phase of the curriculum, namely:

- *The political sphere* - This sphere represents the politics of the day which determines the goals, content, learning experiences and evaluation strategies and materials in education. The curriculum materials and their interpretations are usually heavily influenced by political considerations and persuasions since we are the product of democracy, the government of the day which is headed by a political party which has won elections has a voice over other parties, thus why their influence runs across the spectrum. Political persuasions may influence certain appointments so that they ensure that the person pursues the agenda of the ruling political party.
- *The social factor* - Issues such as the culture of the target group, different religious and moral values should be considered in the designing of the curriculum
- *The economic factors* - the market forces dictates what should be included in the national curriculum. Technology - modern curriculum designers cannot afford to ignore technology and its influence on the national curriculum.

- *The environmental factor-people* have become insensitive to their surroundings and the natural resources which must be considered in designing the curriculum.

5. The Secret Hidden in the Curriculum

These debates will be incomplete and meaningless if it can fail to highlight the fact that from time in memorial the curriculum was regarded as a secret garden, a secured place only to be visited by the chosen few, destined elites, the educationists because of their specialized knowledge. It was a taboo to enter in that secret place specially reserved for the professionals. However, today, things have turned another way round; everyone can walk in and out the garden, politicians, laymen, business personnel and the academics alike. Some would even walk in for no apparent reasons, whilst others gain access through their political connections and others by virtue of the wealth or financial status. The root cause for such disrespect and invasion centers around democratic principles, which dictates over and above that everyone has the rights including the right for information (RSA, 1996). These changes were informed by among other pressing factors the response to the economic need which was to be globally competitive (Czerniewicz, Murray and Probyn, 2000:8). The trio further argued that the transformation of the curriculum was driven by the state's needs to transform the old apartheid curriculum into one appropriate structure for a newly democratic society defined to create one that will meet the government's goals of equity, redress, democracy, access and participation, which has compromised access to the secret place.

6. Critical Issues Around Curriculum Supervision

The focus of this deliberation centers around a heated debate on who is in charge for the control and management of the curriculum in the 21st Century in South African corridors and boardrooms today, due to the fact that the control and management thereof is a contested terrain by all those who allege to have a bite in supporting and sustaining the welfare of education which relates to the curriculum. The "war of words" to be more precise stems from different groups with differing ideological viewpoints regarding the design, implementation, evaluation and control which has always been the possible point of tension in many schools in South Africa. The private sector believes that the education sector must produce learners who can fit the work environment by being relevant and been equipped with the necessary expertise, they therefore claim to be the one who can bring the best curriculum which can assist economic growth and in return efforts to realize the objectives of the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG) 2015. In view of conditions outlined above there is a need for a transformed education which can only be achieved as a result of the robust dialogue.

Maile and Pitsoe (2012) were right to concur with Cummins (2000: 245; Davis (2010: 246) that transformative pedagogy (science and art of teaching), should be perceived as interactions between educators and students that attempt to foster collaborative relations of power in the classroom. They however, caution that, power relations in teaching and learning contexts are complex and cannot be seen in linear lenses. They can also not be envisaged as located in classroom dialogues, because they are mostly located in print and the various technological media used to enable the student to learn better. The implication is that the print media and all technologies used to enable better learning need to be deliberately aware of power relations that should be negotiated between students and lecturers in order to ensure that the pedagogical relation challenges the operation of coercive relations of power in the school and wider society (Cummins, 2000:245). It is a huge challenge for curriculum designers and educators to ignore the needs of their students and concentrate on what they think need to be taught, how it must be taught and why it is taught. Matos (2000:19) reiterate this notion when he claims that students' African knowledge is not included in university curricula. He argues that "University education refuses to acknowledge the knowledge present in African society. Literature, poetry, art and in general culture represents other extreme cases where African philosophy has been ignored and at best tolerated within the content of the educational systems." For him, "these disciplines are as exotic and absent from the curricula in Africa as anywhere else in the world." Besides replacing these disciplines with western fields of study, our argument is that, when students are brought on an acceptable level of power sharing in the pedagogic relation, their knowing is bound to come as their own identities. Conversely, what students know, is integral to their community life.

The failure of the African University to adapt to the African student's community life is a major challenge for higher education. Reiterating this observation Matos (2000: 19-20) laments that "learning is not *Conceived to adapt to the African learner, the very concept of school as we know it from western civilisation (as a place where students of well-defined age groups come together at well-defined times and periods and acquire well-defined sequences of skills and a body sequences of skills and a body of information) is unlike learning systems in the homes, villages and countries of average African students.*" However, we concur with Matos (2000) that to understand African societies and minds,

learning systems, and to design schools, universities, study programmes and curricula which seek to assist students adapt to society and make them agents of a gradual but sustained improvement of the standard of living requires a deep understanding of and respect for African societies, and Cummins (2000 quoting Banks, 1996: 9) that "pedagogic power relations require educators to perceive transformative academic knowledge as the facts, concepts, paradigms, themes and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge. And as that which expand and substantially revise established canons, paradigms, theories, explanations and research methods."

In view of the above deliberations, Maile and Pitsoe (2012) contend that "this is a huge challenge for educational institutions, universities being included." In their view the institutions cannot claim to be the sole spaces for knowledge construction. Because knowledge is not neutral, but is influenced by human interests, as human interests are also influenced by created knowledge, Maile and Pitsoe (2012) further assert that "transformative teaching and learning should be grounded in the lives of students, since students in teaching and learning processes are integral to the dispersal structures of pedagogic relations. Therefore all these factors hinted above should be taken into considerations when thinking and drawing the curriculum for any institution in future.

7. Standards for Determination of the Curriculum

In this section, we argue that the successful curriculum requires unique and special sets of conditions to be adhered to; drawing the curriculum should also comply with such requirements. In view of the demands of appropriateness and relevance of the curriculum, certain conditions should be considered when mapping up the study programme. However, in deciding about what schools should teach depend on what educators or lecturers see as the desired result of education; but not all educators will share the same vision and opinions. Parents, education authorities and other stakeholders will also differ vehemently. Those subscribing to the philosophy of child centred education will want children and their abilities to have a large share in deciding in curriculum while the collective educator will want to make sure that children learn skills and the ways of behaving which are necessary to the life of the collective. We therefore have to look now at the variety of principles which determine curricula at present rather than at one particular theory of education.

Dednam (2012:926) asserts that criteria for determination of the curriculum might differ with reference to the applicable system, country, political stage, local experience of social justice issue such as sex, gender, race, religion and many other, and significance of subject matter as foundational, core and optional courses. On the other hand, a new democratic dispensation and a negotiated constitution geared for societal redress has ensured marked changes to the established curriculum. In addition, South African curriculum increasingly has to cater for above mentioned social justice issues, including also language and even socio-economic class.

In determining the curriculum the knowledge dimension must be included. The factual knowledge (basic elements of a discipline); knowledge of terminology; conceptual knowledge; knowledge of classifications and categories; knowledge of principles and generalizations; knowledge of theories, models, and structures; procedural knowledge; knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms; knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods; knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures; metacognitive knowledge; strategic knowledge and the self-knowledge must be included in the curriculum (Krathwohl, 2002:214).

8. Conclusion

This article argues that there is a need to realign the curriculum in order to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. Since we live in changing times there is a need for the curriculum to be coined in such a way that it meets the societal needs of the times in question as well as promotion of the advancement of the economy through the use of the appropriate curriculum which is relevant to the times we live in. Therefore, the curriculum must be of such a nature that it encourages students to construct knowledge and apply that knowledge in their day to day encounter with life. Since there is no need for a specific group to own up to the design, content as well as management of the curriculum but the best option is to draw from various ideologies so that they supplement and complement each other, this means a negotiated approach is herewith recommended which can assist aligning the curriculum.

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