

## Editorial

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## Transforming curriculum in a rapidly changing world: Challenges, tensions, and expectations

The education landscape is transforming across both the schooling and post-schooling sectors in South Africa. In schooling, curriculum reform initiatives aimed at strengthening the curriculum have been underway since 2019, and the post-schooling sector has been in a state of flux for many years grappling with TVET, competence-based programmes, and micro-credentialing. Schooling and post-schooling curricula are, however, not merely technical artefacts designed to serve political agendas. When embraced as fluid and dynamic, the curriculum can pioneer positive change and enhancement moving beyond prescriptive policies, engaging with the complexities of an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

Curriculum transformation in schooling is inevitable and a constant situation. Although curriculum policy is mandated by government and informed by broad consultation processes, its implementation and theorisation demand the criticality of curriculum scholars so that the complexities of all matters learning, teaching and assessment are not detached from the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) realities wherein curricula are enacted. In the post-schooling sector, curriculum development is also politically charged but does not conform to standardisation, unlike the nationally prescribed school curriculum. Its multifaceted and complex nature enables varied interpretations and implementations across theoretical and practical perspectives (Le Grange, 2016). Transforming the curriculum within South African higher education has necessitated intricate and often contentious discourse around decolonisation, particularly in response to historical inequalities and Eurocentric epistemologies that have shaped the sector (Mbembe, 2016).

Concurrently, global forces such as neoliberalism, characterised by market-driven reforms and privatisation, exert pressure on institutions to prioritise performativity, rankings, and entrepreneurial initiatives over critical intellectual engagement (Fataar, 2018). Additionally, advancements in generative artificial intelligence raise ethical and academic integrity concerns that have direct relevance for curriculum in terms of its interrogation and renewal (Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). Sustainability and the need to respond to global conflicts and crises further emphasise the role of higher education in fostering adaptive and socially responsive curricula. Also included, are the current curriculum shifts towards micro-credentialing such as short courses towards cumulative qualifications consisting of smaller qualification units (du Preez, 2025). In this complex landscape, curriculum transformation in South African higher education (and schooling sectors) represents an ongoing negotiation between global demands, local imperatives, and historical legacies. Whether in the schooling or post-schooling sector, curriculum remains a vibrant and generative space for scholars to think anew and debate the issues that our education system faces within the rapidly changing world we occupy. This special issue consists of 12 articles exploring the contemporary issues facing curriculum transformation in the schooling and post-schooling sectors.

Articles linked to the schooling sector zoomed in on reading, mathematics, literacy, and technology. The authors also focused on the importance of the human resource, namely teachers in the curriculum implementation and transformation processes. Nene and Sokhulu explore primary school teachers' readiness to integrate emerging technologies into the curriculum. They highlight the importance of digital competence required by teachers to strengthen the integration of emerging technologies into the curriculum. Madimabe-Mofokeng, Sathorar, and Nubia, on the other hand, focus on mathematics teacher's practices. They advocate for curriculum transformation through pedagogical indigenisation and technology in rural South African mathematics classrooms. Employing a quantitative questionnaire, their study found that the transformation of mathematics curriculum is dependent on effective, inclusive, and sustainable teacher training that foregrounds both technological fluency and cultural responsiveness. Both articles warrant the need for curriculum reform to be critical of teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge, and its challenges within various contextual factors.

Boyd highlights literacy as key to curriculum debates in the Foundation Phase schooling sector. She argues for transforming reading activities to accommodate contextual realities, thus addressing tensions between policy intentions and the classroom realities where these are enacted. She regards curriculum interventions such as scripted lesson plans for teachers and one-on-one material for learners as pivotal to foster early grade reading through the formal curriculum. Livingston's article on reading is focused on adapting the canonical European fairy tale, Little Red Riding Hood, through cultural localisation and multilingual storytelling. Adaptation thus becomes a structured pedagogical practice through which students retrieve Indigenous symbols, languages, kinship structures, and moral frameworks, and embed them within inherited narrative forms. This process illustrates how curriculum content can be reworked from within, not by erasing established texts, but by reframing them through

contextually situated epistemologies that align with the lived realities of Foundation Phase classrooms.

The post-schooling sector (TVET and universities) boasts an array of topics. Majola argues that meaningful transformation of TVET lecturer education requires centring students' lived experiences, critiques, and aspirations as catalysts for reimagining curriculum and pedagogy. His article provides evidence from qualitative narratives of 15 graduates of the National Certificate (Vocational) programme to argue that the TVET curriculum demands a shift from narrow professionalisation toward transformative, Africanised, and socially responsive praxis. This resonates to some extent with the article by Rathilal and Sunder, who stress the centrality of the human dimension in curricular change. Shedding light on the profound misalignment between a reform's strategy and an institution's culture and identity, they believe that successful transformation requires a human-centred approach that actively diagnoses and aligns with institutional culture.

Curriculum is yet to fully experience micro-credentialing because this is still an emerging practice. Through a mixed-methods research study, Slabbert and Labuschagne explore the potential of micro-credentials to address discrepancies between academic training and labour-market demands. Their research findings indicate that micro-credentials, when aligned with industry requirements and integrated into curricula, can more effectively develop and signal essential competencies for future employability. This provides alternative perspectives for thinking about curriculum transformation in universities of technology and universities, more broadly.

The curriculum on teacher professional development is central to continuing and in-service teacher education. The article by de Villiers, Petersen, and de Beer focuses explicitly on the life sciences curriculum. They present a NOS-STEAM conceptual lens that promotes scientific knowledge as tentative, creative, socially negotiated, and culturally embedded. For them, curriculum transformation bridges global scientific frameworks with local knowledge so that it responds to a rapidly changing world. Also in teacher professional development and cultural responsiveness, Dyosini and Letsapa lean towards ethical and pedagogically responsible artificial intelligence integration within a comprehensive open distance e-learning Bachelor of Education (Foundation Phase) module. Their research concludes that meaningful curriculum transformation requires more than technological adoption; it demands structured ethical scaffolding, culturally responsive pedagogy, and intentional support for the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities.

Authors Mokgwathi and Ngoveni suggest that curriculum transformation in higher education requires a triadic lens: decolonisation, transformation, and digitisation. They opine that decolonisation functions as the primary epistemic driver, transformation operates as the institutional mechanism, and digitisation acts ambivalently as both an enabler and a constraint. Offering a theoretically grounded framework for coherent and socially just curriculum reform in the digital era, their research proposes a triadic model integrating social redress, epistemic plurality, and digital equity. Menon and Castrillón assert that to radically reimagine education's purpose and methods, holistically, relationally, and responsively complicated conversations

about curriculum are urgently needed. Their conceptual paper also feeds into decolonisation, like previous authors, but is premised on the critiques of the neoliberal university and invokes posthumanism when challenging this. Posthuman innovations are also offered by the final article in this collection. Drawing on multifaceted crises (personal, social, and environmental) facing the contemporary world, Le Grange's conceptual paper is focused on the role of the curriculum scholar in navigating the contemporary moment. The nine provocations that he proposes provide critical insights into how curriculum is transforming in a rapidly changing world.

This collection of articles provides insights into the complexities of curriculum transformation in education sectors in South Africa in the fast-paced global context. Key themes emerging point to the importance of the nexus of curriculum policies, individual and institutional practices, institutional cultures, and how these cohere around the introduction of technology and human agency. The articles also highlight that while curriculum has historically contributed to the perpetuation of the status quo, it can and has also been transformative amidst multiple ongoing local and global crises and persistently polarising discourses about what should and should not be taught in educational institutions. It is our view that we can draw inspiration and hope from articles in this volume to reimagine curriculum in education to engender and enable further inquiry into the field with a view to opening up possibilities for innovation and transformation.

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