

## Book Review

### *Curriculum Studies (in the) Now: Transformations and possibilities* (2025) edited by Petro du Preez and Chris Reddy

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Nyna Amin

Interim Director: University Teaching and learning Office, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa  
amin@ukzn.ac.za  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4551-5046>

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*Curriculum Studies (in the) Now*, edited by Petro du Preez and Chris Reddy, traces the movement from the curricular settlements that shaped South African schooling to the conditions presently unsettling it. The titular parenthetical, “(in the)” positions the field at a threshold, and insists that curricular thought inhabits a present implicated in the unresolved residues of its past.

Agamben’s political philosophy offers three concepts pertinent to this arc. The *apparatus* names any arrangement that captures and orients living beings (Agamben, 2009), and curriculum, on this account, operates as the principal apparatus through which schooling produces the subjects it appears merely to instruct. The *state of exception* (Agamben, 2005) describes a political condition in which the rule is suspended yet remains operative; curricular reform after apartheid exhibits this grammar, dissolving the formal rule of segregation whilst preserving its educational effects. *Form-of-life* (Agamben, 2016) designates an existence in which knowing and living are inseparable, and in which political being is entangled with biological being. Transposed to curriculum, the concept invites a pedagogical imagination in which the subject’s becoming constitutes the field of study.

The volume does not deploy Agamben directly; the concepts are introduced here as one productive interpretation of what the volume accomplishes. A reading framed by Bernstein’s (1990) pedagogic device, Bourdieu’s (1988) sociology of academic fields, or the decolonial scholarship of Mbembe (2017) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) would identify different strengths and different limits. The Agambenian reading offered here illuminates the sovereign seizure of life and the modes of existence resisting it, whilst occluding what its vocabulary cannot articulate.

Soudien’s chapter on the political and historical landscape of South African curriculum exposes three and a half centuries of policy texts as instruments of intent, demonstrating how schooling in this country functioned as an arrangement for producing subjects. The analysis opens with

Van Riebeeck's diary entry of 1658, recording the establishment of a slave school whose primary work was the fabrication of a particular kind of subject. Children were induced to attend through the lure of brandy and tobacco, and the apparatus that gathered them for instruction simultaneously clothed and disciplined them. In its earliest South African iteration, curriculum operated as the apparatus in undiluted form, designed to align life with sovereign purpose. The chapter also supplies a method. Policy texts can be read for the will and intent they encode, equipping South African curriculum scholarship to work through the colonial and apartheid archives without succumbing to technicist reception or undisciplined critique. What the analysis opens, it does not exhaust. The post-2012 curricular landscape, with its digital platforms and algorithmic mediations, remains available for the next generation of such work, where the apparatus has acquired computational form. Read through Agamben (2009), the web of institutions and practices Soudien describes constitutes the inherited foundation from which every later South African curriculum descends, including those presenting themselves as emancipated.

The "now" of curriculum-as-exception extends this arc. The juridical end of apartheid in 1994 suspended the rule of racialised schooling, yet its educational consequences remain operative, attenuated by democratic legislation though structurally continuous with what they were intended to supersede. This is the precise grammar of Agamben's (2005) *State of Exception*, where the suspension of the rule does not cancel its force. The South African curricular present is constituted by this paradoxical suspension, with curriculum operating as the privileged site at which the persistence of the superseded is reproduced.

Maistry's chapter on neoliberal marketisation makes the structure of exception unusually visible. The argument links the school funding regime to the quintile ranking system and to the commodification of higher education, producing an integrated account of how educational life chances are differentially distributed under post-apartheid conditions. Drawing on critical political economy, a tradition the volume otherwise leaves in the background, the chapter raises a productive tension with the editorial framing; if neoliberal marketisation is indeed the most pressing condition shaping South African curriculum, the implications for the volume's theoretical resources warrant editorial reflection. The tension identifies a seam at which the volume's diagnostic ambition meets its conceptual range.

Ramrathan's chapter on curriculum leadership opens a further register of exception. The post-COVID recovery curriculum suspended ordinary curricular operation whilst continuing to govern through the frameworks devised to monitor its suspension. Each device assembled to track curriculum implementation becomes itself a curricular arrangement, shaping the teachers and learners it claims to observe. The chapter approaches this recursive condition through an account of monitoring across three provinces under acute disruption, where the instruments designed to record curricular delivery quietly come to constitute it. The empirical foundation supplied invites the explicit theoretical development that the analysis implies.

Other chapters operate within this register without naming it. Accounts of post-apartheid reform, of sustainability under global change, and of persistent inequality across school and post-school settings document a present in which what was juridically ended continues to

function through its formal supersession. The South African curriculum (in the) now is a layered exception, and serious curricular thought must begin from this layering. Diagnosis alone, however, cannot exhaust the work of a field; the volume's most ambitious chapters reach towards what lies beyond the exception.

The anticipatory movement of the volume reaches towards curriculum as form-of-life. Agamben's (2016) form-of-life designates an existence in which knowing and living are inseparable, and in which the bios of qualified political life remains entangled with the zoē of biological life. Transposed to curriculum, the concept reorients the central question of the field. The curricular subject, previously theorised as captured object of the apparatus and again as suspended subject of the exception, here becomes a relational being whose becoming itself constitutes the curriculum. From this vantage, the closing theoretical movement of the volume emerges as its most consequential contribution.

Le Grange's ubuntu-currere stands out as the chapter to which the field is most likely to return. The construct draws together Pinar's (2004) autobiographical method, Wallin's (2010) Deleuzian reworking of curriculum thought, Ubuntu philosophy, and posthuman theorising (Braidotti, 2019). It refuses two reductions at once: the instrumentalism of the Tylerian rationale (Tyler, 1949) that continues to dominate schooling and higher education curricula, and the residual anthropocentrism lingering in reconceptualised curriculum thought even where such thought seeks to humanise the curriculum (Pinar, 2011). The African philosophical commitment functions substantively. Ubuntu operates here as a philosophical resource that, placed in conversation with posthuman theorising, opens curriculum to the more-than-human entanglements that an ecological present demands. The chapter introduces, without exhausting, its most far-reaching implication, that curriculum can itself be conceived as a form of life. Its pedagogical, assessment, and institutional consequences await elaboration in further scholarship. This is the chapter's invitation to the field; interventions of this kind open the terrain on which further work becomes possible, and the conceptual labour required for that work has been laid down.

Two further chapters extend this anticipatory movement. The argument for epistemic equity considers what it would mean for the curriculum to honour the epistemic life of its subjects, resonating with decolonial scholarship on epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007; Santos, 2014) that the volume does not directly engage. The chapter on artificial intelligence (AI) and ethics develops an immanent and affirmative position, drawing on Badiou (2002) and Braidotti (2019) to contest the moralism that pervades educational discourse on AI. The conceptual reach is considerable, although the evidentiary base, drawn largely from a single business-oriented magazine, sits at odds with the theoretical ambition. The argument is best understood as the opening of a research programme; empirical anchoring will follow as the programme develops, with a substantial South African and international peer-reviewed literature on AI in higher education available to support that work.

The three Agambenian movements do not map neatly onto the volume's parts. The book is organised into opening, middle, and closing chapters, with the editorial conclusion drawing the structure together through the concept of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The

Agambenian movements cut across this organisation. The crossing is constitutive of the volume's intellectual character; the arc from then to now operates even where the formal organisation does not announce it. The middle chapters perform an indispensable orienting function. They map the field of curriculum studies for postgraduate readers, address practical domains including curriculum development, design, teaching, learning, assessment, leadership, and blended learning, and provide the scholarship on which more adventurous work can build. The relationship between these chapters and the closing theoretical movement is generative. Introductory exposition makes the volume's more demanding interventions accessible to new entrants, whilst those interventions guard the field's introductory materials against settling into orthodoxy.

Two observations pertain to the volume as a whole. The first concerns decoloniality. Several chapters invoke decolonisation as aspiration or context, and the closing theoretical movement engages decolonial concerns through its commitments to Ubuntu philosophy and to the African philosophical archive. A chapter taking the decolonial turn (Mbembe, 2017; Mignolo, 2011) as its principal focus would have strengthened the volume's engagement with what has been a defining conversation in South African higher education over the past decade. The absence doubles as an invitation to a second volume or a focused special issue.

The second observation concerns the volume's self-positioning as a response to a posthuman condition (Braidotti, 2019). This positioning is theoretically adventurous though unevenly sustained across the contributing chapters, and the editorial conclusion's recourse to the figure of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) attempts to recuperate the heterogeneity as constitutive of the field. Whether assemblage fully resolves the question of theoretical coherence merits further interrogation. An Agambenian arrangement suggests an alternative; the chapters demand sustained engagement, in different registers, with the question of how curriculum captures and how it might be thought otherwise. Coherence is already present, even where the volume does not name it in these terms.

*Curriculum Studies (in the) Now* arrives at an opportune moment for South African curriculum scholarship. The field requires texts able to address local political-historical inheritances alongside the global theoretical currents reshaping curriculum studies, and the volume brings those dimensions together with intellectual seriousness. The arc from then to now, traced through Agambenian apparatus and exception, towards form-of-life, constitutes the volume's principal intellectual contribution. The now here exceeds temporal designation; it names a curricular present constituted by the persistence of what was meant to be superseded and animated by gestures towards what remains unthought. The wager that curriculum studies in the now must move through and beyond the inherited rationalities of the field invites debate and elaboration. The volume deserves the sustained engagement that the field's emerging scholars will give it.

## About the reviewer

Nyna Amin is a full professor of Curriculum Studies, and Interim Director of the University Teaching and Learning Office at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She is an NRF-rated researcher, a Fulbright Scholar, and a co-founder of the journal, *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning*. Her current scholarship spans curriculum studies, higher education, epistemic justice, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence in research and teaching.

## Declaration

The reviewer is professionally acquainted with several contributors to this volume through the small scholarly community of South African curriculum studies, and has collaborated with the editor of the *Journal of Education* on prior projects. The reviewer affirms that these professional relationships have not influenced the independence of the assessment offered here.

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