



CHAPTER 6:

Decolonising South African higher education: Transforming curricula by addressing dichotomies

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Abstract

In the current South African higher education landscape much salient writings, institutional approaches, as well as the South African constitution and legislation present a host of dichotomies in attempting a unified approach to decolonising the higher education curricula. The problem is that unless South African higher education institutions acknowledge and understand the dichotomies of knowledge production, endogeneity, and actors engaged in the knowledge production, curricula decolonisation would not materialise. Examining this topic is significant because without addressing the dichotomies, exploring their root causes, and suggesting a pathway to resolve them, curriculum decolonisation would remain a myth. The authors applied critical theory as paradigm, an interpretive bricoleur frame and a deconstructionist lens to address all factors in resolving dichotomies as a way forward. The authors present a set of recommendations for South African HEIs.

Keywords: curricula decolonisation, knowledge production dichotomies, South African higher education, transforming curricula

Introduction and background

A critical review of the most salient arguments and the public policies since 1994 post-apartheid, in favour of decolonising the South African Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) curricula, has been undertaken. Dichotomous dilemmas surfaced in search of identifying some practical ways of addressing the need for decolonisation of the curriculum in HEIs. This chapter is intended to provoke thoughts and is a call for debate and action to create a positive social impact. As the South African liberation was cemented, the underlying philosophical perspectives of (HEI) curricula became subject to discussion of radical transformation (Sheehan, 2009). Since the liberation, the call for decolonizing the curricula has been steadily rising (Hlalele, 2019). Decolonisation typically refers to the historical movements after WWII by indigenous people globally challenging colonial domination of all aspects of social, political, cultural, and economic life (Mignolo, 2011). Within the context of this study, decolonising the curricula in higher education refers to dismantling discourses and practices that perpetuate cognitive injustices (Zembylas, 2018) and prolong social exclusion (Mzangwa, 2019). The term cognitive injustice was first coined by Visvanathan (1997) which was rooted in the recognition of plurality of knowledge. Visvanathan (1997) asked for alternative paradigms of creating knowledge in diverse settings.

Chapter 2, section 29 of the South African constitution sets the requirements for educational institutions to redress the past inequities and injustices while affording individuals to be treated equally based on their languages, race, and cultures (Mzangwa, 2019; South African Government, n.d.). Consistent with the constitution, South African HEIs have articulated their mission and values and provide wide-ranging statements about incorporating the constitutional requirements. For example, the University of Cape Town (n.d.) offers a cursory perspective, including a broad spectrum of diversity. In

contrast, the University of Pretoria (n.d.) provides a more precise language for inclusion, addressing specific categories such as culture, language, to mention a few. NWU (n.d.) puts forth an accurate and direct statement about addressing decolonisation and establishing equity based on pre-apartheid injustices—explaining its roots, its connection to South African society, and how to begin addressing it in redesigning the HEI curriculum. Yet, neither the constitution nor the HEIs approaches can address the fundamental obstacles in redesigning the curriculum—dichotomies of praxis. Four dichotomies exist. They are 1) the imbalance of racial presence in the dyadic teaching and learning process, 2) the lack of clarity of what South African learners' underlying value system is based on immersion in Western and Arab cultures over sustained long period, 3) dominance of what is non-South African in HEIs knowledge production and 4) dissemination and competing principles in the South African constitution and higher education legislations.

The problem and its significance

The problem is that unless South African HEIs understand and realise the dichotomies of knowledge production, endogeneity, and actors engaged in the knowledge production, curricula decolonisation would not materialise (Mbembe, 2016; Uzomah, 2018; Zinga & Styres, 2019). Examining the topic is significant because without addressing the dichotomies, exploring their roots, and suggesting a pathway to address them, curriculum decolonisation would remain a myth. Etieyibo (2021) in agreement with the authors of this chapter asserted that it is significant to address the extent of colonialism and its impact on curriculum development by examining the dichotomies.

Decolonising the South African HEIs' curricula requires paying close attention to the voices included in the knowledge production, the resources used in facilitating the process, and understanding the connection between society,

practices of various fields, and the academy (Charles, 2019; Mbembe, 2016). The remainder of this chapter is organised as follow: (1) providing perspectives on how we should define decolonisation of HEIs curricula in South Africa and offering a way forward, (2) who are the actors in the South African knowledge creation process, (3) in the context of the first point, what is the knowledge production and how is it created in South Africa, (4) etymologically, knowledge creation and HEIs curricula decolonisation is bound by language, requiring hermeneutic examination of its ontology and epistemology, and (5) discussion and a way forward in addressing the dichotomies.

Conceptual framework and methodology

The conceptual framework that grounds this work is interpretive bricoleur in respect to what shapes the authors' personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting as they examine the topic and suggest pathways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), and hermeneutic to address the ontological and epistemological nature of language (Gadamer, 1997). In examining the elements factored in decolonisation of HEIs curricula transformation, the authors adopt Derrida's deconstructionist approach to critical theory in examining the setting as created by language (Tyson, 1999). The authors will apply critical theory as paradigm, an interpretive bricoleur frame and a deconstructionism lens as approach to all factors addressed in resolving dichotomies as a way forward.

Perspectives on curricula decolonisation in South Africa

There has been a plethora of recommendations of what decolonised curricula should look like in abstraction. Some have suggested that curricula

decolonisation requires an imaginative review of the spectrum of mental states, attitudes, and values rather than readjusting the topics (Maserumule, 2015; Mgqwashu, 2016). Lebelo et al. (2021) and Chikoko (2021) proposed that decolonising should be considered as a product, process, contextual makeup, and praxis in the South African curricula.

Some scholars have moved away from abstraction to provide relevancy to practice. Calitz (2018) suggested that until a genuine dyadic relationship across the black and white culture can be created in HEIs, curriculum decolonisation will not materialise. Considering the history and culture, Le Grange (2021) viewed South African curricula decolonisation only possible if we move from rediscovery to action, leading to individual liberation. Kaya and Seleti (2013) argued that integrating the African indigenous knowledge system may be one way to decolonise the South African HEI's curricula. Mubangizi and Kaya (2015) saw the integration of local culture in the teaching and learning process and diversity of perspectives practiced at North-West University and KwaZulu-Natal University in South Africa as another way to decolonise the curricula.

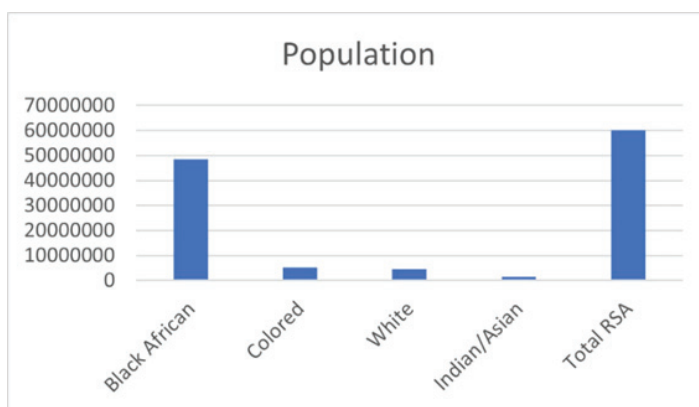
Like Etieyibo (2021), others realised the spatial nature of colonialism and sought to decolonise the curricula by liberating Africa epistemologically. This group saw the recent attempts as nominalism without much attention to ontological and epistemological underlying factors of colonialism (Dube, 2021). Additionally, although curricula had been addressed from a range of disciplines such as philosophy, literature for example, it has not been thoroughly reviewed by the educationalists (Leibowitz, 2017). Regardless of the grouping, all current literature focusing on decolonising the curricula in South Africa have failed to clearly explain the following three issues: (1) the actors in the process and what each group or category of actors should do, (2) how we should deal with heterodox nature of knowledge, and (3)

etymology as manifested through ontological and epistemological language (hermeneutics) conveying both the explicit and tacit knowledge academically. We will refer back to these three issues in our final discussion for a way forward.

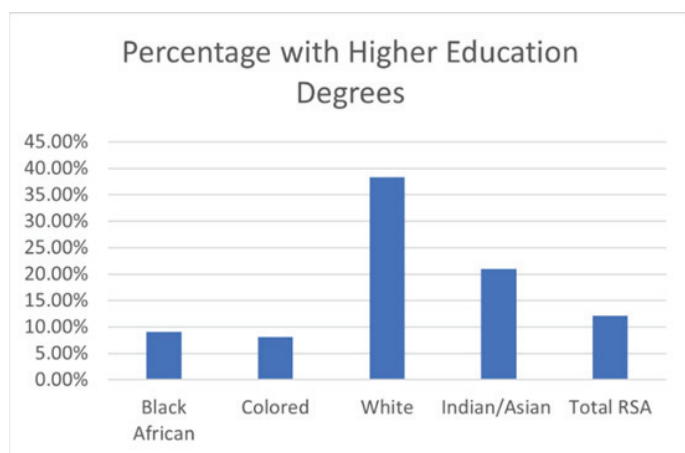
Actors in the knowledge production process

Knowledge is produced based on the dyadic exchanges between the learner and the teacher.¹⁶ Examining the percentage of the actors by race may provide a clue about knowledge production and hence, offer us a glimpse of one of the dichotomies in curricular decolonisation. Although Blacks comprise 80.9 (As shown in Graph 1) percent of the total South Africans population, only 9.1 percent of them have attained any post-secondary degree (As shown in Graph 2).

South African population by race



¹⁶ The author defines knowledge production as the result of dyadic information exchange process between the learner and the teacher where the synthesis and analysis of information leads to learners' formation of usable knowledge to apply to various situations.

Figure 1: Based on South African Government (July 19, 2021) report***Percentage of South Africans with any post-Secondary education*****Figure 2: Based on South African Government (June 3, 2021) report**

Among the factors that shape the curricula as a system of knowledge production are the HEIs researchers who typically include professors and associate professors. Both male and female Black South Africans respectively comprise only 6.4% and 1.6% of the total professors and associate professor positions at HEIs (As shown in Graph 3).

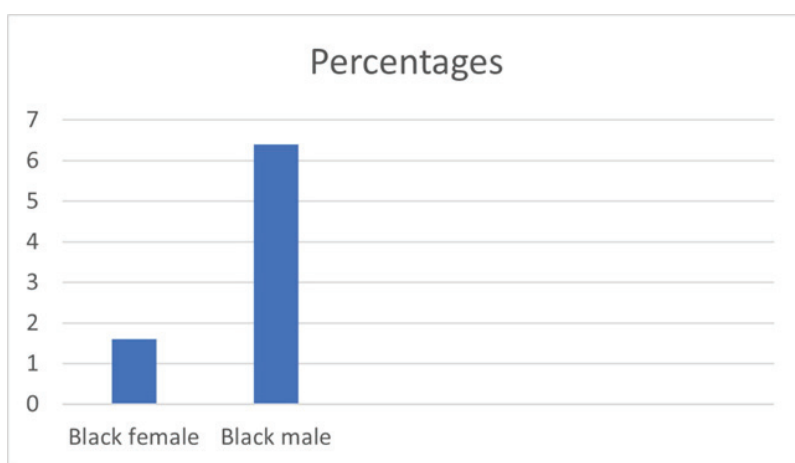
Percent of Black professors and associate professors in HEIs

Figure 3: Based on Africa Check (2014) information

Due to a small pool of Black post-secondary students, professors and associate professors, there has been an insufficient impact on the dyadic exchange relationship, resulting in less than expected decolonised curricula. Therefore, lack of presence by sufficient Black professors, associate professors and research students has been one reason for inadequate transformation for decolonising the South African HEIs (Watony, 2012). Therefore, moving the needle for decolonising the curricular knowledge production has been unrealistic. Based on the small percentage of academics and students engaged in the dyadic knowledge production, the curricula transformation for decolonisation has been unfavourable despite various constitutional and institutional mandates and strategies.

The second set of actors influencing the curricula decolonisation process have been the HEIs and the South African government. Each had played different roles. As Fomunyam (2017) explained, the South African HEIs have been the subject to a barrage of demands to stop catering to the marketplace for consumption of knowledge and simply producing a skilled labour force (Higgs, 2016; Paphitis & Kelland, 2016) which has been seen as the cause of Western dominant technological knowledge production.

The third set of actors include the decolonising curricula protagonists and often misplaced expectations of realities. Forsdick (2018) noted that decolonisation is a process that occurs through cultural agency, drawing on the production of novels, poetry, theatre, law, philosophy, or political theory to mention a few. However, Haase (2010) cautioned against excessive emphasis on the tale of cultural agency, which may lead to unwarranted biases, perpetuating false representation of dominant colonial powers.

The fourth set of actors have been the South African government and its principal agents. In 1997, the Higher Education Act 101 (Republic of South Africa, 1997) detailed competing principal mandates in higher education, impacting decolonisation transformation. Notable among the mandates were the competing focus on programme development in responding to freedom of religion, academic freedom¹⁷, and economic development needs. Although each principle in the Higher Education Act of 1997 was of importance, combined, they created obstacles for decolonising to transform the curricula. Subsequent amendments between 1998 and 2016 provided refinement in the bureaucracy of HEIs rather than substantive changes in the way teaching and learning should take place (South Africa Government, 2021). To explain the conflicts among the Higher Education Acts' principles, the authors will firstly examine the respect of religious freedom¹⁸ and its relations to decolonisation concept. While 88% of the current South African population is Christian, approximately 8% arrived in South Africa as Christians (See Table 1 and 2).

17 The challenge with religious and academic freedom is that the extent each is practiced, the level of meaning abstraction in each of the terms, and how the two impact the other. For example, if one is Zulu, converted to Christianity, and teaches in a higher educational institution, how does the individual reconcile a Zulu way of thinking, Christian moral values, and exercising academic freedom to remove Western ideas from the teaching process and finding a pathway to indigenizing learning.

18 We define religious freedom as people's right to live, speak, and practice social norms according to their moral beliefs which may include how they teach others and how they learn.

Table 1: Percentage of religious affiliation of South African population

Religion (2015 est.)	Percentages
Christian	86
ancestral, tribal, animist, or other traditional African religions	5.4
Muslim	1.9
nothing in particular	5.2

Based on CIA Factbook (2020)

When indigenous South Africans were converted to Christianity around middle of 16 century (BBC, 2014) they assimilated to Western values, educational thinking as communicated by the then missionaries, and became alienated from who they were epistemologically—as the authors will address later in the knowledge creation hermeneutics.

Therefore, it is somewhat unsettling when everyone insists that we should decolonise something as one would attempt to free ‘Winston from the horror of Ministry of Truth’ in George Orwell's 1984 novel (Orwell, 1961). It is not clear how one can free anyone from the perpetuated falsity of Western ideas ingrained in most of the South African population through church, its value system, and the schooling that has expanded its philosophy to reach the unconscious level of people’s mind. Second, academic freedom to express one’s ideas without risk of disadvantage or professional interference tends to favour those who have very little incentive to transform the HEIs curricula to decolonise it, as deduced from Table 3 above that more than 90 percent of the professors and associate professors are White. Unless the government and the HEIs can provide incentives to encourage the White majority of academics to use their academic freedom for curricular transformation, the process would stay very slow. Third, operating in the Industrial Revolution 4.0, when developing skills to address economic development (Kazeroony & Tsang, 2022), requires adhering to the Western models of teaching and

learning to instil competencies in each graduate applicable to working with artificial intelligence, robotics, and computer programming across disciplines.

Knowledge production and curricular transformation in South Africa

It is essential to address knowledge production as a precursor to curricula transformation for decolonisation. As stated earlier, knowledge production is a dyadic process between learner and teacher. When there are not many of a particular grouping, knowledge production becomes dominated by those who are in the majority. The findings, therefore, require us to examine the nature of knowledge production, particularly in South Africa, and how curriculum design is influenced by it.

Knowledge production in South Africa

From a universal perspective, producing new knowledge requires imaginative and reflexive deconstruction, reconstruction, testing, and applying (Harvey & Knight, 1996). As one moves from imagining to reconstruction, knowledge production requires applicability or some use by the community to produce it and be subject to social accountability for its purpose (Gibbons et al., 1994; Giroux, 1992). Knowledge production should be flexible to address scientific, technological, and industrial needs as appropriate (Waghid, 2002). Knowledge production is dynamic and requires a heterodox orientation (De Eguia Huerta, 2020; Fataar, 2018) if one aims to decolonise it. This means that knowledge production methods that may be radically different from or contradict those in use should be embraced.

In the South African context, knowledge production requires humanisation to address its problems (Waghid, 2002). Yet, for practicality, to increase the

number of skilled graduates who can represent the diverse South African population and the needs of the labour marketplace, knowledge production requires transformation (Winberg, 2006). To address skill sets matching the industries' needs, by necessity, the South African curricula has become subject to the South Africa Government (2021) Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, responding to the human resource needs and economic development. Therefore, once again one of the 1997 Act's principles stands in the way of curricula decolonisation. The alternative to transform knowledge creation requires the government to help encourage Africanising publications based on HEIs research that can connect the social needs to the curricula transformation (Zegeye & Vambe, 2006), which neither the constitution, nor the subsequent legislations, or their amendments have provided.

Curricula design to decolonise knowledge production

Curricula design and knowledge production transformation for South Africa requires examining a few arguments from the current literature. First, the current literature points to the oppression and dominance by the colonisers regardless of the place, and irrespective of the land as the source of colonised curricula design. From Mohawks of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada to IsiZulu of KwaZulu-Natal, the colonised seek to free themselves from oppression of dominant episteme. So, some scholars have suggested to decolonise the curricula and knowledge production from indigenous perspectives. Zinga and Styres (2019) suggested that educators must engage in own self-reflection and examine effective design opportunities to engage students with challenging course content and how they are implicated in and informed by the very things that they are asking students to examine things critically. Uzomah (2018) argued that to rid of Arab and European colonial education in creating knowledge, educational policies must become homegrown or contextualised.

Second, as the current literature reveals, some scholars have attempted to claim that autochthonous knowledge creation can exist along with other forms which can lead to decolonising the curricula (Zoogah, Gomes, & Cunha, 2020). The word autochthony is derived from Greek word αὐτός *autos* "self," and χθών *chthon* "soil," referring to the original indigenous inhabitant of the land. There are two fundamental challenges with the knowledge integration proposal by Zoogah, Gomes, and Cunha (2020). First, it is not clear how they propose to cleanse Africa of the invading inhabitants' knowledge who have been living in Africa since Arab invasion of North Africa and European who arrived few centuries later. Second, as Fataar (2018) argued that the integration of indigenous and Western knowledge in the South African context is untenable. Because autochthony can only exist in its pure term, otherwise, we have a mix of indigenous and people who are descendants of immigrants who see their knowledge as much a part of Africa as anyone else.

Third, one should examine other challenges in addition to what is residing within the HEIs setting. Saurombe (2018) argued that often, at least in the South African context, the challenge of decolonising the curricula resides outside the academia. Saurombe (2018) suggested that to transform the curricula and decolonise it, we must critically examine the archival history of South Africa and the way HEIs have been systematically engaged in the non-South African knowledge production to effectively address the issue. Indeed, the curricula transformation can only happen if words translate into action and policies move from shelf where the ideas are rested to the HEIs impacting the dyadic interaction of teacher and student (Fomunyam, 2017).

Knowledge creation philosophy: the hermeneutics

Episteme, derived from Latin word ἐπιστήμη, meaning science or knowledge, is a philosophical term which is subject to different approaches, e. g., realism,

positivism, etc. (Frick, 2017) leading one to understand what is known. Therefore, how one creates knowledge depends on one's approach. For example, a medical doctor, more than likely, will follow a positivist path, based on a set of assumed principles and observations through regimented experiments, quasi experiments, or non-experimental approaches to learn the best course of action for the patients; the doctor learns through doing and working with objective facts as they are observed as would an engineer through understating the system design and connectivity of the parts (Von Bertalanffy, 1972; Kuhn, 1996).

Regardless of our approaches to knowledge creation, knowing is rooted in the consciousness, as communicated by humans through language, effected and teleologically positioned to reflect history (Gadamer, 1997). Philosophical hermeneutics help us grasp how our understanding is manifested in our consciousness (Gadamer, 1997). Yet, what we know is not devoid of prejudice and prejudgments (Van Manen, 2014). Recapturing the essence of what we just laid out, knowledge is communicated through language in texts in a dyadic relationship of teaching and learning by the teachers, professors and associate professors following the Western tradition (at least the majority) such as empiricism, realism, idealism, to mention a few. The other part of the equation of teaching and learning are the students whose language vary in the South African context (See Table 2) and hence breaking the harmonious transmission and relationship of the text as it moves between the teachers and the learners.

Table 2: Percentage of official languages spoken in South Africa

Official Languages (2017 est.)	Percentage
isiZulu	24.7
isiXhosa	15.6
Afrikaans	12.1
Sepedi	9.8
Setswana	8.9
English	8.4
Sesotho	8
Xitsonga	4
siSwati	2.6
Tshivenda	2.5
isiNdebele	1.6
Other	1.9

Based on CIA Factbook (2020)

Gadamer (1997) argued that language, etymologically, is the communication of a perceiver of experiences and the meaning the receiver understands from what is described. Indeed, Gadamer viewed language as dyadic phenomenological exchanges—bound by teacher-learner dyadic interaction in knowledge creation. Merleau-Ponty (1964), in response to Gadamer, argued that language is a subset of perception, which allows arriving at universal understanding. Therefore, the text and its medium of transmission, the language remain a challenge at the core of curricula transformation, reconciling the perceptions and universal understanding (Dube, 2021) for decolonising HEIs. Mqgqwashu (2014) suggests decolonising the curricula and transform HEIs epistemologically and ontologically, the use of isiZulu would allow revival of South African culture. Yet the majority of those who influence the process of teaching, the professors, and the associate professors, predominately publish in English and some in Afrikaans, although no reliable statistics exist to compare the publication of this group in each of these two languages. Those who are on the receiving end, doing the learning, have a

more complex situation. As Table 4 shows, while over 80% of the population are bound by Christian values they adopted over four centuries ago, they diverge (See Table 5) in communicating ideas, arts, physical and metaphysical understanding of the world based on their spoken languages.

Addressing dichotomies as a way forward

To address the dichotomies, juxtaposing interpretive bricoleur and deconstructionist critical theorists' positioning, the authors will first, outline and review the South African curricula decolonisation dichotomies. Second, the authors, will propose ideas to consider for debate, action, and policy formulation. Both authors have decades of experience in HEIs and have realised the gap in the South African HEIs knowledge creation process when teaching and observing learning amongst the students who are from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. The authors' transparency and reflexive nature offers their bricolage perspectives on the topic. The authors, one male and female, allow for balancing gender perspective on the topic, while the diversity of their racial background and subjugation and divergent exposure to colonialism present a unique opportunity to discuss the topic at hand. One author has been subject to colonial rule and forced to abandon his homeland and seek refuge in the land of colonists where he was further exposed to oppression culturally, socially, and epistemologically. The second author, although of White descendants of African colonisers, was of an extreme modest family means and equally subjected to reverse discrimination while settling in South Africa. Therefore, for transparency and the views expressed in interpretive bricoleur manner, it is important that the reader knows what the authors are stating are simply meant to arrive at a workable solution in decolonising the South African HEIs curricula, to ensure inclusivity, rather than masking the important perceptual issues.

Recapping our main points, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 above there is an imbalance between the influencers teaching and the learners. There are for example too few influencers other than White as teachers in relation to the overall population (Shown in Table 1). As the data showed, the South African HEIs are dominated by large percentage of White academics comprising the dyadic nature of knowledge production. As Table 4 showed, 86% of South Africans are influenced by religious belief that was imported by the colonisers muddying the indigenous population value system as a distinct criterion to address curricula decolonisation. Therefore, the domination of the HEIs by a small minority of Whites and the overriding colonisers value system transferred through religion has led to non-South African dominance in knowledge production. Also, inherent contradictions in the South African Constitution and subsequent legislations, although well-intentioned to address the problem of equity and inclusion have allowed for the continuation of the dominance of colonist approach to knowledge production.

The Way Forward

So, how do we move forward? First, putting on our critical theorists' hat, proverbially speaking, would allow for understanding the construction of knowledge in society generally, and in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and governments (Reeves, Albert, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). Second, adopting a deconstructionist view and critical theory will afford us the ability to think critically through experiences built into language (Tyson, 1999, p. 241) to decipher the hidden meanings. Third, using hermeneutics would help us uncover what is the hidden part, under the water of the mental iceberg. This will explicate out understanding by offering structure to our understanding, making sense of the relationship between the author, the text, and reader and answering the question by examining the hidden realm of activity behind

the scenes of our own lives, explicating our understanding (Porter & Robinson, 2011). Finally, we offer further practices researched in other studies that might present unique pathways such as circular problem solving and practices in New Zealand Māori population.

Taking a critical theorist and deconstructionist view, the authors examined the salient writings and governmental policies. The authors, hermeneutically, reviewed the writings and the public policies based on the RSA constitution and legislations to unfold the dichotomies of curricula decolonisation. The authors provided explanation of dichotomies based on how the intermingling of colonial imposition of values, beliefs, and perspectives and indigenous acceptance of many of those elements had made the decolonisation of the curricula a murky endeavour. Yet, drawing on the present dichotomies, there are pathways that make decolonising the curricula possible.

Knowledge construction has both sociological and pedagogical roots. Sociologically, knowledge production requires reorientation by (a) obtaining sufficient resources to carry decolonised research, (b) creating African theories embedded in African languages, and decentering Northern theories (Connell, 2018). This line of thinking requires us to examine the binary conceptualisation of Whiteness and Blackness and [also acknowledge that South Africa is not just Black and White, but also Asian and Mixed races,] thus refocus on more pertinent issues such as class and economic status of students and the nature of relationship between the teacher and the learner as a way forward in decolonising the curricula (Calitz, 2018). Additionally, one must recognise, as studies in USA has highlighted, understanding the connectedness of indigenous students to land and how this connection provides a different perspective in learning which is imperative to finding our way forward in curricular decolonisation (Alejandro et al., 2020).

Pedagogically, rather than throwing out the Euro-centric knowledge production, we should focus on creating and integrating consciously indigenous learning and teaching approaches (Winberg & Winberg, 2017). Circular problem solving, exploring dissonance, incorporating the community learning needs, integrating the local elders in the teaching and learning process to understand the local sociological needs, using practicum supervisors who are deeply engaged in the indigenous culture help decolonise knowledge production and transition to decolonising the curricula (Madden, 2015). Research based on using indigenous examples such as Māori values and beliefs in educational approaches when teaching across disciplines provides one way to decolonise the curricula (Higgins & Eden, 2015). Such integrative participatory approaches require constant coordination between the learner and the teacher to ensure consistency of meaning in exchanges and creation of knowledge (Diab et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the search for knowledge creation and learning in a complex society such as South Africa, due to its historical background and vast socio-economic needs, call for constructive debate and inclusive efforts from all actors ensuring that learning takes place to progress together within South African HEIs.

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