What Knowledge is of Most Worth?
The Question of Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa

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Introduction

We are currently in a curriculum craze in South Africa.
Labby Ramrathan (2010, 107)

Focusing on the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Discussion Proposal -

Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa: *The Case for Flexible Curriculum*

*Structur*e - and referencing both the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Response and

Curriculum Studies in South Africa - a project focused on the history and present state of

curriculum research and development in South Africa[1]- I pose the question of

undergraduate curriculum reform, asking about its relations to national history, culture,

and globalization. Because this multivariate context seems crucial in comprehending

what is at stake in curriculum reform, one element – such as "structure" (the crucial

concept in the CHE Proposal) – cannot, I suggest, be cast as *the* key contributor to

educational accomplishment.

After critiquing the Proposal – its ahistorical,[2] neoliberal, systemic inflexibility

propelled by evidence-less assertions are among its self-negating features – I question the

UKZN response as well, specifically its embrace of skills over (specifically canonical or

"Western") knowledge. Isn't the emphasis on "skills" itself an expression of modernity's obsessions with instrumentality and functionality that make *working through*[3] the colonial and apartheid past impossible? Why invoke what seems now an inflationary rhetoric (calling for "emancipatory" higher education) when minimal practices of academic integrity itself (faculty control over curriculum, including its duration and assessment) are at stake? Why make that concessionary note that with "proper" management the CHE Proposal could be implemented? After praising the UKZN endorsement of institutional autonomy[4], its critique of commodification, its affirmation of indigenous languages and knowledges,[5] and its cautionary note concerning South Africa's systemic school reform, I conclude with concepts from curriculum research and development in South Africa (and elsewhere) that could contribute to a reconceptualization of the question of undergraduate curriculum reform.

The CHE Proposal

The racialization of power is important to study precisely because of its changing morphology.
Crain Soudien (2010, 20)

What prompted this Proposal? We are told "the South African higher education system is currently producing too few graduates, both in absolute numbers and relative to intake, and that there are mismatches between current graduate attributes and the broader needs of society and the economy." Evidence could have been helpful here: ten-year old data are referenced. Also helpful here would have been a definition: what exactly does "mismatch" mean? What constitutes – and who decides - the "broader needs of society and the economy"? That adjective – "broader" before "society" - implies cultural,

perhaps psychological, no doubt historical "needs" that certain academic disciplines – in the arts, humanities, and interpretative social sciences – are more likely to address than are the natural sciences and vocational training, from which the examples provided in the Proposal derive. Even the "broader needs" of the economy – innovation, creativity, "world-class" research – may also require sustained study in the liberal arts, not an immediate funneling into disciplinary functionality and instrumentality. That is, as Waghid (2010, 202) laments, "learning … associated with consumerist logic," consigns the teacher-student relationship "as one between a customer and a supplier" (2010, 207).

The other apparent prompt for this Report's series of declarations is what its authors term "a major fault-line," a "discontinuity between school and undergraduate studies in higher education, referred to in this report as an articulation gap." Evidently having abandoned hope for improving the schools, the authors of this Proposal want to close this "gap" on the university side. Before returning to this concept of "gap," I want to raise two questions about the references to K-12 education. "Dysfunction" is one term used to describe its present state, followed by the declaration that there is "no prospect" that schooling will "produce" the "numbers of well-prepared matriculants that higher education requires." Is that the *only* point of public schooling in South Africa, preparation for university study? If post-secondary school destinations are not only the universities, why would the point of K-12 schooling be solely the production of "well-prepared matriculants"? Why is there is no acknowledgement of the multiplicity of civic and personal purposes of elementary and secondary education? Even focused on this one purpose and concerning the allegation – the absence of "well-prepared matriculants" - where is the evidence? Are there **no** superb secondary schools in South Africa?

The authors of the UKZN Response also characterize the entire spectrum of South African schools in this sweeping fashion.[6] South African schools are, they claim, "increasingly weak." There is, they continue, a "moral responsibility" to communicate with their colleagues in "the basic education sector" that there is "a limit to what can be achieved with significant numbers of grossly under-prepared students." In so doing they accept the "deficit model" elsewhere they denounce.[7] "There is little or no evidence elsewhere in the world," the authors of the UKZN Response conclude, "of a good higher education system resting on a very weak basic system." There is at least one: while a majority of the top 25 universities in the world are often listed as being in the U.S., the school system in the U.S. has been declared "weak" since Sputnik; 26 years later, in 1983, it was pronounced by a Presidential Commission as so weak as to be placing the nation at risk.[8] Evidently superb universities do not everywhere require a strong basic education sector.

Sidestepping such questions, the authors of the CHE Proposal emphasize this "articulation gap" (as indicated in low graduation rates). There is considerable attention given to this problem, but only passing reference to its possible but clearly multiple causes, among them "subject knowledge but also academic skills and literacies (such as quantitative, language-related and information literacies), approaches to study, background or contextual knowledge, and forms of social capital."[9] In another paragraph the authors list then dismiss obvious candidates for "underperformance" – among them "student deficits," "poor teaching," even, sweepingly, "affective or material factors" – and conclude that "underperformance … must be systemic in origin."[10] Given the plurality and complexity of causes they cite, it is not likely the "gap" could be *only*

"systemic," i.e. internal to the universities. At one point the authors assure us that "all signs that the fundamental problem is systemic rather than a result of student deficits"[11] but we are never shown these "signs." Indeed, there is no data, as the authors admit: "The sector-wide information currently available is not able to accurately identify the reasons for 'voluntary' dropout, but data such as course success rates and institutional exclusion patterns indicate that poor academic performance affects very large numbers of students, especially in SET programs."[12]

Despite the absence of data and the authors' own admission of the "complexity" of the problem[13], the solution is obvious: "The factor that the investigation has focused on is the structure of South Africa's undergraduate curricula, rather than issues of content and canon." And, even more narrowly, the solution is "creating additional curriculum space for strengthening and enhancing learning in mainstream undergraduate provision." Later they acknowledge: "Structural curriculum reform is of course not a complete response to the challenge of improving graduate output and outcomes, but it can be expected to make a positive difference in itself, as well as facilitating effective practice in other fundamental elements of the teaching and learning process."[14]

How can "affective and material factors" be dismissed out of hand?[15] The authors acknowledge their significance when they reference "a growing body of research, in particular in the form of local and international retention studies, which indicates that success and failure in higher education is the result of a complex interplay of factors. These factors are both internal, that is, intrinsic to the higher education system, and external, in relation to social, cultural and material circumstances." The two domains are surely interrelated. In the CHE Proposal, they are simply set aside: "addressing material

disadvantage is not a substitute for dealing effectively with the academic and other factors impacting on student progression." No substitute of course, but can "material disadvantage" be set aside?

The CHE definition of "curriculum structure" is certainly expansive, including "parameters of starting level (and related assumptions about students' prior knowledge), duration, the pace and flexibility of progression pathways, and exit level."[16] Prior knowledge is acknowledged, but strangely not present knowledge, the very "formal" – the authors' adjective – curriculum of university study, the curriculum with which some struggle. Despite this diffuse definition, curriculum structure, we are advised, is "a key framework that enables or constrains effective teaching and learning in higher education."[17] No evidence or argument is provided.

Undeterred, the authors proceed. "In summary," they inform the reader, "the available evidence suggests that structural curriculum reform that takes account of students' educational backgrounds can positively influence student performance."[18] One wonders what taking "account" of students' educational backgrounds means? If the "evidence is "available," why not make it "available" in this Proposal? Without evidence or explanation, the authors continue with what reads more and more like a conceptual Ponzi scheme: "Because of current constraints, however, the educational advantages underlying extended curriculum provision will not be fully realized until they are fully integrated into an enabling curriculum structure and are available to the large numbers of students who are talented but not coping with traditional curricula. This report thus argues that it is time for structural curriculum reform to be applied systemically."[19]

We are told that "the term 'curriculum' as used here refers primarily to the formal

curriculum, that is, the planned learning experiences that students are exposed to with a view to achieving desired outcomes in terms of knowledge, competencies and attributes."[20] The emphasis on outcomes and outputs confines the proposal to instrumentalism not inspiration. While in accord with many initiatives – advocated not only but especially by the World Bank which has enforced its economistic conception of education[21] – such an emphasis seems striking given the history of racial exploitation in South Africa. While constantly cast in the rhetoric of equity – in the U.S. especially such rhetoric conceals the continuing commodification of the black body as significant only in economic terms – does not such economism risk recapitulating not reconstructing the legacies that undergraduate curriculum reform is designed to address?

Declaring the South African nation as "entering the second stage[22] of its historic new life," we are told in the Proposal that the "future keeps receding" due to "a murky and unfocussed present severely lacking in human capacity."[23] In that last phrase is the "deficit model"[24] the UKZN response discerned, not only a covert racialization of national failure but an outright displacement of the responsibilities of government and business for job creation, job training, and wage growth. For the cultural crisis produced by the failures of government and business – organized religion or the court system cannot be exempt from any comprehensive critique of society - we must rely on artists, public intellectuals and cultural critics, none of whose work or academic preparation is acknowledged let alone supported in the CHE Proposal.

The undergraduate curriculum, we are reminded there, "is closer to career systems and life orientation," a point made in the service of emphasizing the "decisiveness" of the curriculum in the life of nations. Crafting a "life orientation" - a vague[25] phrase that

seems to reference how decisive this experience can be for students - would seem to support study in the liberal arts, not in remedial education.[26] In Canada (and in the U.S. for the elite) the significance of the liberal arts – by which I mean the arts, the humanities, and the interpretative social sciences – has historically been acknowledged as appropriate regardless the vocational destination the student has in mind.[27]

The problem Proposal confronts is not the cultural crisis it references in passing – the disappointed dream, the future receding – but its symptoms, increased access to higher education but "high attrition and low graduation rates."[28] This "output," we are told, "has not kept pace with the country's needs."[29] That momentous phrase – "the country's needs" – calls for clarification. Are labor shortage statistics in the authors' minds? If so, those would not be sufficient, as any list of the nation's needs must be composed by representatives of the nation as a whole, including the impoverished. But I suspect the nation's "needs" are in fact incidental here, as authors remain focused on one issue: "The conditions on the ground dictate a fundamental systemic review of the undergraduate curriculum."[30]

Undergraduate curriculum review is ongoing, but any "systemic" review of the "nation's needs" must also include a "systemic review" of government, business, the courts, and the church. If it were truly the needs of the nation that had been the animus for this Proposal, a more "systemic review" would have indeed been the outcome, not the identification of a lever[31] by which the failures of government, business, the courts, and the church can be corrected, and the nation raised.

These august institutional sectors of South African society are evidently marginal in the task at hand. It is reform of the undergraduate system that will restore the promise

of the nation, and through "more program time, more flexibility, more system self-awareness, and more rigor and steadfastness," adding that "true transformation will occur in the field of teaching itself."[32] The Proposal might seem to be placing university teachers on a pedestal here – after all they are ascribing to them powers evidently unavailable to elected officials, business executives, judges, and priests – but they are clearly not looking up at educators, but down. Educators are capable – no they are responsible – for doing what no other group of professional has managed to accomplish, even the priesthood with, presumably, God on its side. Yes, we are told, the "onus"[33] is on higher education institutions, and not only to correct the injustices of the apartheid past, but to address the opportunities and threats posed by "global demands."[34]

After setting up university faculty[35] for the fall, the Proposal authors sidestep the professors to name the corrective: curriculum structure. Curriculum structure is, we are told, "a key element of the teaching and learning process," and so we must consider "the desirability and feasibility of amending it as a means of substantially improving graduate output and outcomes."[36] The indefinite article "a" suggests there are other key elements but these are left unspecified.[37] There are two reasons provided for this focus, the first of which is "systemic obstacles to access and success," for which "evidence" has "accumulated."[38] Apparently this is common knowledge, as no evidence is presented.[39] Second, the current curriculum structure is a century old, adopted during the colonial era, constituting "a *prima facie* justification for a review."[40] Evidently what was appropriate for the colonial elite is inappropriate for the masses.

Assertions without evidence are combined with self-contradiction, as in the endorsement, simultaneously, of flexibility and inflexibility. "The report … makes a

concrete proposal for a flexible curriculum structure for South Africa's core undergraduate qualifications – based on extending their formal time by a year as the norm."[41] In what sense does decreeing an extension of program time by one year "as the norm" constitute a "flexible curriculum structure"? Evidently overlooking this self-refuting statement, the Proposal cautions that "moving from the current rigid curriculum structure to another rigid one would not satisfactorily address the diversity that will continue to characterize the student body."[42] In this paragraph there is mention of "provision for shorter pathways within the new norms," but these are not specified.[43] Instead, the demand for increased duration is repeated.

There is reference to "local and global conditions[44]," but these too are never specified. There is a nod to the idea that education could have intrinsic value – "The Task Team recognizes that completing a higher education qualification is likely to have value beyond the instrumental"[45] – although that one acknowledgement seems the end of it. That the value of higher education is now "instrumental," e.g. indeed exclusively vocational, is implied by this statement that consigns all such value as "beyond." For me, that *is* the "value" of education, a long-term, "big-picture" view of what we face as an endangered species.

Never mind the big picture; let us return to graduation rates. No doubt there are steps universities can take – these are "the factors within the sector's control that can make a significant difference to higher education output and outcomes," as the authors of Proposal phrase it.[46] These are steps that various universities may in fact already be taking, but these are not cited. The authors ignore the obvious ones -- expanded tutoring programs, increased financial assistance, more social support including peer support

groups, academic, psychological, and career counseling – and instead focus on one: undergraduate curriculum structure. There is some definitional dancing – curriculum time, curriculum space – but the authors fasten their attention on "structural" not social or specifically racially related "impediments" to "student success." Why?[47]

Another assumption expressed in this Proposal that represents consensus thinking is a causal relationship between participation rates – the highest in sub-Saharan Africa but below those of Latin America and Central Asia – and "social and economic development," a phrase denoting a "broader" set of issues and concerns that disappear in the phrase that follows it, "the shortage of high-level skills."[48] Which "high-level skills" exactly are in short supply? Relying exclusively on what is supplied in the Proposal, it turns out they are not so "broad" at all, as they are restricted to Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) as well as those skills taught in professional programs. When engineering shortages loomed in the U.S., immigration was increased. Is that not possible in South Africa? Why is Pretoria's the only policy option manipulating the undergraduate curriculum that, even if it were in time successful, would surely constitute a "slow-motion" response to "real-time" labor shortages? What "social development" did the authors have in mind? Does not that require what in North America we term the liberal arts: studies in the arts, humanities, and social sciences that contribute to the formation of the civic subject?

Embedded in that vague phrase – "social development" could be "equity and social cohesion,"[49] two concepts the authors link with the undergraduate curriculum, insofar as its "reform" will lead to economic development, another assumption, no documented fact. Surely "equity" and "social cohesion" are not so easily achieved –

although admittedly their absence might become more tolerable amidst an equitably distributed national prosperity – but their causes and consequences are among the investigations university scholars could continue to conduct research conducted in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Construing education – whether K-12 and/or higher education – as the engine of the economy and the medium of reparation for historical trauma and injury – inflates the promise of curriculum while distorting its achievements.[50] Understanding these calamities and their legacies we scholars can study but not solve, certainly not alone. Imagining that the manipulation of one variable – however vague that "variable" is – segregates the responsibility and misunderstands its nature. It is the liberal arts that address questions of history, culture, and post-colonial experience; these enjoy little attention in the present Proposal.

After decreeing the new inflexible flexible curriculum structure, the authors dissimulate once again, declaring that "none of the accountability measures outlined above will infringe on institutional autonomy. Institutions will continue to be free to design their curricula within the nationally-adopted framework, as is the case at present."[51] What exactly is "institutional autonomy" if the "nationally-adopted framework" structures it? Once again the authors are undeterred: "In fact, a strength of the flexible curriculum structure is the opportunities it gives to institutions to design curricula that suit their particular student profile and institutional mission, without the counter-productive constraint of the current rigid structure and subsidy system that are not sensitive to differentials in students' educational backgrounds."[52] The idea of local control in institutions historically identified with Apartheid cannot be entirely reassuring, but it is the "double-think" of this Proposal I am highlighting here, not its recoded

racialized meanings, a project requiring more intimacy with the South African situation than I have. How can officials and colleagues claim the following? "Valuing institutions' disciplinary and local knowledge, contextual awareness and creativity should therefore be a key element of implementation strategy."[53] Implementation means compliance; by definition implementation confines "contextual awareness" and "creativity" to the execution of that policy.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal Response

[N]ew ways of living are not to be found in returning to values of the past nor in replacing existing models with new ones but rather in seeing current events as bearers of alternative constellations.
Lesley Le Grange (2010, 194)

Like the CHE Proposal, the University of KwaZulu-Natal Response demonstrates little interest in evidence and argument, perhaps due to time, perhaps to the lack of faculty consensus. It does seem to hedge its bets, although perhaps the faculty are also affirming a confidence similar to that expressed in the epigraph, namely that they can rework present circumstances to find passages to a future that seem currently blocked.[54]

It is clear by now that I do not share its first point, namely that the CHE Proposal makes a compelling case for curriculum reform. Systemic curriculum reform could be called for but the Proposal provides insufficient data or argumentation to justify the specific reform it recommends. If curriculum reform were to occur – surely it is occurring already, everywhere, to some extent, as faculty stay abreast of developments in their

respective fields – it is best left to individual institutions and faculties who can assess whether extending the duration of the study – by itself or more sensibly in concert with a series of initiatives - can address the problems they identify. Especially in South Africa, it seems to me (as an outsider) systemic curriculum reform echoes too loudly the authoritarianism of the Apartheid and colonial periods.

If the UKZN faculty confirm the existence of an "articulation gap" – as they do in this Response – then the concern they express about the "deficit paradigm" seems undermined. Does not an "articulation gap" simply restate the concept of "deficit"? The two concepts are equally expansive, equally vague, equally coded with concerns that cannot be circulated in public but must travel undercover. It is not obvious how there could be support for the Proposal "in principle" – as the UKNZ Response announces - especially given the request for "a more explicit articulation of the extent and limits to institutional autonomy in the re-design process and the eventual curriculum framework."[55] From my reading of the Proposal, there can be no institutional autonomy concerning the key point, i.e. extending the duration of the degree programs. Only in implementation is there acknowledgement of "institutional autonomy," a contradiction in terms.

I confess I am curious if the concern expressed over "the 'irreducible core' of knowledge" *is* shared widely across the campus – the consultation process described in point 3 appeared inclusive – or was it concentrated within the faculty of education, where a skepticism toward such ideas, even "knowledge" itself, can be common, at least in North America. Surely faculty everywhere would agree that there is an "irreducible core" of knowledge" in the undergraduate curriculum, even when they do not share what that

knowledge is. Would not knowledge of the struggle to end Apartheid qualify as an "irreducible core"? The canonical curriculum question – what knowledge is of most worth? – is an ongoing provocation for curriculum revision, as the authors of the UKZN Response realize in the second paragraph of point #8.[56] Without an "irreducible core" – in any undergraduate curriculum surely it would include History – inequity (among other legacies of colonialism and Apartheid) becomes naturalized not problematized.

At one point the authors of UKZN Response express skepticism not only toward a curricular core but toward "knowledge" itself, endorsing "the attainment/cultivation of learning principles and the development of intellectual skills rather than the acquisition of discrete content knowledge."[57] In the shadow of authoritarian models, such a shift can make short-term sense – as it does now in China's effort to shed its Soviet-era school system – but without "knowledge" students are condemned to learn "skills" too easily co-opted by corporations or undemocratic governments. At one point there is acknowledgement of "commodification" – intellectually eviscerating and now internalized by students, as Yusef Waghid acknowledges[58] - but in the face of its pervasiveness what can be "emancipatory education"? How can we embrace "emancipation" when confronting the collapse of civil society into corporatization? While worth pursuing, the very idea of an emancipatory education seems terminologically inflationary when an all-encompassing economism threatens the most minimal standards of academic integrity. Strategies for survival within the ruins of the university seem a more suitable scale of aspiration, and these are implied in the UKZN Response. "In a differentiated higher education system," the authors of UKZN response point out in point #10, "curriculum flexibility cannot and should not be legislated on the

basis of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach."[59] The recommendation – point 7 in the UKZN Response – "to allow individual institutions the space and flexibility to decide for themselves whether to embrace remedial or radical reform"[60] is one such strategy for survival within a turbulent sea of systemic "reform."

Associated with faculty control over the curriculum (including its assessment), academic integrity is also associated with ongoing asking of the canonical curriculum question: what knowledge is of most worth? That ongoing academic question is at once cultural, political, and ethical. If focused academically – away from the vocationalization of the undergraduate curriculum and toward what Waghid (2010, 208) sketches as "authentic learning," a curriculum of cosmopolitanism (see 2010, 218) – curriculum can encourage the erudition and skills (they are inextricably interwoven) that enable student to address the past and participate in the formation of the future. Such curriculum – what gets called "liberal" or "general" education in the United States - hardly excludes vocational specialization, but it emphasizes, as Le Grange (2014, 473) notes, "culturally inclusive curricula, in the project [of] decolonizing … in an age of performativity, [i.e.] a more human curriculum."[61] What coursework and extracurricular activities could address these challenges constitute the challenge of undergraduate curriculum reform. Vocationally focused undergraduate education, Michael S. Roth (2014, 2) points out, "is a critical mistake," as it ignores the "broad contextual [or "humanistic"] education" that, he points out, has enriched the lives of generations of students by enhancing their capacities for shaping themselves and reinventing the world they will inhabit." Are these among the "needs of society" the authors of the CHE Proposal have in mind?

Conclusion

Education … was and still is, in the context of the evolving colonial landscape, a violent
process involving the fundamental displacement of local knowledges and local identities.
Crain Soudien (2010, 22)

The CHE Proposal concludes with an endorsement of curriculum development.
Curriculum development is an ongoing *faculty* project, an intellectual undertaking, only
secondarily an organizational restructuring. In general, it is best relegated to experts in
the various academic disciplines and professional fields who work together on shared
problems – degree requirements for instance - but also, let it be noted, as they work
alone, as they individually restructure the content and format of their courses, preparing
for participation in the complicated conversation that is the curriculum. That conversation
can proceed, as not only the Bernsteinian view indicates, from the simple to the
complex[62] but it can also incorporate juxtaposition, wherein conceptual scales are
complicated and sometimes harmonized by their dissonance. Curriculum development is
a creative, contextualized endeavor informed by expertise and consultation, not dictated
by definition.[63]

Rather than assigning faculty bureaucratic busywork renaming courses and
rescheduling their sequencing, they can themselves make these adjustments, in ongoing
conversation with each other and students. I recommend that the government provide
more funding in order to increase considerably their numbers.[64] More professors means
more funding for research, more funding for reduced teaching loads[65] and extended
sabbatical leaves, as establishing world-class universities while working with students
who struggle with what they study requires more institutional support, probably much

more.[66] As the UKZN Response notes, the government is also obligated to increase

considerably its support of struggling students, financially and affectively, providing

more culturally informed counseling as well as funded programs of tutoring with peers,

advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. The UKZN Response

recommends the improvement of residences and learning environments that, the UKZN

faculty suggest, "are equally, if not more important, in improving student performance."[67]

Addressing as well the "large disparities across the university system"[68] the authors of the

UKZN Response recommendation seems much more promising than the CHE Proposal's

confidence in the outcomes of manipulating the "curriculum structure" of all universities.

The problem of low graduate rates is part of a much larger parcel, one sent to you

from the past and containing residues of colonialism and Apartheid that cannot

sidestepped by tinkering with curriculum structures. The inconvenient and expensive

truth is that low graduation rates – at universities or in the public school system – cannot

be solved by manipulating one variable, or two, or even several. In a country whose

present continues to be structured by the legacies of its colonial and Apartheid past,

manipulation is not the appropriate action of government at all. Support – financial first

of all - is. Support would be an acknowledgement by members of the Council on Higher

Education that the problems of the present follow from the past, problems that require a

critical and cosmopolitan curriculum that addresses that past, and the continuing presence

of the past in contemporary South Africa. Such a curriculum requires knowledge as well

as skills, and sustained study of the liberal arts – emphasizing indigenous knowledges in

juxtaposition with inherited European traditions (including their violent intersections)

that is perhaps an undergraduate academic version of "People's Education"[69] – promises

that passage from the past to the future[70] the authors of the CHE Proposal and the citizens of South Africa seek.

"[I]f if higher education is to be an intellectual and experiential adventure," Roth (2014, 8) reminds, "and not a bureaucratic assignment of skill capacity, if it is to prize free inquiry rather than training for specific vocations … then we must resist the call to limit access to it or to diminish its scope." In such a view, remedial instruction is not to be disguised as an universal fifth year from which in practice many will test out; it is not to be severed from courses in African history, art, and literature, *South African* history, art, and literature as well as in the cultures (literary, aesthetic as well as anthropological) of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Such "liberal learning" encourages what Roth (2014, 10) describes as a "capacious practicality," not a narrow vocationalism that prepares for specific jobs that could easily disappear, perhaps by graduation.[71] "In an age of seismic technological change and instantaneous information dissemination," Roth (2014, 10) emphasizes,

> it is more crucial than ever that we not abandon the humanistic frameworks of education in favor of narrow, technical forms of teaching intended to give quick, utilitarian results. Those results are no substitute for the practice of inquiry, critique, and experience that enhances students' ability to appreciate and understand the world around them – and to innovatively respond to it.

For me, it is not only the promise of an informed, capacious, cosmopolitan, subjectivity that justifies an undergraduate curriculum – "an intellectual and experiential adventure" - it is the legacy of colonialism and Apartheid that requires reparation, providing an education for all that was – is - reserved for the children of the elite. It was such

education W. E. B. Du Bois enjoyed and demanded for African Americans, education that cultivated "neither a psychologist nor a brickmason, but a man."[72] "It is industrialization [today, technologization] drunk with its vision of success," Du Bois wrote one hundred years ago, "to imagine that its own work can be accomplished without providing for the training of broadly cultured men and women to teach its own teachers, and to teach the teachers of the public schools."[73]

Addressing the complexity of the South African present is provocation for national curriculum reform led by faculty, focused on education that discloses the persistence of the past in the present, not recrimination but (if still unrealized) reconciliation that sustained academic study can invite. "Teachers, Roth (2014, 92) reminds, "don't just impart skills for specific tasks; they also guide students to think allegorically and to puzzle out the diverse ways through which people give significance to their lives." He quotes Du Bois' teacher at Harvard, William James: "Education, enlarging as it does our horizon and perspective is a means of multiplying our ideas, of bringing new ones into view."[74] James, Roth (2014, 93) emphasizes, underscored that "looking for the 'whole inward significance' of another's situation is a crucial dimension of any inquiry that takes us beyond the comfortable borders of our own insular groups. Teaching is neither preaching to the choir nor energizing a base of believers."

It is such a historically informed, socially focused undergraduate curriculum reform – simultaneously structured horizontally and vertically, in Bernsteinian terms, animated by reparation - that South African faculty might undertake. They might modify curriculum structures but remain, I recommend, focused academic knowledge and its communication in complicated conversation with students struggling with the specialized

languages expertise requires. It matters what you know, not only what you can do, as the latter follows from, is embedded within, the former. Without expertise "skill" is an empty concept, a slogan now complicit with corporate commands for a compliant workforce. "There isn't sufficient awareness," Crain Soudien (2010, 29) wrote, "of how the curriculum provides the tools for the deconstruction of the totalizing colonial project." Rather than a yet another reiteration of that colonizing project – as this current Proposal threatens to be – the call for undergraduate curriculum reform could demonstrate the truth and timeliness of Soudien's sagacity.

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Endnotes

[1] See Le Grange 2014, Soudien 2010, Hoadley 2010. Regarding curriculum studies as an academic field in South Africa (but inadvertently depicting undergraduate curricula as well) Hoadley (2010, 164) emphasizes "the diversity of the field, the lack of articulation between different bodies of work, the question of the impact of work, and issues pertaining to continuity from the past."

[2] "Ahistorical" also typified K-12 curriculum reform, as Soudien (2010, 44) emphasizes: "[T]he ahistoric nature of the new curriculum is the issue. This new curriculum speaks into the social context of South Africa as if it is empty. It comes from the uncontextualized and unrelated world of New Zealand and the United Kingdom and imposes itself onto the post-Apartheid imagination as if it itself is not the product of history." For Hugo (2010, 59), the mistake of C2005 was that "we went for the grandiose vision when we should have focused on the foundational [numeracy, basic reading and writing]."

[3] LaCapra (2009, 40 n. 8) regards "processes of working through problems as intimately related to the historical attempt to understand and overcome – or situationally (not totally or annihilating) "transcend" – aspects of the past." Historical knowledge, not vocational skills, is the site of "truth" and (perhaps) reconciliation.

[4] I would have hoped to read as well an endorsement of individual faculty autonomy as well.

[5] Within curriculum studies in South Africa, Hoadley (2010, 161) notes, "indigenous knowledge is also tied into arguments around constructivism, relevance, and multiculturalism." Those associations could engender the tensions between "knowledge" and "skill" evident in the UKNZ Response.

[6] Even thoughtful students of the South African scene make similarly sweeping statements. "[D]espite the production of literally thousands of pages of policy documents after apartheid," Le Grange (2014, 472) laments, "there is little change in classroom practice throughout South Africa."

[7] While not reducible to race, the "deficit model" has its racial subtext. Soudien (2010, 45) notes "that curricular strategies need to be investigated that uncouple whiteness from the ideal of equality. This is the first step in a complex process of invoking a range of new ways of resituating the subject in all its hierarchical locations … the search for new ways of seeing self and other."

[8] See National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983).

[9] CHE Proposal, p. 17.

[10] CHE Proposal, p. 53.

[11] CHE Proposal, p. 104.

[12] CHE Proposal, p. 98.

[13] In 2004 the George W. Bush Administration charged U.S. universities to address the problem of delayed graduation and declining graduation rates. Appointed by the Provost to the committee to study this problem at Louisiana State University (LSU), we interviewed students who had recent dropped out and who remain enrolled but in their 5th, 6th, even 7th year for programs intended to last 4 years. From these interviews we

learned that coursework was not the primary problem. While some number of students dropped out due to what could be characterized as self-discovery issues (some said they discovered higher education was not for them), most dropped out or delayed graduation due to changes in living arrangements (marriage, children, and altered financial arrangements). To our surprise we learned that some number of undergraduates delayed graduation so they could continue to purchase LSU football tickets at a student discount price. What institutional response could have made a difference in LSU graduation rates? Extending the duration of the study was part of the problem, not its solution.

[14] The emphasis remains on the university, except for the students, unless they are embedded in the phrase "academic and institutional culture." "The other key elements in improving learning in higher education – particularly raising the status of teaching, improving the level of educational expertise across the sector, and related matters of academic and institutional culture – are well known to take a long time to realize, and in fact to be resistant to change. Adopting a more effective curriculum structure may consequently be one of the most pragmatic and achievable approaches to improving higher education performance" (CHE Proposal, p. 105). Remedial education has failed to improve graduation rates in U.S. community colleges (two-year, often vocational institutions) and or in second-tier state universities, where even after six years, fewer than 25 percent of their students have graduated. Regarding the former kind of institution: six years after their enrollment, only about a third of California community-college students have completed a degree, about half have dropped out, and around 15 percent are still enrolled. National studies report similar results (see Quiggin 2014, B4-B5).

[15] At one point the authors inadvertently undermine their position of curriculum-structure-as-pivotal when they cite "a rapid rise in intellectual maturity that academic staff members often observe in students in the final year (currently the fourth year) of professional programs." Why not just wait for it, then? If it were intrinsic maturation – irrespective of culture or class – why not ask everything to take a year off between secondary and tertiary, perhaps participating in national service programs dedicated to serving the poor? A program of national and community service would surely be less expensive and perhaps more educational for middle-class students than prolonging university study for everyone. No, the authors are determined that curriculum structure is the "magic bullet," as when they assure us that it enables "the curriculum as a whole to be designed in ways that are responsive to the diversity of the intake and the complexity of the personal growth process."

[16] It seems much more expansive that the Bernsteinian model, evident, for instance, in Hugo (2010, 53) definition of the field: "*Curriculum studies is the critical investigation of the processes involved in engaging with knowledge structures that have been designed for systematic learning.*" For an overview of the field and its internal tensions, see Hoadley 2010.

[17] CHE Proposal, p. 17.

[18] CHE Proposal, p. 90.

[19] CHE Proposal, p. 90.

[20] CHE Proposal, p. 5.

[21] See, for instance, Steiner-Khamsi 2012, 7.

[22] Signaled, apparently by the National Development Plan (NDP): see CHE Proposal, p. 8.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ndebele writes: "South Africa may yet have the large numbers she desires and the quality of people to make it a leading country in the modern world" (p. 9). There is here no acknowledgement here of scholarly critiques of modernity, its relation to colonialism and neocolonialism, e.g. globalization. "[C]urriculum development processes in the southern Africa region and other colonial parts of the globe," Soudien (2010, 20) reminds, "involve a forceful incorporation into the dominant ideological structures of the world."

[25] CHE Proposal, p. 9. "Vague" typifies much of the rhetoric of the CHE Proposal. In discussing "standards," for instance, we are told that adding an extra year will allow for "curriculum enhancement." "Curriculum enhancement" is not increasing "the volume of conventional content, as this would defeat the purposes of the proposal" (p. 20), a vague phrase ("conventional content") one would think might include that which "improves or enriches learning (as opposed to inserting more conventional content) and that goes beyond what is offered in current programs - is required in a range of forms: from provision that is necessary to support core learning (such as the explicit development of academic literacies), to broadening the curriculum to include learning that is professionally and socially important in the contemporary world (such as additional languages) and that lays foundations for critical citizenship" (p. 19). No mention of History here or the other liberal arts, surely the "foundation" for "critical citizenship."

[26] Evidently "developmental" is the designation of such programs in South Africa, and the authors dismiss them as having "always been constrained by the reality or threat of stigma attaching to initiatives seen as being intended for a disadvantaged minority in the institution."

[27] Anglophone Canada and French Quebec, Tomkins (1986, 2) points out, have been "two deeply conservative societies which shared more common values than their obvious linguistic, religious and other cultural differences implied." Historically that has translated into ambivalence regarding, if not rejection of, U.S. emphases upon vocationalism (see, for instance, Tomkins 1986, pp. 6, 61, 249, 287, 360, 440).

[28] CHE Proposal, p. 8.

[29] CHE Proposal, p. 9.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Njabulo S Ndebele laments the "brake on the momentum of the desire to craft an undergraduate system that delivers on a demanding constitutional mandate to achieve a successful post-apartheid society." Whose fantasy is it that the university education can fulfill the promises of a "post-apartheid society" when government, business, the courts, and the church have failed to do so?

[32] CHE Proposal, p. 9.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] The strategy seems parallel to that used against schoolteachers. "Failures in curriculum implementation are placed at the feet of teachers," Hoadley (2010, 164) points out, "and as teacher trainers they are repositioned to repair the situation. A distinct hierarchy as

well as positions of power [aren't they the same?] and control are thus established between the state, teacher education, and teachers. This hierarchy has been in place for a very long time. There is some continuity in the relationship between the universities in this case and the state under Apartheid."

[36] CHE Proposal, p. 15.

[37] One thinks of the students themselves, whether they bother to study or have slept or eaten a proper breakfast. What about tutors for those in trouble? These obvious considerations are nowhere in sight in what seems from the outset a single-item agenda.

[38] CHE Proposal, p. 15.

[39] Evidence-less assertions structure the Proposal. "On the basis of extensive analysis," the reader is assured, "the Task Team has concluded that modifying the existing undergraduate curriculum structure is an essential condition for substantial improvement of graduate output and outcomes" (CHE Proposal, p. 16). No evidence is provided. Then we are told that "the output of higher education is not meeting the country's needs," but no evidence is provided (Ibid.).

[40] CHE Proposal, p. 15.

[41] CHE Proposal, p. 16.

[42] CHE Proposal, p. 19.

[43] CHE Proposal, p. 20. Testing out of "first-level courses" will become possible, a common-enough strategy that overlooks the invaluable nature of dialogical encounter and subjective presence in academic study. Spared studying with others enjoys an acronym in this Proposal – RPL or Recognition of Prior Learning.

[44] CHE Proposal, p. 19.

[45] CHE Proposal, p. 34.

[46] CHE Proposal, p. 34.

[47] Soudien (2010, 20) suggests that "social difference, as opposed to, say, pedagogical reforms is the central question that drives curriculum development in South and southern Africa." No doubt social difference includes, perhaps even features, racial difference. It's not obvious to me how Bernsteinian commitments to curricular structures of verticality can be so strong as to resist the curricular incorporation of "marginalized voices," but apparently that has evidently occurred (see Hoadley 2010, 131).

[48] Both quoted phrases in the CHE Proposal, p. 41.

[49] See, for instance, the CHE Proposal, p. 52.

[50] "[T]o the extent that conquest laid the foundations for Western dominance," economist Patricia Coyle (2007, 17) judges, "the process took several centuries. There was no billiard-ball sequence of cause and consequence. The interplay between ideas, technology, conquest, and economic success is more subtle than that." Coyle (2007, 37) continues: "Rather, getting an economy expanding in the way the rich countries already have for the past 200 years depends on a complex sequence of decision and policies, involving many partners and depending on past choices, current resources, and pure luck." What is the role of education in economic growth? While Coyle (2007, 50) acknowledges associating the two makes "intuitive sense," in terms of economic history there is no demonstrable causal relation. "Yet education cannot have been decisive during the Industrial Revolution," she points out, "when literacy levels were low, and many innovators hadn't been to school at all" (2007, 51).

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[51] CHE Proposal, p. 152.

[52] Ibid.

[53] CHE Proposal, p. 152.

[54] In that essay from which the epigraph is drawn, Le Grange (2010, 196) even accepts aspects aspect of "outcomes-based education," as long as the outcomes stipulated are welcomed: "I have suggested that a more rhizomatic view of outcomes, knowledge, and outcomes-based education could begin to include that which is excluded (the null curriculum) and bring it into the conversation, and make it part of the activities of the activities in South African classrooms (issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural inclusivity, Africanization of knowledge, etc)."

[55] UKNZ Response, p. 1, point 2.

[56] The UKNZ faculty point out: "Hence, it should be possible, for example, for a University to transform its undergraduate curriculum to include a common first semester curriculum in say each of the BCom or BSc, or indeed across a cluster of Bachelor degrees in a College; or to structure an extended curriculum that is more appropriate to a research–led university; or one that integrates indigenous languages and knowledge systems or community engagement." As they point out, two sentences later, such revision requires institutional autonomy, not systemic decrees.

[57] UKZN Response, p. 3.

[58] Waghid (2010, 202) writes: "[S]tudents seem to have become consumed with a market-oriented 'logic' of learning. Most of the students I have worked with started off by claiming that they needed to be 'reskilled,' to 'improve their qualifications,' to 'become more marketable'." Facing "customers" not "students" is not limited to South Africa of course. Teaching in an elite university in the United States, Roth (2014, 1) admits that "many undergraduates behave like consumers."

[59] UKNZ Response, p. 6.

[60] UKNZ Response, p. 4.

[61] It is a curriculum with outcomes of course, but ones that cannot be specified in advance. "I feel myself loving my students," Waghid (2010, 209) confides, "when I care for them in a way that evokes their potentialities in order that they come up with possibilities I might not even have thought of."

[62] Wayne Hugo (2010, 57) emphasizes that "systematic learning within an organized knowledge structure is about … increasing levels of complexity with an underlying increase in automaticity."

[63] "The importance of clear textbooks, time on task, repetition of key elements, and knowledgeable teachers who are aware of the various paths upwards and how to get there cannot be overemphasized," Hugo (2010, 63). Surely he would agree that creativity, originality, independence of thought, and capacity for improvisation are also indispensable elements of the curriculum. Present circumstances – however convoluted – also figure in: In practice, Ramrathan (2010, 111) recounts, "curriculum design was, therefore, a response to a range of drivers and initiatives, some from national agendas, some from individuals, and some from institutions."

[64] This is a point for which data *was* provided: "According to HEMIS data, in the period 2000-2010 student enrolment grew by 52% but the increase in FTE academic staffing for the same period was 21%."

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[65] The authors endorse renewed attention to teaching, but what they mean is less teaching – face-to-face encounters in classrooms – and more online learning: "There is no doubt that innovative pedagogy which makes appropriate use of new technologies will make a further positive contribution to the potential success of the four-year curriculum, both academically and in terms of developing the desired attributes in our students." As Ramrathan (2010, 109) notes, "There seems to be an excessive enthusiasm about the potential computers can offer."

[66] Teaching under such expectations and aspirations is psychological as well as intellectual labor, requiring close and ongoing dialogical encounter with students, as Jansen (2009, 259) suggests: "The goal of a postconflict pedagogy under these circumstances is first to understand the emotional, psychological, and spiritual burden of indirect knowledge carried by all sides in the aftermath of conflict."

[67] UKNZ Response, p. 4.

[68] Ibid.

[69] "People's Education involved a process of conscientization," Le Grange (2010, 84) remembers, referencing a key concept of Paulo Freire, "that would help children to better understand their past, their present, and provide hope for the future."

[70] Discussing Ralph Waldo Emerson (and the American tradition of liberal learning), Roth (2014, 50) acknowledges "education as finding ways to allow the past to push us forward."

[71] "In contrast to the focus on increasing educational opportunities to prepare needed workers for the knowledge economy," Joel Spring (2008, 339) reports, "there is some research evidence that suggests that there is an oversupply of higher education graduates."

[72] Quoted in Roth 2014, 67. Here "man" means "humanity." Roth (2014, 67) comments: "Education is for human development, human freedom, not the molding of an indivdual into a being who can perform a particular task. That would be slavery…. To focus all black education on trades and commerce in the early years of the twentieth century made little sense to Du Bois."

[73] Quoted in Roth 2014, 70. Roth (2014, 77-78) elaborates, noting that Du Bois acknowledged the "powerful links between a broad education and self-assertion, between self-reliance and freedom. But Du Bois added a deep social connection to their emphasis on individual freedom. Technical competence was not to be disparaged, but neither should it be allowed to overshadow the form of education through which citizens discovered their humanity and their power to act on it." Cosmopolitanism is cultivated subjectively, through sustained academic study.

[74] Quoted in Roth 2014, 92.