Comments on the Curriculum Change Framework (CCF)
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Introduction

Our expectation of a curriculum change framework is that it would be principally guided by a theory of curriculum that demonstrates how power and control is expressed at three levels: at the level of knowledge production (this includes the activities and products of research and scholarship); at the level of curriculum (this includes the selection, sequencing and recontextualising of knowledge for the purposes of teaching and learning); at the level of pedagogy (this includes the pacing of teaching and learning, evaluation of learning and social relations in the classroom). We would expect a curriculum change framework to distinguish between these levels and interrogate each level in terms of how and what knowledge is produced, distributed, recontextualised and evaluated. We would also expect a curriculum change framework to recognize that the different disciplines that make up the contemporary university have different knowledge structures and curriculum forms; manifest power and control in different ways to maintain disciplinary boundaries; and consequently have different curriculum change entailments. Further, we would expect a curriculum change framework to provide a robust, accurate and historically informed assessment of what curriculum currently exists in the university prior to proposing the need for change. First, because the past engagements and contestations around curriculum change may contain valuable lessons for the present exercise; secondly, to avoid re-inventing the wheel.

With these expectations in mind, we engaged with the Curriculum Change Framework (CCF) in relation to the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG) as set out in the CCF. Our overall argument is that the CCWG only partially addressed the ToR set out for itself.

The Terms of Reference for the CCWG as stated in the CCF (pg 11) were to:

1. Document, archive and keep records of the process
2. Identify curriculum innovations and interventions already taking place in various parts of the university
3. Develop an enabling and responsive environment to facilitate organic curriculum change
4. Continuously identify, document and where possible disseminate information surrounding critical issues emerging from the curriculum change dialogue process
5. Conclude the formal process with a proposed framework to guide curriculum transformation.

We argue that the CCF succeeds in part in addressing Point 3 of ToR. The engagements by the CCWG, largely with students, and its reporting has begun to open up a space for "an enabling and responsive environment to facilitate organic curriculum change". Perhaps this is a necessary first step to understanding the nature of curriculum change, by considering the context and the reasons for the demands for change. But it does not, on its own, provide a

framework for curriculum change across the university. Below we argue that the CCWG failed to meet its remit on points 1,2,4 and 5 of the ToR. We indicate below why we think this is so. Our main concern relates to the CCF's weak theory of curriculum and its consequent inability to address issues of curriculum that might guide a process of curriculum change.

TOR1: Document, archive and keep records of the process

While there is some indication of the process undertaken by the CCWG, the reader can gain little idea of how many students, or how many staff, across different engagements, were spoken to. While the CCF talks about 'data' generated from the case studies, it is not described in detail. Thus, when claims are made regarding students' views it is unclear whether these constitute the view of a single student or many students. The main source for the arguments made in the report are the 'study circles'. No details are provided of how many participants there were in these study circles, how many were held, nor who the participants were.

As a result of the lack of detail regarding process, claims are made without reference to supporting evidence. For example, the report states that there was "*a strong sense of disciplinarity … evident across all CCWG engagement*" (pg49). However, no evidence or discussion is provided for how this insight was derived. Detail regarding the sampling for the 'case studies' would be crucial to establishing the validity of any claims and recommendations made in the report.

The CCF claims that the selection of Health Sciences, Fine Art and Drama and Music "*provide a rich representation of the disciplinary spectrum across the university*" (pg 18). These sites were chosen as "*the key data sets used in the analysis of and in the creation of the Curriculum Change Framework presented in this document*" (ibid). A rationale or argument as to how three performing arts departments and one professional field reliably represent disciplinary fields across the university is not provided. This appears an opportunistic sampling where the CCWG were invited to those sites, rather than having selected the sites on the basis of how they exemplify the disciplinary range, and/or curriculum change or innovation. As we argue below the curriculum structuring and transformation entailments of, for example, Physics, Engineering, Economics, Biology, Historical Studies and Mathematics, to name some disciplinary fields, are very different.

A systematic account of the processes undertaken by the CCWG is not evident in the CCF. Whether the processes were documented and archived is not evident from the reporting.

TOR 2: Identify curriculum innovations and interventions already taking place in various parts of the university

The CCF makes reference to curriculum development proposals submitted to the UCDG that had "*an explicit focus on decolonising the curriculum*" (pg 31). This reference is used to underscore the assertion that 'the contestation phase' of curriculum change at UCT has been "*generative, leading to an expansion of the cultural register/ discourse/ lexicon of change*" (pg 31) and further, that these proposals indicate that 'a re-positioning' has started to happen towards "*genuinely embedding marginalised knowledge at the core of the curriculum*" (ibid).

However, there is no elaboration of what these proposals entail, and how they 'expand the register/discourse/lexicon of change'. It may have been instructive to discuss/critique these proposals as exemplars of 'decolonising the curriculum' and interrogate them in terms of the 'frames' the CCF itself has put forward for 'decolonising the curriculum'. That is, how do these proposals, already submitted to UCDG, match up with the 'decolonial lens' that the CCF describes for itself? Questions arise as to whether the CCWG had any involvement in any of these proposals. If yes, why were they not used as exemplars? If no, how have the proposers interpreted the focus on 'decolonising the curriculum'?

There is no evidence of engagement with curriculum innovations and interventions taking place across the university elsewhere in the CCF. Some examples might include the work being undertaken by the various EDUs, as well as recurriculating activity in, for example, Economics and in other seminars and colloquia that addressed this topic in 2016 and 2017 across the university.

TOR 3: Develop an enabling and responsive environment to facilitate organic curriculum change

The CCF provides useful insight into understanding a particular aspect of curriculum change: its context. The CCF contextualises recent student protests at UCT and reports on their engagements with students, articulating the demands for change. In describing what it means to 'adopt a decolonial lens in curriculum change' (pg 23), the CCF offers particular interpretations of 'decolonization and decoloniality' that may be potentially productive and generative in fashioning a pluriversal understanding of these and other concepts in the context of curriculum change. They pose questions around power and control that could open up meaningful dialogue in spaces where people are seeking or grappling with issues of curriculum change. The 'theory of change' offered in the CCF presents some ideas of how to open up inclusive spaces for dialogue. The 'Recommendations' (pg 64) with which the CCF concludes are presented explicitly as "*a reflection of what the CCWG members came to understand as critical in engaging the university around meaningful curriculum change*" (pg64). In all of this, the CCF succeeds in beginning to open up a space for "an enabling and responsive environment to facilitate organic curriculum change" (ToR 3).

TOR 4: Continuously identify, document and where possible disseminate information surrounding critical issues emerging from the curriculum change dialogue process

The CCF refers to 'the collective wisdom' of the CCWG that "*stemmed from individual member's (sic) previous experience in tackling challenges of inequality in their research and teaching programmes, and the successes in opening up spaces for those previously excluded from curriculum discussions at UCT*" (pg 8). No evidence is presented to substantiate this claim and it may have been more instructive to use some of these 'successes' as exemplars.

In terms of the description of 'engaging with the curriculum change process', the CCF refers to engagements with 'faculty representatives' who '*have a strong interest in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment*', with 'decolonial scholars', and with students in study circles focused on 'social and community transformation' (pg 14). However, it is not evident that the engagements were with curriculum or education specialists per se, i.e. people engaged in the

study of curriculum theory and pedagogy. Nor is their evidence of engagement with academics who have actively engaged with curriculum change within their own programmes. We link this to the underdeveloped theory in the CCF that we elaborate on below.

Finally, in relation to documenting critical issues, the CCF calls on interlocutors to disclose the vantage points from which they "*interpret the concepts of decolonisation and decoloniality*" (pg 24). The CCF asserts that '*an undisclosed vantage point suggests that knowledge has no context*' (pg 24). It then claims that the work of the CCWG should be regarded as "*generative theoretical work, informed by many vantage points – **partly embedded in the membership of the CCWG itself** – in constant conversation*" (ibid; our emphasis) with a range of interlocutors. It is not made clear what these 'embedded vantage points' are, or what it means to have 'vantage points' 'embedded in the membership'. Does this vantage point necessarily entail membership of a particular racial designation, and is this a sufficient vantage point? None of this is satisfactorily discussed in the CCF.

TOR 5: Conclude the formal process with a proposed framework to guide curriculum transformation

The CCF ultimately does not conclude with a proposed framework to guide curriculum transformation. We argue that this is largely because the CCF lacks an adequate theory of curriculum that would allow it to conceptualise and organize components relevant to such a process. Though not sustained, the CCF presents a theory of change as the framework, but this is a generic framework of change rather than one informed by a theory of curriculum.

At other points in the CCF curriculum theory is invoked; however, this is fragmented and inconsistent. We discuss this in greater detail below.

Conception of history and 'regulative discourse'

The CCF refers to Bernstein's notion of regulative discourse on a number of occasions, in order that the framework be allowed to "*consider ways in which the socio-political context and its inherent moral codes, act to determine the regulative discourse for content and pedagogy*" (p23). This would appear to be a productive avenue to pursue, engaging with curriculum theory, and recognising that 'instructional discourse is embedded within regulative discourse', that is, that curriculum content is always embedded in a set of social norms and values.

Regulative discourse is referred to in the document under the heading '*Historicizing Curriculum Change*' (pg 23) and comprises just 4 paragraphs. This section follows a longer section on '*Contextualising Protests and Curriculum Change*' (pg 21). However, neither of these sections give any details of any previous attempts at 'curriculum change' or even details of current curricula organisation at UCT, that demonstrate any of the general claims made i.e. that demonstrate what the nature of the regulative discourse is, or how it has historically framed the instructional discourse at UCT or elsewhere in SA.

Regulative discourse is taken as given; the reader infers that colonialism and racial apartheid has been the regulative discourse, and it is deemed obvious the way the instructional discourse

has been embedded in this regulative discourse. And yet, the claim is made at the start of the section following these, '*Adopting a Decolonial Lens in Curriculum Change*', that "*the history of curriculum change at UCT and in education in general, **as described thus far**, necessitates a decolonial lens through which to effect meaningful curriculum change*" (pg 23, our emphasis).

There are no descriptions of the history of curriculum change at UCT or in education in general anywhere in the CCF. If this were the case, there ought to have been some critical reflections on the myriad of curriculum reviews and changes to courses and programmes at UCT post 1994, as well as the many scholarly reflections on them. Such a critical engagement could perhaps have allowed for interrogation of how 'knowledge-power relations' manifest in these previous curriculum change initiatives and how they constructed the 'ideal social subject'. Such an interrogation of actual curriculum change efforts, could have provided useful insights into why or how a 'decolonial lens' is necessary to 'effect meaningful curriculum change' or how it would construct a different 'ideal student'.

In this, and in a number of other instances, while there is some gesturing towards curriculum theory, the theory is not elaborated in any coherent way nor are there illustrative examples of the theory at work.

Theory of knowledge

The CCF's theory of knowledge and curriculum appears to be equated with power relations (only): '*Curriculum change is about contesting power, especially disciplinarity which carries colonial narratives. Disciplines must be undone because they carry colonial narratives*'. A question arises, however, as to whether all fields and disciplines and their knowledges are only about colonial narratives and colonial authority? While we agree that the contestation of power and control is at the heart of curriculum change and that Western thought emerged in contexts of empire and privileges the 'individualistic autonomous I', leading to an arguably false abstract universality, and that knowledge production is already structured by a logic of identity, we still hold to the possibility that some truth claims do carry over across cultural and historical contexts (of course not only western claims). Without this, global scholarship could not exist. The CCF does not engage with this possibility.

The CCF also refers to Bernstein's notion of horizontal and hierarchical knowledge structures, that suggests that the way knowledge is structured differs across disciplinary fields. However, the theory is distorted to suggest that this distinction is about "*whose knowledge is privileged and whose is not*" (pg 52). This is plainly a misreading of Bernstein. The CCF asserts that '*experience and positionality in the real world thus renders us all knowers, from different vantage points, armed with the ability to reject lies from anywhere peddled as truth to deny some people their humanity*' (pg 26). This suggests a strong relativizing of knowledge. It also obscures differences in the structuring of knowledge in different disciplinary fields, which is what Bernstein was alluding to in his distinction between horizontal and hierarchical knowledge structures. The CCF does not elaborate on this distinction in terms of what it means for curriculum structuring or pedagogic relations. The CCF does not for example address the issue of the necessarily hierarchical pedagogic relationship, between academic lecturer and the 'yet to be apprenticed' student. This is especially the case for the undergraduate student who in entering the university, we have to assume, seeks access to specialized knowledge. If

the nature of specialized knowledge is up for contestation, where does that leave the novice student seeking specialized knowledge?

Decolonial theory as a guide

Decolonial scholars cited in the report are concerned with questions of epistemology and knowledge production, generally casting arguments in broad socio-political terms ('geopolitics' and 'bodypolitics') rather than in relation to questions about particular knowledge forms or disciplines and their organisation in curriculum. As both Luckett and Shay (2017) and Morreira (2017) argue, there is a gap between the 'high-level meta-epistemological debates' of the decolonial scholars and questions around education systems, curriculum and pedagogy. A result of this gap is that it is difficult for those tasked with curriculum work to draw on decolonial theorizing in addressing questions relevant to their work. There is no substantive decolonial theory of curriculum that can guide curriculum change, nor analyse it sufficiently. The CCF does not address this gap – between concerns with the production of knowledge (in scholarship), and the reproduction of knowledge (in curriculum). For example, 'Disciplinary decadence' is cited from Gordon to mean "*deontologised or absolute conception of discplinarity*" concerned with the "*the proper administering of its rules, regulations and methods*" (pg 27). The CCF makes a claim that '*absurdity in the academy is allowed and perpetuated through this disciplinary decadence*' (pg 27). What is meant by 'absurdity' here? It goes on, that if "[*methods and methodology] overshadow the inquirer and the vantage points from which the marginalized seek to theorise their own reality*" then it "*is to re-inscribe the colonial tropes of power, being, knowledge and doing*" (pg27). What are these methods and methodology? How do they inscribe the 'colonial tropes of power, knowledge, being and doing' such that they can 'silence' the marginalized voice? There is an absence of any illustrative examples, and this makes these claims difficult to comprehend and certainly offers little guidance of how these relate to curriculum and how one might do things differently. Is the 'methodology' of 'workshops', 'knowledge cafes' and 'study circles' as described in the document, immune to colonial tropes of power/knowledge? Is this an 'alternative' methodology for pedagogic relations in the classroom? How does it engage methodologies and specialization of knowledge in other fields of study?

But crucially, arguments of disciplinary decadence refer in the first instance to the production of knowledge, rather than how a curriculum guides the teaching and learning of selected knowledge. This blindspot leads the authors to invoke theory that is incapable of addressing the problem at hand: curriculum change.

Conclusion

While the 'case studies' in the document are wide-ranging, and provides a useful account of some of the issues at stake, they are more about students resisting colonial practices at UCT rather than specifically about curriculum. In sharing insights from these cases and other discussion forums the CCF provides a useful starting point for an enabling and responsive environment to facilitate organic curriculum change. However, the CCF does not locate its understanding within any consistent, coherent or relevant theory of curriculum as such. In short, in relation to its terms of reference, it neglects to provide adequate scholarly detail of its own processes in making the arguments it does; it fails to engage seriously with historical

or current interventions and innovations; and it does not provide principles or tools to help academics review existing curriculum and consider possibilities for change. The actual curriculum thinking around *how to decide what knowledge to select, how to sequence it, pace it, what and how to assess it at either course / programme level,* remains to be done. So too, in relation to pedagogy, the report offers little guidance on *how to establish productive and respectful relations between teacher and taught* in lectures and tutorials, and *how to conceptualise the 'ideal student'* that decolonized curricula seek to produce.