



# Restorative learning for fostering a decolonised curriculum attuned to sustainable teacher education

Shan Simmonds

Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa  
Shan.simmonds@nwu.ac.za  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5005-9906>

Oluwatoyin Ayodele Ajani

Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa  
oajani@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6545-0203>

(Received: 10 February 2022; accepted: 19 September 2022)

## Abstract

Social sustainability is paramount for peaceful and inclusive societies. It embraces all cultures and civilizations while promoting that these contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development. One aspect hereof is knowledge—what is taught and who decides. South African students remain frustrated with the Eurocentric and Western dominated university curriculum. This was made evident in the iconic 2015 student protest movement that, along with current and preceding protests laid bare the stark inequalities that persist in higher education and students outcries for socially relevant education that acknowledges the global South. In this article, we draw on data that emanated from qualitative interviews conducted with ten North-West University postgraduate teacher education students to unlock their concerns and aspirations for a decolonised curriculum in higher education. Students expressed their concerns with the political nature of the systems of power in higher education that are exclusionary, the need for the curriculum to be contextualized, and the tendency for decolonisation to be perceived as a threat. Students voiced their aspirations for a decolonised curriculum by specifying the importance of decolonisation as a process through teaching approaches like storytelling. We propose restorative learning as one avenue in response to students' outcries for the need to be critical of abyssal thinking and to challenge the root of hegemonic knowledge systems in such a way that decolonising the curriculum can be attuned to sustainability aspirations related to justice and social equity.

**Keywords:** decolonisation, curriculum, sustainable teacher education, restorative learning

## Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). This Agenda reflects a concerted effort to ending all forms of poverty, sustainably managing our planet's natural resources, and bringing about peace and prosperity for all. A commitment to economic and environmental sustainability and social sustainability is a key dimension of peaceful and inclusive societies. The aim is to achieve the integration of, and a balance between and among, the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, environmental, and social (United Nations, 2015).

As we look at South Africa's higher education landscape and the journey towards a decolonised education in this article, the focus falls on SDG 4: to strive to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Key directives range from quality education, gender equity, access to education, skills development, and the promotion of sustainability through education for sustainable development as well as sustainable lifestyles to foster, among others, an appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. This resonates strongly with one of the pledges in the *Agenda of Sustainable Development* "to foster inter-cultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility" as part of acknowledging the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognizing that "all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development" (United Nations, para. 36). It is against this backdrop that we conceptualise decolonisation and its potential to (re)configure sustainable development through aspects such as inter-cultural understanding, appreciation for diversity, and respect for difference.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015) publication *Rethinking education: Towards a global common good?* echoes the tenets of the United Nations Agenda. Irina Bokova (the then Director-General of UNESCO) underlined the urgent need for education to be reenvisioned in our complex and rapidly changing world. This requires, in part, "moving beyond literacy and numeracy, to focus on learning environments and new approaches to learning for greater justice, social equity and global solidarity" (Bokova, 2015, p. 3). For her, this also required cultural literacies of respect and dignity so that education, as a common good, can foster social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. To embrace this concern the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015) stressed the need to involve education in exploring alternative approaches to fostering cultural literacies. This is essential because cultural literacies are a source of creativity and wealth central to education that encompasses diverse ways of coming to know the world and being in the world and, in so doing, "valuing fundamental aspects of life: the natural ecosystem, the community, the individual, religion and spirituality" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 29). This requires alternative knowledge systems, more specifically, those that recognise diverse knowledges beyond the hegemonic structures that continue to

dominate education. This necessitates recognising that education can be an engine of sustainable development, not only physically (through access to education) but also epistemologically by developing thinking communities in which people can live together, and with nature, in peace and harmony in leading “meaningful lives in equal dignity” through socially relevant learning that reflects “what each culture, each human group, defines as what is required to live in dignity” in the human and more than human world (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 32–33). Education for the common good will be possible only when dominant utilitarian conceptions of education are succeeded by integrated, alternative knowledge systems, in which silent voices are heard and the global South is fully acknowledged in international debates on education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015).

Bonnett (2002) endorsed UNESCO’s (2015) complex call and argued strongly for a shift in perspective from sustainability as policy to that of sustainability as a frame of mind. To invigorate sustainability as a frame of mind, Le Grange (2017) was inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizomatic thinking and his musings on sustainability as a rhizome prove insightful. A rhizomatic view of sustainability recognises that there is no fixed central point to sustainability and, therefore, it is always in-becoming. Le Grange (2017, p. 96) explained this by saying that

[s]ustainability education does not signify an a priori image of sustainability nor define what the education pathway towards achieving sustainability should be. Instead, it opens up possibilities for critical discussions on sustainability and suggests a process that is always in-becoming.

Entangled herein, Le Grange (2020, p. 5) encourages us as educationalists to ask, “How might we (re)think education so that it will open up pathways for the becoming of pedagogical lives attuned with sustainability?” Higher Education in South Africa is currently at the epicentre of (re)thinking education in the face of stark inequalities that, once again, revealed their ugly face in the iconic 2015 demonstrations and in ongoing student protest movements. These protests, especially the outcries of students for socially relevant education, foreground the inequities of the global South in relation to its many cultural literacies.

This article is divided into five sections. The first focuses on the South African higher education landscape amid the ongoing #Fallism student protest movements that have foregrounded decolonising the curriculum. In this setting, Santos’s (2018) positions on the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences provide a vital dialectic that opens up alternative pathways for imagining decolonising the curriculum as being in-becoming and concerned about the sustainability of society. The second section provides a description of the research that we undertook. The third presents the student participants’ voices in our drawing on semi-structured interview data. Four key research findings emerged. Each of these findings lays bare the concerns and aspirations that students have for a decolonised curriculum with the potential to unlock sustainable teacher education in South Africa. In the penultimate section, we provide a discussion in which we read the findings in proximity to the potential vested in restorative learning to foster the process of decolonising the

curriculum as in-becoming rather than hierarchical and hegemonic. A brief conclusion highlights the essence of the research.

## Literature review

The statue of Cecil John Rhodes, former prime minister of the Cape colony, was unveiled in 1934 and placed on the renowned Jameson steps (famously known as the Jammie steps) located on the University of Cape Town's upper campus. The Jammie steps remain a popular, central meeting point for students to socialise. They offer scenic views of Devil's Peak and the World Heritage site of Table Mountain and lead to Jameson Hall (now renamed the Sarah Baartman Hall) that seats hundreds of students for graduation ceremonies. Hunma (2018) saw the students as making history every day just by sitting or walking on these steps. On March 9, 2015, politics student Chumani Maxwele emptied a bucket of excrement over the statue of Cecil John Rhodes as a protest against this statue that symbolised a still divided South Africa, 20 years into its democracy as well as the dominance of white, Western, phallogocentric knowledge (Hall, 2015). It was not long before many students, academics, and various workers demanded that the statue be removed as a symbol of racism, white supremacy, colonialism, and postcolonial struggles (Masondo, 2015). On March 20, 2015, a campus march was held, and the slogan Rhodes Must Fall was born. This was to prove iconic in the subsequent South African higher education student protest movements, many of which were born under the banner of #MustFallMovements: #FeesMustFall; #OutsourcingMustFall; #RapeMustFall; and other protest movements that were initiated in revolt against the injustices and inequalities still prevalent in South Africa (Booyesen, 2016; Ngcaweni & Ngcaweni, 2018). One month later (on April 9, 2015), the statue of Cecil John Rhodes was removed. This paved the way for deep deliberations on the need for a decolonised university curriculum and on the lack of transformation in academic appointments (see Hall, 2015).

Although student protests are not new to South Africa (see Becker, 2019), the #RhodesMustFall movement once again highlighted the urgent need for higher education curricula to be decolonised. It is important to make a distinction between a decolonised curriculum and a transformed one. South Africa has made great strides toward transforming higher education through developing policies geared to redress structural and ideological dimensions such as increased accessibility, forming one national higher education system, establishing equality of race and gender, as well as economic and resource provision to universities (Du Preez et al., 2016; Lange, L., 2017). However, less has been done in terms of "institutional cultures and epistemological traditions" that remain substantially unchanged (Heleta, 2016, p. 2). In response to student calls for a decolonised curriculum during the student protest movements, higher education government officials and university leaders took action and convened seminars, workshops, and conferences on decolonisation and set up formal curriculum committees and task teams to search for effective strategies to decolonise disciplines, institutional cultures, and even management. Funding from the United States Mellon Foundation was also received by seven selected universities in view of the urgent need to find sustainable solutions. For Jansen (2019, p. 52), this decolonial moment became a political act, and decolonisation a political slogan because it was mostly a policy discourse

framing the lack of transformation at university campuses that received little critical engagement and the consequence was a “lack of critical analysis and informed activism.” The concern of Le Grange et al. (2020) was a different one. They highlighted the danger of decolonial-washing, a term adapted from the environmental studies term greenwashing, to argue that universities disguise decolonisation under the notion of transformation, resulting in instrumentalist and quick-fix solutions, rather than substantive change.

As a result, this decolonial moment in South African higher education institutions has revealed stark paradoxes. Santos’s (2018) call for a wider sociology of absences and emergences as critical to the decolonisation process offers one avenue through which to navigate these paradoxes and provide alternative pathways for understanding the process of decolonising the curriculum. The sociology of absences involves an inquiry into the ways in which colonialism of power, knowledge, and being operates with capitalism and patriarchy to produce exclusion that represents certain forms of social life as radically inferior. In previous work, Santos (2014) revealed that this inferiority stems from the monocultures that often characterise modern Eurocentric knowledge. For him there are five monocultures that have been responsible for the production of absences: valid knowledge; productivity; linear time; social classification; and the superiority of the universal and global. Absences reveal the hegemony of these monocultures that view nonconforming social groups and modes of social life as “ignorant, primitive, inferior, local and unproductive” (Santos, 2018, p. 26). Here, some traits of coloniality surface.

Maldonado-Torres (2007) made a generative distinction between colonialism and coloniality that captures the very core of how coloniality lives on as the darker side of modernity, even after countries have declared the end of colonies or political colonialism and claim to be post-colonies. Coloniality, therefore, remains vested in long-standing patterns of power that emanate from colonialism, and that continue to define “culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). He argued powerfully that

Coloniality survives colonialism [since coloniality] is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.

So, in this era of modernity, absence (like coloniality) “highlights and denounces the suppression of social reality brought about by the type of knowledge validated by Northern epistemologies” (Santos, 2018, p. 28). While Santos pointed out that the sociology of absences focuses attention on the “negativity of such exclusions” so as to “denaturalize and delegitimize specific mechanisms of oppression”, he refers to the sociology of emergences as the “positivity of such exclusions.” For him, the sociology of emergences affords “new potentialities and possibilities for anticapitalism, anticolonialism, and antipatriarchal social transformation” so that “new evaluations of lived conditions and experience that resignify individual and collective subjectivities emerge.” Emergences have symbolic and material

potential and are thus affirmed as “always in a holistic, artisanal, hybrid way” that recognises the multidimensional presence of exclusion and oppression “as embryonic realities, as inchoate movements” because they enable pathways for “a successful struggle against domination”, the type of struggle that is vested in hope (Santos, 2018, p. 28). As embryonic and always in the process of becoming, the sociology of emergences is different from the sociology of absences that “produce[s] a radical diagnosis” of exclusions and oppressions (p. 29). What can we learn from this in thinking about alternative pathways for understanding what it could mean to decolonise the curriculum?

For us, it means that as long as South African higher education institutions continue to avoid critical engagement with the concept itself, decolonisation remains a “catch-all description of, and solution for, the lack of transformation on university campuses” (Jansen, 2019, p. 52). We argue for recognition of the potential of the sociology of absences to “diagnose” (Santos, 2018, p. 29), through rich inquiry, the ways in which colonialism of power, knowledge, and being form the key foundations of decolonising the curriculum. As Jansen (2019) incisively argued, this makes it possible for the meaning of decolonisation not only to be assumed, but also engaged with critically. Although the sociology of absences is pivotal, this should not limit the process of decolonising the curriculum to the “negativity of . . . exclusions” (Santos, 2018, p. 28) at the cost of only abandoning hegemonic knowledge systems that deem social groups and certain modes of social life invisible and/or irrelevant. This results in representationalist forms of knowledge that gives rise to reflecting on representations that are like a mirror image in that representations have no effect on the objects of investigation in the sense that they are “nothing more than iterative mimesis” of the cognitive injustices perpetuated by phallogocentric, Western knowledge or “reflecting on the world from the outside” (Barad, 2007, p. 88). Although this could provide differing perspectives, it has little transformation potential since it is not embodied nor embedded. Instead, using the diagnosis generated from the sociology of absences juxtaposed with the sociology of emergences could open up the landscape of the Western dominated curriculum “into a field of lively, rich, innovative social experience” that takes account of “new evaluations of lived conditions and experiences that resignify individual and collective” knowledges (Santos, 2018, p. 28–29). We consider that both the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences stimulate a vital dialectic that opens up alternative pathways for imagining sustainable societies in general and sustainable teacher education in particular. In this way, sustainability is not an instrumentalist policy directive that dictates what sustainability education should signify and decides on which technocratic checklists that must be met to achieve it. Rather, as a frame of mind, sustainability is always in-becoming in that it has no fixed end goal but, instead, invokes many pathways to (re)imagine a decolonised curriculum that is attuned to many different knowledges along with positive and generative avenues to challenge Western dominated education.

## Research methods

The data presented in this article is from a phenomenological research study called Curriculum Studies as an intellectual space for decolonising education: In pursuit of Human

Rights education. In this research study, we listened to the voices of ten students who were enrolled for postgraduate research studies in the Curriculum Studies programme in Education. Eight of the students were enrolled for a PhD and two for a Master's. We deem their perceptions on decolonising the curriculum significant because they were doing research in the field and were thus in a position to advance research on Curriculum Studies and, more generally, influence curriculum change in teacher education. The participants were purposively selected based on their area of research in Curriculum Studies and their enrolment in this postgraduate programme. The ten participants included three black and two white females, along with four black males and one white from all three campuses of the university (Potchefstroom, Vaal Triangle, and Mafikeng). While some students were in their final year of study, others had only just commenced, thus increasing the potential of the sample to generate diverse, rich, and insightful data.

These participants voluntarily took part in semi-structured interviews during 2020. The interview questions allowed them to voice their understanding of what it means to decolonise the curriculum in higher education, discuss the influence of institutional cultures, topics, and/or teaching approaches that they thought could foster decolonisation in teacher education, and suggest possible challenges that they foresaw or experienced in their dealings with the curriculum. To comply with Covid-19 regulations, the interviews were conducted via Zoom so did not involve physical contact. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording software so that accurate transcriptions could be compiled to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. These transcriptions were used to do an open, inductive coding of the data to arrive at key findings. Employing thematic analysis, the main findings are presented as themes (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The relevant ethical protocols were followed stringently. The research study received ethical clearance from the university where it was to be conducted.<sup>1</sup> Informed consent was also obtained from each participant. To ensure anonymity, the participants are referred to here as P1 to P10. To ensure that no hierarchy (in terms of order of importance) is operating, the number represents the participants in the chronological order in which the interviews took place. This approach was used to anonymise the participants and to allow for valid and trustworthy presentation of their responses.

## Research findings

Four key research findings emerged from the data generated by these ten postgraduate students who were enrolled for postgraduate research studies in the Curriculum Studies programme. Each of these findings reveals the concerns and aspirations students have for a decolonised curriculum that would lead to realising the unlocking of sustainable teacher education in South Africa.

---

1 The ethics clearance number is NWU-01229-20-A2.

## South Africa's higher education landscape

Some of the students alluded to the ways in which higher education systems of power produce exclusions and hierarchal forms of knowledge and this was in line with Santos's (2018) position on a sociology of absences. For P1 this is, in part, the result of institutional cultures that are still strongly under the influence of colonisation. This situation reinforces what Le Grange et al. (2020) denoted as decolonial-washing and is elaborated on by P1 who said,

The university adopts a symbolic approach. One of the approaches is to talk about it. Act like you're doing something and gradually raise the students' expectation that something will happen and in time it dies off. Colonisation is about power. So, when you decolonise, if you don't go to the root of where the power is, whatever you do, is just symbolic.

Therefore, decolonisation is disguised when universities resort to symbolic and political acts that lead to instrumentalist and quick-fix solutions, rather than substantive change (Le Grange et al., 2020). For P10 one form of substantive change had to do with the management of universities. He explained, "The university system needs to do things in African ways. The management has to introduce things that will encourage decolonisation through African approaches." This requires a radical shift from "university management's rigid structures that are stereotypical of Western ways of doing" and occupied by "people in the system who refuse to embrace change." But for P10, this requires that the "South African system of education be revised to accommodate African initiatives and to break away from colonization." This remains a tall order as can be seen in the three pertinent examples raised by the students participating in this study. The first example relates to students' identities and needs. P1 explained,

Students are protesting in response to a certain sense of awareness of their identity and what they are being subjugated to at their universities. They are finding themselves in the system that does not speak to them and their need.

The second example resonates with what Jansen (2019, p. 52) terms "the political act of decolonisation." P5 stressed that universities have put in place policies to promote and foster decolonising the curriculum. However, these remain policies "that are not in practice." The third example has to do with the neoliberal culture underpinning assessment at South African universities. P6 explained,

Performativity seems to work against decolonisation. Assessment is focused on grades, and it encourages students to focus on regurgitation of knowledge for examination purposes, and this does not result in lifelong learning. Assessment methods that will encourage critical thinking and reflective skills are lacking. Assessment methodologies in higher education rely heavily on summative and formative scores. They consider these [to be] the only method of determining students' abilities. And as such [this is] not decolonising education. We are after high



marks that do not create life-long learning rooted in African ways of living and learning.

The voices of these students indicated that the South African higher education landscape is in need of shifting its symbolic and political tactics if it is to decolonise the curriculum. This remains a complex endeavour and these students highlighted many layers in the process of decolonisation including changing institutional culture, management, identity, policy, and even how universities dictate practices such as assessment to measure student abilities.

### The need for teacher education to be contextualised

Since the participants of this study were postgraduate students in the field of education, they were adamant that decolonising the curriculum is possible only if the teacher education curriculum is contextualised. For them a contextualised curriculum emphasises two core aspects. One aspect refers to the design and development of the university curricula. P3 believed that the design of the curriculum is in the hands of the Department of Higher Education and Training. This is because the Department has the power to determine the structure and purpose of qualifications through its National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This top-down approach is not uncommon in South Africa's young democracy where the concern about responsiveness to national needs is often viewed in relation to economic and developmental goals (Lange, L., 2017). For P1, "Contextualisation of the curriculum is part of the universities institutional culture." Institutional cultures play a central role in designing curricula that seek to meet needs. As P3 asked, "What is beneficial for students?" For P5, these are underpinned by "an awareness of the socio-economic environment and its students." P8 said, "The university needs to look at the demographic of its students . . . so that there is inclusion for every group or tribe" and went on to explain that this would also mean that institutions take account of multilingual diversity among students to promote student learning and interaction. For this participant, "Students should be given a choice of any African language to learn in or communicate with." For Lange, L., (2017), this dovetails with recognising both the institutional identity and that of its students. For P1, this requires interrogating institutional culture and how it dictates the ways in which curricula are designed and developed at universities. P1 went on to say, "Does this curriculum speak to our culture? If it doesn't speak to our culture, then is not us." On a micro level, P1 believes that lecturers play a central role because they are responsible for responding to the tenet that the curriculum they teach "should not apply in absence of context, context should come first."

The other aspect of a contextualised curriculum is that it chimes with content knowledge. Content knowledge "should help students learn about where they come from and where other people come from" (P4). Similarly, P6 averred that "education that focuses on local contents, real life experiences, and where our students [are located] will [enable them to] reflect on the societies they are coming from." This also involves "using examples in the curriculum to teach why decolonisation is important" (P7). For P10 this could require a level of courage, because they believe that "[i]t is high time that we Africans stand up for an African education and not other people's education." In addition, P10 advocated for curriculum reform that asks, "What curriculum content needs to be removed from the curriculum so that we can

promote decolonisation?” In terms of which content knowledge needs to be removed, students mentioned “curriculum content that promotes racial discrimination” (P7) and “topics on African approaches to learning that do not build-up our education system” (P10). P3 explained,

The literature we are giv[en] to read do[es] not focus on African literature. I was just thinking of courses in my Honours [where] we were comparing [the] South African curriculum with Australia [and] Canada. Why don't we compare[the] South African curriculum with [the] Nigerian [and] Egyptian curriculum? Another thing is the use of herbs that our grandparents used rather than the drugs that give us side effects. We should start integrating the use of these herbs.

History and origin are the cornerstone for P10, who explained,

There is need for teacher education to integrate topics like origin of Africa, how Africa started and how we were enslaved. History is important. There is need for us to understand our origin [and] history very well.

Contextualising the curriculum is not simple and straightforward. P2 alluded to the mind shift that is needed for effective implementation of a decolonised curriculum and noted that this will require that “existing teachers need to be trained.” For P4 the challenge lies in “South Africa’s many cultural practices and languages” and how “to reflect all cultures and design an inclusive curriculum that speaks to this diversity.” P5 explored the complexity of a contextualised curriculum in saying,

One should be aware of [one’s] own context and indigenous environment, Africa. One should be aware of this context without ignoring the worldviews of European cultures. In order words, one should expose students to different worldviews otherwise they become isolated.

The participants stressed the importance of recognising the value of a contextualised curriculum. They also alluded to its complexity to illustrate both absences in the existing curriculum and proposals of emergences to afford new potentialities to successfully struggle against domination (see Santos, 2018).

### **Challenges inhibiting decolonisation**

Some of the participants expressed their views and described their lived experience of the challenges of decolonising the curriculum. For P1 the promise of decolonising the curriculum is hampered when people perceive it as a threat.

It’s the threat that decolonisation brings. It is a threat to colonial thought in the higher education intellectual space . . . It becomes a war that is played in an intellectual space with a lot of disadvantage to the person that is being colonised. And for me, we need to do it in a very quiet way . . . when it makes sense to my society, we will rise up and

... speak for ourselves. We need to do it smart[ly], diligently, or otherwise we will end up with a new colonised or neocolonised curriculum.

To move beyond seeing decolonisation as a threat, P3 believes that the challenge lies in “decolonising the colonised minds of communities.” He elaborated, “We need to enrich our people about Africanism. Things the colonisers made us to believe are evil. The challenge is not only to the curriculum or our lectures but taking it to our communities, our parents.” In echoing this view, P3 became reactive and assertive in claiming,

I think for our colonisers, we need to colonise them too, so that they can know some things about us. They need to know we are intelligent, smart people, and we have our own indigenous knowledge. Maybe we need to do more student exchange programmes so that they know we are not stupid people.

This speaks to the sensitive nature of decolonisation and how the personal becomes political. For P4 misconception plays a role when there is a “lack of understanding why the curriculum needs to be decolonised.” Similarly, P8 commented that the “misconception about decolonisation is that people always think decolonisation means excluding one major knowledge.”

P3 emphasised the importance of including traditional practices. They recounted an experience from their graduation ceremony:

I remember when I was graduating, we were told not to make noise. Africans are noise making people especially during ceremonies. We had choral songs. African songs should be introduced to graduation ceremonies instead of choral songs . . .

P6’s experience was related to the way in which teaching is structured.

The strict timetable in the higher institutions does not allow the students to do other things than memorizing the knowledge. The timetable in higher institutions does not allow [a] decolonised curriculum. The present curriculum needs reviewing—the assessment methods, teaching strategies, and the contents.

Another frustration seen by P3 was the need for the racial transformation of the lecturing staff. They said, “Universities should hire more Tswana lecturers. They should introduce more black South African lecturers.”

The participants raised several challenges to decolonising the curriculum that reaffirm the stance of Heleta (2016) that in South African universities’ institutional cultures and epistemological traditions continue to produce exclusions. These exclusions speak vividly to monocultures that produce absences (Santos, 2014) by dictating what constitutes valid knowledge, productivity, linear time, social classification, as well as global and universal superiority.

## Decolonising the curriculum is a process

The participants described decolonising the curriculum as a process and not a product. For P3, “It’s going to be a process, it’s not going to be done in a day” and for P5, “Decolonisation is a long process that will take many years to realise.” As a process, the participants shed light on decolonising the curriculum in relation to receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. P2 commented,

My understanding is that the process of decolonisation attempts to create a learning environment that is open and supportive of students from various backgrounds . . . working with instead of around cultural differences [and] finding culturally relevant material for all learners by introducing new teaching methods and information from non-traditional sources to expand the student experience. This is needed to build a stable education system that won’t just fall apart in a few years and require a brand-new curriculum.

P3 said, “Let’s revise our African curriculum. Let us also write our African History. Let us not allow the one that colonised us to write our history. The one who colonised will leave out many.”

According to P4, “I think it is important for lecturers to examine themselves and present information in different ways. We learn from our teachers, so they should model students correctly. I think we need skills to receive different opinions.”

P5 called for

equal distribution of African contexts and western scenarios. We should start with worldviews. We should start to merge African beliefs, values, and ethics with Western beliefs together. We should expose students to African culture, knowledge, and ethics without compromising Western knowledge.

P6 said, “Education should emancipate and empower students in the society they live. For students to transform, they need to be fully engaged rather than mere receiver[s] of dominant knowledges.”

P7 explained, “I think people should be giv[en] same opportunities to indicate what they can offer or bring to the table. The people that have been silent for so long should be given opportunity to air their views.”

And for P9, “Maybe to give the students more voices in learning. To hear their voices on what benefits them and to empower them.”

These aspirations for the process of decolonising the curriculum breathe the type of hope that Santos (2018) framed as occurring in inchoate moments and embryonic realities that envelop symbolic and material affirmations needed to resignify individual and collective knowledge that is holistic, artisanal, and hybrid. Some of the participants referred to specific teaching

approaches that could promote decolonisation. These included “storytelling” of “our own stories and legacies in our communities” (P3). P10’s belief that students “don’t know their roots” echoed the statement that “African cultures must be taught for preservation and protection of heritage.” This could foster “African cultures being celebrated and free from marginalisation.” Other participants placed an emphasis on communication. P1 emphasised the need for curriculum to be a space that “initiates scholarly conversations that re-imagine thinking and lead to decolonisation.” For P4, “Critical discussion is needed to expose students to various and different knowledges” and for P5, “More discourses on decolonisation will aid in realising the idea of decolonisation in practice and not just in policy or theory.” P10 insisted that

one of the teaching approaches best suited to a decolonised curriculum are communicative approaches. Most of the teaching approaches we use in Africa are based on how to communicate colonial knowledge. An African interactive approach allows students to contribute while teachers also learn from the learners and . . . teachers will not dominate.

P10’s view matches P5’s emphasis on “peer learning” as valuable “to understand other people’s cultures” and P6’s injunction that we should “encourage the students to interact with one another.” This can be generative since it stimulates an “open-mindedness” (P5) that “enables students to question existing beliefs and practices” (P6) and a meaningful “interaction with the environment for deep learning experiences” (P6). But for P6, this requires a non-Western approach in which the process of decolonisation sees students and lecturers as “co-participants in [the] learning process.”

## Discussion: Decolonising the curriculum for sustainable teacher education

Higher education government officials and university leaders reacted immediately to actions during the 2015 #RhodesMustFall student protest movement that aimed at decolonising disciplines, institutional cultures, and even management (Jansen, 2019). Decolonising the curriculum remains a generative issue in sustainable teacher education (and higher education as a whole) in South Africa.

In the field of higher education, teacher education is responsible for developing professionals who will enter the schooling sector and educate the children who are the future of our country. A decolonised curriculum should not only prepare teachers for their profession, but it should also infiltrate all sectors of schooling and the higher education curriculum so that it has an impact on society and, in that way, invigorate its sustainability. But the participants’ voices and lived experience made it plain that decolonising the curriculum is both determined and shaped by larger ecosystems such as the higher education system that has predominantly colonised systems of power through institutional cultures, symbolic change, performativity regimes, and hierarchical management (Heleta, 2016). The participants also revealed the need for the teacher education curriculum to be contextualised, not only through the content

knowledge prescribed and taught but also in the approach to designing and developing it. Various challenges inhibiting decolonisation were raised and these will need to be overcome if we are to unlock its many layers as well as realise its personal and socio-political nature given the complexity of the decolonial moment. These experiences mostly reflected what Santos (2018, p. 28) described as the sociology of absences that “highlights and denounces the suppression of social reality brought about by the type of knowledge validated by Northern epistemologies.” But juxtaposed with these absences, the participants also raised the affordances of decolonising the curriculum as a process. These concur with a sociology of emergences since they complement the potential of decolonising the curriculum that could positively challenge the Western dominated curriculum “into [becoming] a field of lively, rich, innovative social experience” so that “new evaluations” of lived experience can regenerate individual and collective knowledges (Santos, 2018, p. 28–29).

Deeply ingrained in “hope” (Santos, 2018, p. 28), these affordances and their affirmative possibilities provide a vantage point for us to argue for decolonising the curriculum through an ethos attuned to learning and being as constantly being in-becoming rather than pre-determined and prescribed (Le Grange, 2019). When it embraces human and different knowledges as always being in-becoming and not defined or essentialised, an image of education as embodied and embedded in the desire to live, to connect, and to care for each other can be unlocked through multiple coursings for the becoming of a pedagogical life, with immanent potential (Le Grange, 2019). Similarly, Braidotti (2011, p. 14) presented a view of the subject as always in-becoming through an affirmative ethic that “actively strives to create collectively empowering alternatives [as] transformative and inspirational” through active commitments of hope, and we firmly support this. We deem such an ethos of being in-becoming as prolific since it challenges “abyssal thinking” (Santos, 2014, p. 119) and troubles the root of hegemonic knowledge systems. Research done by Lotz-Sisitka (2017) called for a wider sociology of absence and emergence since this is critical to the decolonisation process. They enable an in-becoming ethos because of its “commitment to generativity, and emergence as principle” (p. 50) so that decolonising education is less about acculturation and “more about aspiration, change, transformation and hope.”

Situating ourselves in an ethos of being in-becoming, we argue that alternative pathways are necessary for sustainable development. One such pathway, we believe, could be through methodological approaches such as restorative learning (Lange, E., 2017). Our belief is that this methodological approach speaks to some of the participants’ calls for teacher education to employ approaches like “storytelling” (p. 3) and “an African interactive approach” (p. 10) so that African heritages are celebrated, preserved, and protected.

Lange, E. (2017, p. 41) averred that “all peoples need to do the work of cultural reclamation and decolonization, as colonization has touched most peoples, some more recently or more extensively than others.” As Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 6) put it, “[A]s modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day” and for this reason no one can be exempted from the process of decolonisation. Cultural reclamation and decolonisation can be made possible through approaches like restorative learning that enable “us to retrieve the ancient

knowledge we carry” through “a process of growing attunement and ancient practices that ‘speak’ outside Western frameworks” since stories, ritual and/or ceremonies “access forgotten channels of knowing/being” (Lange, E., 2017, p. 40). Restorative learning is cognisant of the fact that often our inner intuitive ethical compass is dictated by cultural expectations and rationality at the cost of the individual and collective moral and ethical sensibility within a cosmic vision (Lange, E., 2017). We believe that three key dimensions of restorative learning could foster sustainable teacher education that is underpinned by an ethos of being in-becoming. First, Lange, E. (2017, p. 41) advocates for education that embraces “hopeful elements for rebuilding a way of living that recognizes embeddedness in affiliation.” An embeddedness in affiliation can be made possible through “the reinvigorating and reinventing of traditions and identities as well as a reappropriation of our modernized consciousness, knowledge, bodies and relations.” Second, education needs to see subjectivity and the subject as embodied and embedded (Braidotti, 2011). In this regard, Lange, E. (2017, p. 41) challenges education to break “the bounds of skin and brain and the inside/outside view of the self in humanist notions” so that learning is more ecological and akin to Le Grange’s (2019, p. 221) view of education as “the becoming of a pedagogical life, with immanent potential.” Third, restorative learning shifts “the mode of having to the mode of being.” The emphasis on “the mode of being” is the need to be not only preoccupied with “who we are or what we are to do”, but also the need to focus on “how we are” through radical relatedness that can “break through the property structures of Western consciousness and cultivate a new moral scope and social imaginary” (Lange, E., 2017, p. 41–42).

## Conclusion

Restorative learning can help foster a decolonised curriculum that is attuned to sustainable teacher education in South Africa. This approach highlights the importance of unlearning in order to relearn (Ndlovu-Gatsheni as cited in Omanga, 2020). Ndlovu-Gatsheni contended that how we teach and what we teach must be “subjected to decolonial interrogation” to unlearn education that “carries the dirty history of colonialism and racism.” He explained,

You need to unlearn that one geographical space in the world cannot be teacher of the world. And then relearn that all human beings are born to valid and legitimate knowledge. At the decenter of unlearning is also the important process of de-bourgeoisification of knowledge. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni as cited in Omanga, 2020, p. 4)

We concur with Ndlovu-Gatsheni and urge higher education institutions, academics, and students to stand as one and consider the potential in approaches like restorative learning, underpinned by unlearning and relearning, to bring about a sustainable process of decolonising the curriculum.

## References

- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

- Becker, H. (2019). South African student protests, 1968 to 2016: Dissent, disruption, decolonization. <https://isreview.org/issue/111/south-african-student-protests-1968-2016>.
- Bokova, I. (2015). Forward. In The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Eds.), *Rethinking education. Towards a global common good?* (pp. 3–4). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Bonnett, M. (2002). Sustainability as a frame of mind—and how to develop it. *Trumpeter*, 18, 1–9.
- Booyesen, S. (2016). *Fees must fall: Student revolt, decolonisation and governance in South Africa*. Wits University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Du Preez, P., Simmonds, S, & Verhoef, A. (2016). Rethinking and researching transformation in Higher Education: A meta-study of South African trends. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), a2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.2>
- Hall, M. (2015). The symbolic statue dividing a South African university. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-31945680>
- Heleta, S. (2016). Decolonisation of higher education: Dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), a9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.9>
- Hunma, A. (2018). Students make history every day just by sitting on these steps: Performative spaces and re-genring in the south. *Education as Change*, 22(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/706>
- Jansen, J. (2019). On the politics of decolonisation: Knowledge, authority and the settled curriculum. In J. Jansen (Ed.), *Decolonisation in universities: The politics of knowledge* (pp. 50–78). Wits University Press.
- Lange, E. A. (2017). RiverSpeaking: The spiraling of transformative and restorative learning toward kinship ethics. In P. B. Corcoran, J. P. Weakland & A. E. J. Wals (Eds.), *Envisioning futures for environmental and sustainability education* (pp. 33–44). Wageningen Academic Publishers.
- Lange, L. (2017). 20 years of higher education curriculum policy in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, 68, 31–57.
- Le Grange, L. (2017). Environmental education after sustainability. In B. Jickling & S. Sterling (Eds.), *Post-sustainability: Remaking education for the future* (pp. 93–107). Palgrave Macmillan.



- Le Grange, L. (2019). Currere's active force and the concept of ubuntu. In C. Hébert, N. Ng-A-Fook, A. Ibrahim & B. Smith (Eds.), *Internationalising curriculum studies: Histories, environments and critiques* (pp. 207 - 226). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Le Grange, L. (2020). Sustainability higher education in the context of Bearn's university of beauty. *Sustainability, 12*(10533), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122410533>
- Le Grange, L., Du Preez, P., Ramrathan, L., & Blignaut, S. (2020). Decolonising the university curriculum or decolonialwashing? A multiple case study. *Journal of Education, 80*, 25–48.
- Lotz-Sisitka, H. (2017). Decolonisation as future frame for environmental and sustainability education: Embracing the commons with absence and emergence. In P. B. Corcoran, J. P. Weakland & A. E.J. Wals (Eds.), *Envisioning futures for environmental and sustainability education* (pp. 45–62). Wageningen Academic Publishers.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2/3), 240–270.
- Masondo, S. (2015). Rhodes: As divisive in death as in life. News24. <https://www.news24.com/News24/Cecil-John-Rhodes-As-divisive-in-death-as-in-life-20150322>
- Omanga, D. (2020). Decolonization, decoloniality, and the future of African studies: A conversation with Dr. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni. <https://items.ssrc.org/from-our-programs/decolonization-decoloniality-and-the-future-of-african-studies-a-conversation-with-dr-sabelo-ndlovu-gatsheni/>
- Ngcaweni, W., & Ngcaweni, B. (2018). *The struggle for #FeesMustFall: We are no longer at ease*. Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd.
- Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the south: Justice against epistemicide*. Paradigm.
- Santos, B. (2018). *The end of the cognitive empire: The coming of age of epistemologies of the south*. Duke University Press.
- United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015). *Rethinking education. Towards a global common good?* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.