
Introduction - Part I

Curriculum stasis, funding and the 'decolonial turn' in universities - inclusion and exclusion in higher education in South Africa

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The crisis faced by higher education systems and institutions across the world is urgent. The sharp and consistent decline in public funding, the pressure for rapid expansion, contests over worthwhile knowledge, concerns about social and economic responsiveness, demands for greater accountability, and increased competition for high quality students, are only some of its features.

Against this backdrop, in 2015 and 2016, universities in South Africa faced a number of strikes and protests which highlighted issues of institutional culture, equitable access, black identity, racial inequality, intersectionality and curriculum relevance. This particular conjuncture has forced us to rethink theory, research and practice. The nature of the protests brought difficult and uncomfortable questions to the fore. Twenty years since the end of apartheid, has curriculum and knowledge production been 'decolonised'? Have our lofty discourses and policies on governance, institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social justice translated into effective strategies and practices, and transformed higher education? What are the implications of the shifts in the student movement from 2015 to 2016, from a broad and diverse movement united across race, class and gender, to highly politicised formations which are using different sets of strategies, including direct action?

Competing positions are clearly evident with regard to the meanings of equitable access, free education, and university education for all. In fact the macro economic framework for education funding has itself come under increasing scrutiny, as has the unresolved matter of institutional differentiation. Furthermore, whether the state's steering and accountability mechanisms can be reconciled with institutional autonomy and academic freedom remains an open question. More broadly, how does the advancement

of knowledge through research, teaching and learning respond to global challenges without neglecting local complexities, particularly in a context of poverty, unemployment, disease and conflict?

The purpose of this Special Issue is to deepen our understanding of the current crisis in higher education through sustained and critical analyses of the problems of funding, knowledge and institutional change in South African universities.

This Introduction is divided into two parts: Jonathan Jansen begins with an overview of the first set of articles, providing critical discussion on curriculum stasis, decolonisation and knowledge production. Shireen Motala follows with an overview of the second set of articles, on funding and resourcing, and uses an equity lens to critically consider current debates on #Fees must fall.

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