

Curriculum innovation: addressing community needs



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Table of Contents

Curriculum innovation: responding to community needs.....	1
1. Introduction	1
2. The Context: Community and vocational education	3
3. The dominant approaches	6
3.1 Human capital theory and instrumentalist education	6
3.2 Curriculum and instrumentalism.....	9
4. Research sources	11
5. Lessons from research	13
5.1 The importance of social purpose curriculum	13
5.2 Researching community needs and interests.....	14
5.3 Curricula and community needs.....	15
5.4 The importance of situated learning	16
5.5 The relationship between educator and learner	17
5.6 Building solidarity.....	18
5.7 Language.....	18
5.8 The conceptualisation of work.....	19
Conclusion	21
References.....	22

Curriculum innovation: responding to community needs

... the development of such intelligence, initiative, ingenuity, and capacity as shall make workers as far as possible, masters of their own industrial fate ... The kind of vocational education in which I am interested in is not one which will "adapt" workers to the existing industrial regime ... but one which will alter the existing industrial system and ultimately transform it.

John Dewey

1. Introduction

Many communities, especially poor and working-class communities continue to experience a wide range of socio-economic problems. In the last decade, the struggle for socio-economic rights and the urgency for genuine and deep transformation have given rise to regular 'community unrests' or community "service delivery protests" – so much so that South Africa has been referred to by Jane Duncan as the protest nation (Duncan, 2016). Duncan's seminal work deals in detail with the importance of protest as a mechanism that "can wake society up out of its complacent slumber, make it realise that there are problems that need to be addressed urgently, and so hasten social change" (Duncan, 2016:1). Although Duncan's work focusses on a detailed analysis of the right to protest, her work reminds us of two decades of dissent related to the multitude of social, economic and political issues confronting South African, a society in transition. Her work goes beyond the structural reproduction of inequality and illuminates the significance and power of agency and collective action in the struggle for social change (p.7). Whilst protest culture is in itself rich in informal learning and non-formal education, expressions of dissent about education have not often been at the centre of protest. Duncan's work reminds us that education is deeply rooted in the social, political and economic fabric of our society.

Protest culture contributes and forms part of the political education within marginalised communities and is the bedrock for curricula essential to advance social change and the transition to substantive democracy. Discontent in communities, especially communities of the poor and working class, highlights the need for forms of education and curricula as a vehicle for the socio-economic transformation of communities and society. In the context of increasing unemployment, poverty and inequality combined with an extensive list of community needs, interests and demands - such as health, housing, care, and nutrition - education with adults and youth has to be a vehicle to address these issues. Community education then calls for curriculum innovation that is more responsive to the variety of community needs and interests.

Vocational education is the second area where curriculum innovation is needed. This kind of education, like literacy and basic education, is subsumed within community education for youth and adults and constitutes education that allows people to develop and use their productive capabilities to improve their lives and to contribute to the transformation of community and society. Here the emphasis on vocational education is placed on the social purpose of the ways in which people in communities 'work'. Curriculum innovation in vocational education requires a movement that broadens the current narrow focus of vocational education as purported by current government policy and practices. This paper argues for broadening conceptions of vocational education that are community-oriented and embedded in forms of education and work in the interests of democratic community development.

This paper is divided into four sections. The paper starts off with an overview of the current context in which community and vocational policy and practice is set. It provides a summary of the size and scope of community and vocational education which have an enormous task in serving the educational and learning needs of a vast majority. It also shows how vocational education in particular is being promoted as a key vehicle to address the triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

In the second section, it frames the dominant orientation of community and vocational education. The paper argues that current government policies and practices remain trapped within the logic of human capital theory and instrumentalist thinking about community and vocational education. Social efficiency models of community and vocational education remain dominant, yet they are largely removed from, and alienating to the real-life experiences of the majority – these models of education are therefore largely undemocratic and contradictory to education oriented to advancing a vision of a just society and the longing for substantive democracy.

The third section of the paper, provides a synopsis of research sources that inform the arguments. The research sources show that the current model of community and vocational education fails to serve the needs of the poor and the marginalised in society. The paper concludes by drawing a few lessons from the analysis. These lessons require further engagement for educators, researchers and policy makers involved in community research and curriculum innovation.

2. The Context: Community and vocational education

Community and vocational education have rich histories in South Africa (Aitchison, 2003; Chisholm, 1984; Bird, 1984; Badroodien, 2004) and are rooted in the historical evolution of apartheid with its oppressive and violent subjugation of black South Africans. Community education is a broad concept. It usually refers to a range of learning opportunities provided to people of all ages in a variety of community-based settings and reflects the learning needs and interests of all members of the community. In this paper, community education refers to forms of education offered to youth and adults who are yet to benefit from our new democracy. It privileges individuals and groups who continue to experience exclusion and marginalisation. It further signals a broadening of the terminology used to refer to education for adults – adult literacy and adult basic education (and training). In the South African context, community education is the form of education provided by the state through a system of Community Education and Training Centres (CETCs), and currently being reconfigured as a network of CETCs that constitute a Community College. In brief, community education is education for, in and with communities - thus education that serves the needs, interests and demands of communities.

Vocational education in South Africa is associated with education for employment. It is also associated with other terminology such as technical education, further education and training (FET) and more recently, technical vocational education and training (TVET). The dominant conception of vocational education is one that is defined as education that should serve the needs of business and industry, with particular emphasis being placed on incorporating the growing unemployed youth (and unwaged adult) population into knowledge and skills formation required by the formal labour market. This orientation to vocational education (vocational education as TVET) is removed from its role in community development and community work. In this paper, we recognise that communities of the poor and working class are rich in vocational skills. These skills are practiced daily and evident in the variety of forms of work, including socially useful work, in which youth and adults participate. Vocational learning and education, we argue, are present in communities in largely non-formal ways.

As educational programmes, community and vocational education could potentially serve 18 million South Africans. Current statistics suggest that as many as 14 million adults (aged 18 years and older) do not have 10 years of schooling. According to Baatjes (2008) less than 10% of this population occupied jobs in the formal labour market. Current education provision for this population is through a network of 3 000 Community Education and Training Centres (CETCs) with a total number of 300,000 enrolled in 2015; the drop-out rate is high; the throughput rate very low; and adults and youth experience multiple barriers to participation. The

curriculum remains largely school-based and linked to formal qualifications. Vocational training for adults is largely absent from the curriculum.

TVET Colleges now reach more than 700,000 youth and adults enrolled in 50 TVET Colleges across the country. In 2011, 115,000 students enrolled in general vocational programmes in TVET colleges (National Treasury, 2011:17). This number has increased dramatically over the last five years with enrolments reaching 738,000 in 2015 (DHET, 2017a). TVET Colleges continue to grapple with a number of interrelated problems. The throughput rate is a mere 2% (for students completing studies in three years); the certification rate is 33%; the drop-out rate is 28%; and there are poor linkages with business and industry. The large number of young people in need of vocational education reflects the urgent need for a new landscape upon which to build a post-schooling sector that serves the best interests of the majority of young people in South Africa.

The latest statistics on post-schooling (DHET, 2017b) estimate that approximately 3,2 million among 18 to 24-year old youths are neither employed, nor in a formal process of education and training (generally referred to as the NEET). This figure increases to 4,4 million when those aged 25-34 are included. Approximately 65% of the 1 million young people exit the schooling system each year without a Grade 12 certificate (Taylor, 2011). Altman and Marock (2011) report that even students who manage to pass the Senior Certificate exam have a less than 50% chance of accessing employment before they turn 24.

These institutions both operate in the context of the oft repeated rampant issue of the triple challenge: poverty, inequality and unemployment. In fact, this triad of issues is now a global concern as many countries, in varying degrees of scale and complexity, are grappling with it (Klees, 2017). How these issues are conceptualised, in themselves and in relation to each other, is not universally agreed upon. Moreover, the relationship between these issues and the post-school education system is the subject of much public debate because of the wide range of interpretations of this relationship. These differences reflect the diversity of orientations, interests and social aims which are ascribed to post-school education and training (PSET).

For some scholars and thinkers, the purpose of PSET is almost exclusively a concern about its role in promoting the kind of skills, knowledge and competences useful for employment (or employability) in the formal labour market - that is, in both the public and private sectors of the South African economy. In this case the challenge of the post-schooling sector arises from a history of poor linkages between workplace education and training; poor 'intermediate level' institutional cultures of

training for artisans and other technological occupations; the weaknesses amongst and between institutional players; the poor implementation of policies; the weak conceptual and practical approaches to pedagogy that combine vocational and 'academic training'; and the like. This could, for instance, include a better understanding of how to combine formal study (Universities, Universities of Technology, TVET Colleges, and community-based education centres) with structured learning at work through work-integrated learning, apprenticeships, learnerships, skills programmes and work experience placements. It could also include an examination of the role of post-school education in stimulating and supporting the reconstruction of the education and training system for developing a self-determining citizenry. This citizenry could participate meaningfully in self-generated and alternative ways of learning through post-school education that is directed at improving socio-economic livelihoods beyond the limits of formal employment and education.

Other approaches speak to the wider remit of post-school education going beyond the demands of employment in the formal sector of the economy and point to the danger and limitations of interpreting the role of post-school education as synonymous with employment in the formal labour market. It is argued that this uni-determinative approach drowns out all other approaches to this issue, thus reproducing the alienating forms of capitalist work without any concept of the broader framework for thinking about the role of post-school education, and especially its wider contextually relevant political, social, economic and cultural purposes in society. This is the general and dominant refrain running through various policy papers - the National Development Plan (NDP), National Growth Path (NGP) and White Paper on PSET included – with the goal of forging an efficient link between education and training and the labour market. In this relationship, the former is principally conceived as serving the latter - 'education and training being responsive to the market' - with an expectation that the market will mete out ample rewards to those who bow to its demands.

It needs to be borne in mind that this oversimplified rationale for a relationship of *homo-economicus* to education and training is deliberate – a complacent and uncritical regurgitation of 'education & training = jobs' is not without its problems, as recent turns in the global economy have shown, and unemployment continues to rise for even educated and trained youth globally (Allen & Ainley, 2012; Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011; Standing, 2011; Motala & Treat, 2014; Klees, 2017). There is a need to carefully reconsider the uni-determinative view of an existing market prescribing the skills-needs of society, a point of view not necessarily unreasonable in and of itself.

A co-determinative approach focuses not only on the role of post-school education in the formal labour market, but also on its role in developing a citizenry that is conscious of its political and social role, and supportive of community-based initiatives for generating socially useful forms of work and livelihoods based on a deeper understanding of the structural and historical nature of the challenges facing South African young people, the working class and the unemployed. This approach to the relationships within and between the triad - one that also leaves open the door for key actors in the political economy - the state, market and citizens, to reshape even the very nature of the market such that it truly serves the well-being of all. This, incidentally, is an empathetic notion of 'economy' that held sway for a long time before it was upended by present-day global developments, which have also proven to be inadequate in promoting an inclusive flourishing for many, while simultaneously catapulting some to untold levels of wealth.

Furthermore, both the NDP and White Paper also argue for a deeper civic purpose of education than merely training people for jobs in the formal labour market. There is now an urgency to acknowledge the importance of work (not jobs) as integral to human existence (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Weeks, 2011; Attunes, 2013). Work should be understood as the means through which humans engage the world, connect with their intellectual physical selves, and the many ways in which *homo sapiens* give expression to their creativity and imagination. Increasing numbers of youth and adults who are outside the formal wage-labour relation (that is, not in a formal job) are involved in various forms of work, including socially useful work. It is imperative to not simply look at these forms of human activity as survivalist or sustainable livelihoods, but rather demonstrations of agency and expressions of resilience, strength, courage and a desire to show that work is inherent to human existence. In the absence of wage labour, people in communities are 'doing' and 'working' to exchange socially productive efforts.

3. The dominant approaches

3.1 Human capital theory and instrumentalist education

Human resource development with its economic determinism is a top priority of most governments and has become the fastest growing segment of adult education (which includes vocational education). Thus education, whether formal, non-formal or informal is being oriented to serve economic goals. Moreover, education is constantly being blamed by politicians, researchers, business and industry champions and powerful political international organisations for the unemployment crisis, because it does not provide the skills required by the economy. Three such comments about this view of education are captured below:

“Education ... is the solution to most problems we face today... The simpler days of blue-collar jobs serving as the fossil fuel of the American economy are long gone. In order to stay financially afloat and to contribute constructively to our economy and society over the course of their lives, young Americans must now attain as much post-secondary education and training as possible to meet the ever-changing demands of our increasingly complex workforce”.

Christopher L. Washington, Provost of Franklin College, US

“...we end up with unemployed graduates because they are qualified in those fields where the economy is either saturated ... not where the economy would be able to attract those skills. We need to create skills that will address unemployment”.

Nhlanhla Nene, Minister of Finance, RSA

“...we are just not getting education right for the majority of people ... they stay sidelined and the handful of people who can afford to get a decent education get the jobs and the economy going...”

Azar Jammie, Chief Economist, Econometrix, RSA

The construction of curriculum in community and vocational education is directly connected to ideas that are dominant in the language, ideologies and practices of human capital theory (HCT). Human capital is regarded as the sum of the total of skills, talent and knowledge embodied in its population and an investment in education, skills and training directly impacts on economic productivity (Baatjes, et al, p.90). Human capital theory further suggests that: (a) education should be regarded as a private good that is a tradable commodity in the market place for money and status; (b) the private return on human capital investment (education) provides an incentive to progress to further education; (c) further education should be oriented towards the labour market (supply and demand); and (d) more education can be translated into higher productivity which results in higher earnings (Ibid, 90).

There has recently been a resurgence and sharpened critique of human capital theory (See Vally & Motala, 2014; Klees, 2017). These authors provide a useful critique of the skills-education mismatch, human capital and neoliberal discourses that dominate policy formulation and shape public consciousness about the narrow purpose of education in societies. Under these discourses, an economic determinism that argue that: “education leads to skills, skills lead to employment, employment leads to economic growth, economic growth creates jobs and is the way out of poverty and inequality,” remains the common refrain (Klees, 2017).

These discourses shape national education systems and have precipitated pedagogical orientations that can be observed in community and vocational

education. Hyslop-Margison (2005) provides an extensive critique of the social efficiency or instrumentalist perspective that has come to dominate the pedagogical mission of vocational education in many countries – a perspective which Hyslop-Margison deems “academic education of little enduring worth to the majority of students” (Ibid, p.10). In his work, drawn from Canada and the United States, he shows the prevalence of the social efficiency model in vocational education. His critique includes, amongst others: (a) the undemocratic nature of vocational education which removes student choice from career preparation and its socially reproductive role; (b) that this model ignores pre-existing social economic forces which impede educational achievement and attainment by students with economically disadvantaged backgrounds; (c) that it ignores the role played by education in preparing students for participatory democratic citizenship; and (d) that vocational programmes based on instrumentalist logic offer students little opportunity to critique work-related social conditions (Ibid, p.11).

Hyslop-Margison further offers an overview of the liberal perspective to vocational education which is concerned with the integration of (economically excluded) students into society by improving employment in the formal labour market. This perspective is also informed by the social pathology or deficit model concerned with narrow occupational training that may enhance opportunities for economic success (Ibid, p.12). A combination of these two perspectives – the social efficiency and liberal models – are present in the South African context.

Similar reformist models are prevalent in adult and community education globally (See Foley, 2001; Baatjes & Mathe, 2004; Baptiste, 2001). Baatjes & Mathe (2004: 397) argue that governments around the world are investing heavily in adult education as part of their drive for skills formation and increased competition in the global market. They point to the use of terms such as ‘adult basic education and training’ (ABET), ‘outcomes-based education’, ‘human resource development’ and ‘lifelong learning’ in support of economic productivity and economic growth. Under the instrumentalist ethic, great emphasis is being placed on the acquisition of skills, knowledge and values to facilitate movement into and across jobs. The vocational sub-sector of adult education which in the past was consistently ignored, under-resourced, underfunded, under-developed and under-researched, is now the focus of increased investment. The primary aim of education is the creation of a highly skilled labour force that will make business and industry competitive in the world economy (Brown, Green & Lauder; 2001).

Instrumentalism in adult education, just like in vocational education, permeates government educational policy, programmes, plans and strategies. As in other countries, South Africa has adopted a largely instrumentalist orientation to its adult and vocational systems in order to harness them to national economic objectives as set out in the NDP, NSDS III and a variety of skills projects and programmes primarily geared towards getting more youth into formal jobs. Over the

past 18 years, South Africa has established and promoted an education and training culture characterised by perpetual training through its skills development regime – all geared towards solving the country’s economic problems. In a recent article the World Bank – one of the most influential purveyors of neoliberal, skills mismatch and human capital discourses – reiterated the need for South Africa to pursue instrumentalist policies in education (Menon, 2018). Integrating training into job creation combined with revised strategies for TVET is likely to increase.

3.2 Curriculum and instrumentalism

Curriculum construction under a philosophical tradition takes on a particular form, structure and content as well as in shaping the dialectic relationship between student and teacher. Human capital approaches give rise to a range of pedagogical practices that seek to domesticate and impede the development of human freedom (Baatjes, et al, 2014: 91). A number of scholars have shed light on the nature and structure of instrumentalist curricula in adult education in general and vocational education in particular (James, 2002; Hyland, 1994; Kilminster, 1997; Collins, 1991).

Although countries across the world have different models for vocational education, the terms ‘competences’, ‘skill’ and ‘qualification framework’ are very familiar and common across contexts. The competency-based education and training (CBET) movement gained prominence in Britain in the mid-1980s and gained traction in government policy in South Africa in the mid-1990s. Some of its hallmarks include: (a) the establishment of national qualifications frameworks for adult and vocational qualifications; (b) the development of a regime of standards; (c) the development of pre-packaged curricula obsessed with narrow, mechanistic and unrealistic conceptions of skills; (d) ill-founded, imprecise, anti-educational and limited conceptions of knowledge, theory and work-based learning; and (e) education based on behaviourist principles (Winch & Hyland, 2007; Collins, 1991). Research conducted by James (2002) in the Australian context, argues that competence-based education and training (CBET) approaches emphasise ‘procedural, technical knowers’ rather than ‘reflective problem solvers’, and ‘standardized adaptive workers’ rather than ‘innovators’ or ‘initiators’ (James, 2002: 371 cited in Baatjes et al, 2014).

Writing about adult education, Michael Collins issued a warning that adult and vocational education is in crisis and has been shaped and captured by a psychological, individualised orientation that is dominated by a “professionalized psychologistic pedagogy”. Collins called this a societal assault on the adult learner and on adult education. He argues that the crisis is the result of a “technicist obsession” which reduced adult learning to situations managed by technical formulations, such as “standardized pre-packed curricula” and “pre-conceived needs assessment instruments” compiled by experts. He critiques pre-packaged curricula and argues that formalised adult education has been transformed into technical

planning of instructions which prohibits the ability to think critically, and to evaluate everyday experiences on their own account (Ibid, p.4).

Kilminster (1997) also adds to the critique of CBET. She points out that CBET, in the guise of qualification frameworks, fails because it does not meet policy expectations and it has inadequate theoretical formulation and practical difficulties. She further argues that it denies students the opportunity to gain socially valid education,¹ something which could lead to the development of critical consciousness and awareness. The creation of socially valid knowledge through vocational education, according to Kilminster, can only be useful if it is practical and directly related to the lives of students, while simultaneously enhancing their role as citizens in society. She concludes that the only way vocational education can be more revelatory and 'factual' is through the ingenuities and critical pedagogical practices of educators. Under CBET formulations of curriculum, educators are reduced to uncritical facilitators or mediators of pre-packaged and highly prescriptive content that excludes the acquisition of revelatory or socially valid knowledge.

Adult and vocational educators have an important role to play with specific reference to their education and its relationship to curriculum development and implementation. The education of these educators is critical especially in the South African context. Vocational educators, in particular, find themselves trapped in an oppressed-oppressor dichotomy: they occupy a marginalised social position, but in turn are oppressors due to their role in delivering vocational education that suppresses criticality – an important issue also pointed out by Hyslop-Margison when he refers to the undemocratic nature of vocational education.² For similar reasons, Collins calls for adult education as a vocation and the praxis of transformative pedagogy aimed at "furthering human emancipation and overcoming domination and repression" (p.104).

Martin (2006) lists ten trends in current education policy, theory and practice which he argues are leading to the deradicalisation of adult educators. These are worth summarising: (a) adult educators are expected to conform to the hegemony of technical rationality and narrowly conceived and economistic forms of vocationalism and competence; (b) they are forced, in the main, to operate in an education

¹ Kilminster uses the term socially valid knowledge to refer to knowledge that encourages critical awareness and more inclusive, integrated and discriminatory understandings of our social world. These include how understandings are affected by one's 'race', class, culture and gender.

² Benjamin et al (2010) highlight three important principles of a democratic learning framework that are important for critical practice in career education. These principles are: (a) respect for student rationality by encouraging student critique and evaluation of course materials; (b) the inclusion of alternative perspectives on vocationally related issues such as labour market structure, environmental impact and sustainable development, the labour movement and labour history and acceptable working conditions and economic globalisation; and (c) emphasising that economic, labour market and working conditions are constructed through human agency and can be reconstructed through democratic participation. These principles should be present in both the curricula for students and the preparation of educators in adult and vocational education.

'marketplace' of commodified and credentialised knowledge, and in educational institutions involved in competition rather than co-operation and collaboration; (c) this 'marketplace' and its workers are subjected to the new managerialism that enforces an accountant's view of the world; (d) a focus on the 'self-directed learner' as consumer or customer and the facilitation of individualised learning; (e) a seductive tendency to celebrate the authenticity of personal experience rather than testing its social and educational significance; (f) stripping adult education from its historical roots in social purpose, political engagement and the vision of a better world; (g) rhetorical assertions about the significance of 'active citizenship' and 'social capital' in the 'learning society' divorced from the material realities of context, contingency and differentials of power; (h) an increase in professionalisation and the emergence of a culture of hierarchy and deference, as well as an unhealthy preoccupation with status and seniority; (i) the emergency of information technology as a medium of instruction raises questions about the authority of texts, the privatisation of knowledge and the control of learning and autonomy of the learner; and (j) education policy and practice which transforms structure into pathology by ascribing the contradictions of context to the supposed characteristics of individuals.

The social efficiency model of adult and vocational education privileges an economic determinism, reduces educators to mere uncritical facilitators in a learning transaction with the aim of producing docile, passive and compliant workers. Curricula should be understood not simply as a set of learning support materials – a term commonly used in many contexts - but rather as the relationship between the purpose of education, how the educator views the students, as well as the classroom pedagogies used.

4. Research sources

This paper draws on the research and analysis of three research projects that inform the basis for exploring new ways of thinking about curriculum innovation in community and vocational education. These research studies formed part of a broader research project of the Education Policy Consortium (EPC) aimed at building progressive capacity and public participation in the PSET sector of South Africa.

Since 2013, research units of the EPC implemented a number of projects. First, the Emerging Voices 2 (EV2) research wanted to gain an understanding of how the rural and urban poor experience post-school education in South Africa. This project had three key components: (a) the Profiles of Possibility -- research visits to a number of selected sites where communities are involved in autonomous and quasi-autonomous work; (b) Community Snapshots – research in additional sites where the work of communities was captured in a series of photographs and short narratives; and (c) research defined by groups of youth and younger researchers

exploring their own research questions. This project included research in TVETCs and CETCs.

A key finding of this research project was that the PSET system in South Africa is not serving the needs and interests of the rural and urban poor. This project further shows that rural and urban settings are filled with autonomous and quasi-autonomous 'learnings and doings' that offer us a different perspective – one that exposes socially useful learning and education. These sites are rich in agency, knowledge and practices that contribute to our understanding of curriculum innovation. Although this study did not include an in-depth investigation of curricula, useful insights can be extracted from the data.

Second, the Community Education Programme (CEP) of CIPSET (Nelson Mandela University) and the Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING) of the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) (University of Johannesburg) established community education programmes. These two research projects researched community education through participatory methods. These projects were concerned with building democratic community education programmes within communities. Using Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR), the programmes led to the construction of a variety of educational materials that reflect a social purpose orientation to community education and development (Senekal, 2018).

Third, exploratory work of CIPSET through its Curriculum Innovation Hub established at the Nelson Mandela University. The central purpose of the Curriculum Innovation Project was to engage academic staff from TVET Colleges and the University in discussion, and to formulate a collective programme of curriculum innovation aimed at expanding curricula offerings in both institutions. This project included engagement with senior staff of TVET Colleges in the Eastern Cape. The project demonstrated the enormous barriers to curriculum innovation in thematic areas which are more closely linked to the needs of communities. It further highlights the need for greater socially-engaged forms of scholarship that place both institutional forms in closer proximity to communities. Curriculum categories that favour the needs of business and industry and those more closely connected to 'career paths' and the qualifications framework seem to get much greater attention, therefore a hub such as this can play an important role in offering an 'alternative' perspective.

Fourth, we also developed deeper analysis based on the EV2 research and data from a community project supported by the EPC (Kimwelle, 2017; Baatjes, 2018b). This project involved the participation of TVET College students in the construction of a community centre in the Joe Slovo West community in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. The project entails the construction of a multi-purpose centre accommodating a youth centre, a creche, a special needs school as well as a

community centre. TVET College engineering students participated and gained meaningful experience during their involvement in construction work using recycled materials (wine bottles and pallets).

5. Lessons from research

The research projects, especially the EV2 project and the Community Education programmes, provide important insights into curriculum innovation in community and vocational education. Whilst the EV2 project learnt through qualitative means about curriculum innovation for the sites visited, the CEP constructed curriculum innovation through community participatory action research. We capture some of the key aspects related to curriculum innovation in the section below. An important observation from the data is how the educational activities differ from the mainstream, but more importantly, that there is a disjuncture between the needs of communities and what the formal system of community and vocational education currently provides.

5.1 The importance of social purpose curriculum

These projects brought into sharp focus the importance of social purpose curricula in community and vocational education, yet they are poorly supported by government and largely located 'outside' the formal PSET institutional architecture. Communities visited were rich in agency as people have assumed their roles as active members and social actors in their communities. Many communities - rural and urban - are rich in ordinary people 'making a life.' By this concept, we refer to the myriad of daily activities, be they physical, emotional or spiritual, performed by community members (Baatjes, 2018). People participate in productive and socially useful work including farming, caring, housework, creative art, food production, cooperatives and ecological work such as recycling.



Signage board near Mthatha, Eastern Cape

Most of this work is unpaid, underpaid, unrecognised and often undervalued by the mainstream. All these activities capture the way millions of South Africans are 'making a life' – a life outside the formal wage-labour relation.



Woman harvesting vegetables, Cape Flats

5.2 Researching community needs and interests

The CEP used participatory action research and community mapping to gain insight and understanding of community needs, interests and community struggles (CIPSET, 2018). Community mapping further captures agency and the great variety of activities present in communities and uses the data to construct education programmes that are directly related to community interests.



Community investigators/educators investigating community needs, Port Elizabeth

This activity has a number of benefits including: (a) it involves community investigators/educators directly in gaining practical knowledge (educators as researchers) of the contexts of lived experience (learner's reality); and (b) it provides

³ Workers do not bring fully developed cognitive knowledge and skill into the 'workplace'. Each job has its particular characteristics and, as a result, specific knowledge and skills are predominantly acquired by means of practical (on-the-job) experience and training.

the community investigators/educators to jointly construct knowledge which can be converted into carefully planned educational events.

In the case of the CLING in Freedom Park, Johannesburg, the community educators and activists are residents of that community and carry a wealth of knowledge about the community that enables them to conceptualise and implement educational activities such as a reading club, back-to-school campaigns, Saturday classes for children in the local school and a library.

5.3 Curricula and community needs

Education and the curricula are directly related to the everyday life experiences of communities. A central feature of the way in which people are 'making their lives' is the presence of situated learning/cognition in context and learning shared amongst groups. Groups of people were found to be involved in innovative ways of addressing basic human and community needs such as food production. The production of food, such as breadmaking and growing vegetables, is usually a cooperative and collaborative activity and the curriculum is of shared, mutual and solidaristic interest⁴.



Women harvesting their crops, Port Elizabeth

The fact that learning and the curriculum is so interwoven with the way people 'make their lives' shows that learning is entirely situated and knowledge is actively constructed to advance collective interests. Unlike learning in formal institutions, learning in 'making a life' is learning by doing. There is no artificial separation between theory and practice.

⁴ There are many examples of food production in local communities such as in villages near Port St Johns, the Cape Flats, Bulungula Incubator and cooperatives in the Chris Hani district, Eastern Cape. Vegetables are grown to provide for families and surplus is exchanged or sold.

5.4 The importance of situated learning

Situated learning refers to learning in context and where one cannot separate the learning process from the situation in which learning takes place. Many communities construct knowledge through everyday living in their involvement with 'work'. The physical and social experience and situations in which people find themselves and the instruments they use in that experience are integral to the entire learning process. The following extract shows the value of situated learning/cognition as experienced by a TVET College student who participated in the Joe Slovo West community project. Sibusiso Dyantyi writes:

I am doing electrical infrastructure and construction with renewable energy and technologies on the iQhayiya college campus. I enjoy what I am studying – it focuses more on our environment and its challenges and is about using what we have around us in facing these challenges. I got involved in the Joe Slovo Project through my lecturer, Mr Ganess – he encouraged me to volunteer – it's great for me, I would get experience. What I learned on the project is team work – I learned a lot about working together as a team to achieve a common goal – it's also much better and faster to complete a task. I met a lot of people. What I really liked about the project is putting smiles on people's faces and knowing that I contributed to that – it leaves you with a nice feeling. I would do it over and over again. I told others that this project is great – you learn a lot from this project and it helps you see things differently. I think the project should be included in the TVET curriculum because what we learned is a lot and you get work exposure. It was different, for example – tools that we learn about in a textbook, we had to use them and get a feel of how they are used. We got a lot of experience.



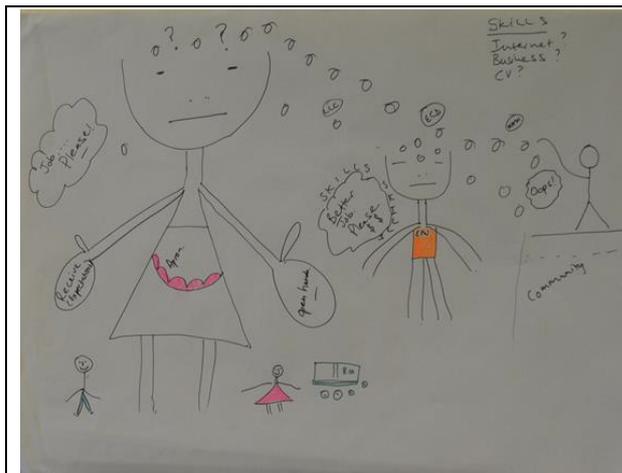
TVET College students working in Joe Slovo, Port Elizabeth

This reflective note from Sibusiso demonstrates the extraordinary value of situated learning. In addition, this commentary further shows how situated learning integrates 'brain work', 'manual work' and 'heart work.' Furthermore, this experience of a TVET College student in a community project suggests the importance of

applying vocational skills in addressing community needs, thus calling for the broadening of TVET beyond the narrow interests of business and industry. Similarly, in some of the communities visited as part of the EV2 research, most learning described was situated.

5.5 The relationship between educator and learner

In the CEP and CLING, the relationship between educator and student – a relationship that involves the questions of teaching, of learning and knowing – could best be described as co-learners or co-constructors of knowledge (in Freirian terms). The CEP defines the educator-student relationship on the basis that as citizens we all carry revealing knowledge and wisdom and are thus conscious as to where knowledge resides. Similarly, its CPAR methodology treats communities as great bearers of knowledge and creators of social meanings. This transformative pedagogy is visible in how community-educators participated in various learnings and actions, such as jointly and collectively fixing school furniture, establishing vegetable gardens and learning how to run buying and savings clubs.



Educators' depiction of TVET students



Educator and learners fixing furniture

In some of the EV2 sites facilitation methods used were participatory, non-traditional and drawn from those commonly used by popular educators.

Contrary to the CEP, the educator-student relationship in the TVET Colleges and CETCs was still based on the traditional 'banking' model. The educator 'deposits' knowledge into the 'empty' head of the learner. In these contexts, knowledge is passed on to the student; the educator knows everything and the learner knows nothing (See pictures above).

5.6 Building solidarity

During the research a number of examples of solidarity could be seen. Groups of people in both rural and urban sites have demonstrated the importance of and need to cooperate. Solidarity was observed in movements such as the Unemployed People's Movement and organisations linked to the rural landless people's movement. These movements use a variety educational and learning tools drawn from the traditions of popular education.



Abalimi farmers' produce: Cape Flats

Solidarity has also been extended to economic practices as seen in villages near Port St Johns where farmers have developed economic principles, as well as principles for cooperation. For instance, farmers agreed on the price of fruit and vegetables in order to avoid competition. Other examples include the stokvels and buying and savings clubs.

5.7 Language

Language in the formal education system is a highly contested issue. An interesting observation is how language was largely a non-issue in most of the EV2 and CEP sites. People involved in these autonomous and quasi-autonomous spaces used a variety of different languages and translanguaging was a common phenomenon.

Translanguaging is a common practice amongst bilingual and multilingual speakers who combine all their linguistic resources to communicate. The use of two or more languages as one linguistic repertoire is therefore quite common amongst these speakers. Whilst formal educational institutions still encourage students to think monolingually, bilingual and multilingual people communicate translangually and without named or bounded languages. Translanguaging was used by many participants in this research project (Baatjes, 2018).

5.8 The conceptualisation of work

Our understanding of the concept of 'work' was raised in engaging communities where autonomous or quasi-autonomous activities are prevalent. In a global context where there is so much focus on education-for-work, the EV2 research reinforces the need to explore alternative conceptions of work. This research compels us to re-examine the whole concept of work and to move away from unhelpful distinctions between paid employment and 'non-economic' activities. Many communities of the poor and working class have a richness in socially useful forms of work such as care work. This study shows that work should be understood to cover a wide spectrum of housework, gardening, care, self-employment and more conventional forms of employment. A renewed focus on socially useful work is critical to explore in light of the dysfunctional formal labour market that is unable to absorb millions of youth and adults who face permanent unemployment and exclusion.

This further introduces the need to explore alternatives to community education and development. The pursuit of alternatives and innovative approaches to the current model of development has increased substantially over the years. The increase has been so significant that Bollier (2015) coined the acronym TAPAS – "There are many alternatives". These alternatives range from the economic to the educational. Economies take on many different forms. In recent years, alternative and innovative economies have been explored (Serrano & Xhafa, 2011; Albert, 2015; Aperovitz & Albert, 2014; Kovel, 2014) in which human needs, relationships and the environment are foregrounded. Wright (2010, p.368) provides a good overview of seven alternatives that have no blueprint or grand designs: statist socialism, social democratic economic regulation, associational democracy, social capitalism, social economy, cooperative market economy and participatory socialism.

These economic and social alternatives are complimented by a growing educational theory and praxis which include critical pedagogy, social justice education, multicultural education, critical eco-pedagogy and so forth. Here, we are referring to alternatives and innovation with specific reference to pre-figurative explorations of people outside the formal labour market – with reference to:

...ongoing multidimensional, non-deterministic processes of people's economic and political struggle beyond the capitalist logic, whether macro, meso or micro, to change their circumstances and simultaneously transform themselves in the process. Full development of human potential based on equality, solidarity and sustainability through democratic participatory processes is at the core of alternative innovations.

(Serrano & Xhafa, 2011)

Innovative pre-figurations of solidarity economy that are built on the principles and values of cooperation, equality, self-determination and democracy are taking shape in many parts of the world, including South Africa (Harvey, 2013; Kovel, 2014; Baatjes, 2015; Baatjes, 2018). These forms include affective or care economies; barter economies; collective economies (including cooperatives); worker-controlled economies; subsistence market economies; community budgeting; buying and savings clubs; stokvels; participatory budgeting; community-based local currency exchange systems; and ethical trading.



Community educators learning about savings clubs

This research in South Africa (Baatjes, 2018; CIPSET, 2018; Kimwelle, 2017) recorded the presence of education and learnings linked to community-controlled projects, moral economics, local economic trading systems and barter, and the creation of autonomous spaces which continue to operate in accordance with principles of solidarity. This research shows ways in which people begin to transcend social inequalities to produce benefits and build a better Commons through pre-figurative expressions (also referred to as ‘pockets of hope’) and other forms of human agency. In the absence of wage labour, members of the urban poor and rural communities are building solidarity by seeking out spaces to exchange socially productive efforts (Baatjes, 2015; Bennholdt-Thomsen & Mies, 1988; Harvey, 2013). This suggests the need for greater focus on building possibilities that may include a variety of ‘making a life’ productions and cooperatives that serve the needs of local communities more directly. The research highlights the emergence of solidarity within communities and the potential for building solidarity between communities as part of a broader solidarity economy. These ‘pockets of hope’ also add to new ways through which to look at ‘work.’

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper shows that the current ideological and philosophical orientation of government defines adult and vocational education within a neoliberal and human capital framework. This framework undergirds the social efficiency (instrumentalist) and liberal models of adult and vocational education which provide for narrow skills formation geared to the economic interests of business and industry. Recent research conducted by the EPC shows that the current PSET system does not meet the needs and interests of communities.

This paper argues that the instrumentalist tradition of adult and vocational education gives rise to particular forms of pedagogical practices that exclude curriculum categories related to the urgent needs of communities. Curriculum within this tradition is largely prescriptive and void of socially valid knowledge. In addition to this, the system promotes the acquisition of formal qualifications and grants little recognition to non-formal education and informal learning.

A number of scholars have reiterated the undemocratic nature of adult and vocational education, including that it prevents the development of more transformative pedagogical practices concerned with building active agents of 'really useful knowledge' (i.e. knowledge that enables people to become critical autonomous citizens). Under the instrumentalist orientation of education, educators are reduced to purveyors of knowledge that is constructed to make people productive, profitable and quiescent workers (Martin, 2006: 16).

Communities across South Africa are overflowing with autonomous and quasi-autonomous 'pockets of hope'. Communities, adults and youth outside the formal wage-labour relation in both urban and rural contexts are turning to various forms of work in order to make a life. These present and growing forms of social organisation continue to germinate and expand and they represent progressive intellectual projects for transformative community and vocational education practices.

Whilst these spaces need further exploration in their search for 'something different', they are initiatives that require greater support in order to strengthen their ability to serve the needs of local communities. They revitalise the urgency to explore the concept of work and the need for more critically engaged research, alternative approaches to community research, responsive curriculum development and pedagogical actions in support of broader community development.

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