


Chapter 4

Curriculum

Transformation for Social

Justice and Diversity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews curriculum transformation as an important process of developing social justice, epistemic inclusion, and responsiveness to diversity in education. It theorises curriculum as a point of power in which the choice of knowledge, cultural hegemony, and Eurocentrism may reproduce inequality and marginalisation. Drawing on worldviews of the Global North and the Global South, the chapter brings out multicultural, anti-racist, and inclusive models of curriculum and investigates the contradictions in standardisation and localisation. Based on the central case of South Africa, it examines the legacies during the era of apartheid, reforms post 1994 and modern forms of decolonisation movements towards epistemic justice. The chapter incorporates perspectives on Critical Theory, social justice, and decolonial theories to suggest the plans for changing the content, teaching methods, and assessment of the curriculum. It concludes by highlighting principles and system-level recommendations for the design of socially equitable, inclusive, and context-based transformative curricula.

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is primarily on primary and secondary education in postcolonial and multicultural societies, adopting South Africa as the central case

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study. The chapter does not cover issues related to early childhood education, technical and vocational education, or comprehensive university curricula, although references have been taken from some of these areas. It is important to highlight that emerging fields, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven curriculum reform, climate change education, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer plus (LGBTQ+) education, are acknowledged as important areas for future research but are not independently engaged in this chapter.

The curriculum is widely understood as a social, political, and cultural construct, rather than a neutral body of knowledge. Current curriculum debates in different countries are shaped by concerns about inequality and exclusion, unfair treatment of knowledge and whose knowledge counts, and the ongoing role of education systems in maintaining structural disadvantages (Dabie, 2025; Ngobeni et al., 2023; Riddle et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2019). As societies become more diverse and more closely linked, educational debates now focus on which forms of knowledge are treated as valid, which identities are supported, and which groups are pushed to the margins in formal curricula. In this context, efforts to change the curriculum to address social justice and diversity reflect both an ethical duty and a practical response to long-standing inequities in education.

Across countries, education systems continue to address the lasting effects of colonialism, market-based policy reforms, globalisation, migration, and widening socio-economic inequality (Siddiqui, 2025; Tyagi et al., 2021; Dadvand, 2024; Trinh, 2018). These pressures have made clear that traditional, standardised, and Global North curricula have limits: they reinforce dominant power relations and do not respond in a meaningful way to the everyday experiences of diverse learners. Scholars note that when curricula are shaped mainly by efficiency, accountability, and measurable outcomes, they can sideline learners from historically disadvantaged communities, repeat deficit views of those learners, and limit space for other ways of knowing (Craft, 2023; Azzarito, 2019; Larey, 2018). Curriculum transformation is now a central priority in international policy agendas, reflected in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s focus on education that supports equity, inclusion, and sustainable development (Gregersen-Hermans, 2021; Ainscow, 2020; Franco et al., 2019; Tikly, 2019; Vaccari & Gardinier, 2019; UNESCO, 2015).

1.1 Defining Curriculum Transformation

Curriculum transformation is a planned and critical process that revises the aims of a curriculum, what is taught, how teaching is carried out, how learning is assessed, and the ways knowledge is organised and valued (Deng, 2021; Gouëdard et al., 2020; Mendy & Madiope, 2020). It is not limited to surface-level curriculum changes or

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