

# Knowledge claims and codes of legitimation: Implications for curriculum recontextualisation in South African higher education



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## ABSTRACT

*This article responds to calls for the recontextualisation and Africanisation of the South African higher education curriculum by drawing on the social realist tradition of the sociology of knowledge -- particularly on Maton's (2000, 2006, 2007, 2009) 'legitimation code theory' -- in order to assess some of the implications for curriculum change. The paper first briefly analyses the current South African context in terms of the contending demands of post-colonial and globalising imperatives. A theoretical framework for a sociology of curriculum knowledge is then set out. Examples from current South African curriculum debates are used to illustrate the different positions described by the theory. Maton's legitimation code theory enables a more nuanced approach in which different knowledge types are seen to be more or less amenable to recontextualisation. Furthermore, the theory enables one to distinguish between different approaches to Africanisation -- showing how an exclusive Afro-centric approach is likely to limit knowledge progression (verticality), whilst an inclusive approach is more likely to realise verticality. In conclusion, the paper argues for an inclusive approach that takes the debate forward beyond the crude dichotomies established by essentialist versus relativist views on culture and identity. Instead, it is suggested that the South African higher education curriculum should offer students subject positions that transcend and subsume the old Western or African identities.*

**keywords:** Africanisation, code theory, curriculum studies, higher education, legitimation, sociology of education, sociology of knowledge

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This article does not address directly the questions of what, how, to whom and by whom curriculum knowledge should be taught and learnt in higher education institutions in South Africa. Instead, it introduces sociological theory that enables one to think critically about the possibilities for and constraints on recontextualising or Africanising the higher education

(HE) curriculum. In order to do this I draw on recent work in the sociology of knowledge and education in the social realist tradition. Curriculum is understood as a social practice: ‘What are the structural and social conditions that underpin the construction of curriculum knowledge?’; as epistemic practice: ‘What are the epistemological and methodological constraints imposed on curriculum knowledge by the nature of the knowledge form, its object of study and the procedures used to study it?’; and finally as ontological practice: ‘What identities and forms of agency do these curriculum practices construct for students?’.

The article first briefly analyses the current South African context in which HE curricula are being recontextualised. It then introduces a theoretical framework for looking at curriculum sociologically, drawing particularly on the work of Bernstein (2000), Muller (2008), Maton (2000, 2006, 2007, and 2009) and Young (2008). The theory is illustrated by examples taken from debates about recontextualising the curriculum in South Africa. The implications of the theory for recontextualising the South African HE curriculum in the current post-colonial, globalising context are then discussed.

## 2 CONTEXT

Higher education (HE) in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to operate in both a post-colonial and a globalising context. On the one hand African intellectuals are calling for an end to the hegemony of Western thought and culture and for the Africanization of the higher education curriculum – or at least for greater responsiveness and relevance to African identity, culture and issues. In discussing the meaning of Africanization in current South African higher education debates, Kistner (2008) traces the genesis of the idea to Pan-African national-liberationist ideals of the 1960s. She argues that current calls for Africanization are rooted in Afrocentricism (the valorisation of all that is African), which is based on a binary code of the ‘modern West’ versus the ‘traditional African’.

So called ‘traditional African’ receives a boost with the assertion that local knowledge, values and identities have been suppressed by colonialism and apartheid. They need to be freed from these shackles, it is argued, to be fully rehabilitated and recognised as aspects of ‘African epistemology’ and ‘African identity’ (Kistner, 2008, 97).

In South Africa, this vision is often fused with the post-apartheid transformation goal of achieving a more representative demographic profile on South African campuses and the assumption that this will lead to greater democracy and relevance.

Kistner (2008) suggests that recently, under the influence of modernising, neo-liberal discourses, the rhetoric of both Africanization and transformation have been linked to a commercialisation of the knowledge production process. The imperative to participate in a global economy puts pressure on governments to call for curricula that will contribute to greater economic productivity and high skills development (within a Western framework and neo-liberal macro-economic system). For example, in South Africa, the ‘Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education’ (1997) holds out a vision of a ‘transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education’ that will simultaneously, ‘meet through

well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment'; and 'address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African and African contexts' (Department of Education, 1997, 1.14). Despite what policy documents imply, it is suggested that these two drivers of curriculum change in Africa do not necessarily work synergistically. In addition to addressing local issues and preparing students for the demands of a global economy, South African HE institutions are expected to become more effective and efficient, particularly in terms of improving graduation rates (NPHE, 2001).

Castells (2001) suggests that HE in the 21<sup>st</sup> century serves at least four (often contradictory) purposes—that is:

1. The production and application of new knowledge, (HE is now viewed as a productive force in the global information economy);
2. The training of professionals and bureaucrats;
3. The selection and formation of dominant elites;
4. The generation and transmission of ideology (i.e. an ideological (state) apparatus, despite claims to be based on rationalism and humanism and thus 'ideologically free').

Castells notes that in developing countries, institutions of HE battle to manage these contradictory functions, particularly when they come under pressure from interventionist states to meet immediate political and social demands. As a result, particularly in post-colonial contexts, the third and fourth functions tend to be fore-grounded at the expense of the first two.

Before the question of how to respond creatively and responsibly to the curriculum development challenges of African post-colonial contexts can be answered, it is necessary to gather some theoretical tools in order to deepen the analysis.

### **3 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR A SOCIOLOGY OF CURRICULUM**

Given that the question of knowledge is key to curriculum theory, it is necessary to briefly revisit epistemological debates in order to understand and critique what may be regarded as a typical Western/ European position (naïve objectivism), a typical Afrocentric position (radical constructionism) and finally to propose a way forward (social realism). The description of the theoretical framework below is interspersed with examples of particular positions taken from debates about Africanising the South African HE curriculum.

From a modernist perspective, both European and African worldviews prior to the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason, were mythic and entailed a non-dualist worldview in which inner and outer truths were related-- the material world was typically viewed as a reflection of the metaphysical or spiritual. Truth was represented by mimetic or analogous metaphor and truth claims were validated by metaphysics and relationships of power rather than evidence. The power conferred by magical or sacred knowledge was usually protected by secrecy, invested in exclusive, secret societies, lineages or priesthoods. The laity was excluded from access to the means of knowledge production.

In the West, the Enlightenment philosophers (from Locke to Kant) took the rational subject out of the world in order to observe and reflect on a separate world of empirical objects. This enabled the development of the scientific method where an unproblematic subject directly observes and represents objects in a pre-given empirical world (see Figure 1). Whilst enabling massive progress in describing, mapping and predicting the natural, material world, this monological gaze has been criticised as ‘naive objectivism’, owing to the fact that the mediating subjectivities, contexts and interests of the human observer are ignored.

When transferred to the social sciences and humanities, this epistemology results in an essentialist, context-free defence of a positivist Western canon (Maton 2009). This position is frequently critiqued by those who object to its lack of awareness of its inherent Euro-centricity,

The reason, it is suggested, that higher education institutions in our country remain largely unreconstructed is that there pervades an ingrained elitism and a dominance of Western culture and intellectual hegemony. Such elitism and hegemony is alienating and in desperate need of reform. (...) We shall open up at least a possibility of Africa becoming a producer of knowledge rather than a faithful reproducer of Western forms of knowledge. (Pityana 2007, 12)

This South African Vice-Chancellor has even suggested a causal link between low graduation rates and cultural alienation,

It is not too far-fetched to suggest that the cultural alienation that many experience in higher education may be the reason behind the high drop-out and failure rates in higher education in South Africa. (Pityana 2007, 10)

In modernity, science (outer truth) has been cut off from art and morality (inner truths). This has created in Western thought, a deep fault-line between the humanities and the sciences. Muller (2008) reminds us that although the majority of the disciplines as we know them today arose only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a great divide has developed between the disciplines of the ‘inner’ and those of the ‘outer’ since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He explains

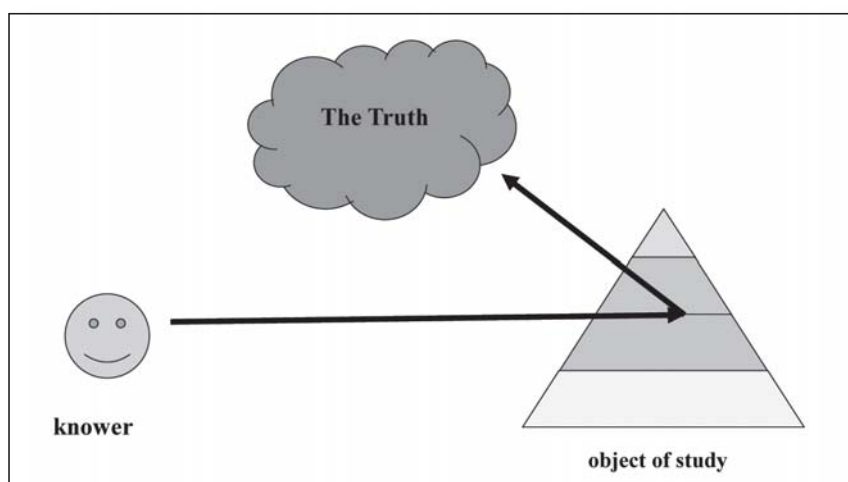


Figure 1: Naïve empiricism

that under the influence of the Christian Church (a mythic worldview), inner discipline (as revealed by God's word) was considered a precondition for understanding the outer disciplines (the world). However, since the Enlightenment Age, when theologians were replaced by secular humanists, the inner and the outer were no longer held together, and a rift that continues to the present day developed between the Humanities (knowledge dealing with inner subjectivities) and the Sciences (knowledge dealing objectively with the outer world).

Habermas (1971) has traced the development and domination of what he refers to as the 'technical knowledge constitutive interest' in Western societies. He shows how science, in the service of the will to control nature and increase productivity, has led to industrialisation and technological progress. At the same time, the technical interest has been allowed to colonise other (subjective and inter-subjective) forms of knowing that are underpinned by the 'hermeneutic' and 'emancipatory' interests. Wilber (2000) suggests that the dualism in Western thought is largely responsible for both the immoral disparities in the distribution of wealth and the destruction of the environment that plague contemporary societies.

There have been, throughout the modern age, idealist reactions against modernity's 'flat ontology' that have sought to refocus attention on the subjectivities and inter-subjectivities of the knowers. Most recently, postmodern epistemologies have challenged the dominance of Western empiricism and the assumptions and 'grand narratives' on which it is based, asserting that there are only extrinsic or arbitrary grounds (usually a matter of social position and power) for distinguishing between experience and what is regarded as knowledge. In education, this position has been taken up by the New Sociology of Education, where, in its extreme form, all knowledge gets reduced to 'voice discourses'; that is, knowledge is viewed as no more than a product of the power and interests of dominant groups to assert that their standpoints and experiences count as knowledge (Young, 2008) (see Figure 2). Taken to the extremes, the 'discursive turn' leads to the death of the object (the referent) and judgmental relativism. When knowledge gets reduced to the social and historical conditions of its production, all knowledge becomes culturally arbitrary (only 'some people's knowledge') and thus equally valid. The imposition of 'some people's knowledge' on others is regarded as 'symbolic violence'. This radical constructionist position is attractive to feminist and postcolonial (e.g. Africanist) writers and activists, due to the fact that it can be used as a basis for de-legitimatising the hegemony of white, male, Western knowledge and expertise. Radical constructionism can also be used to assert the value of sub-ordinate groups' experiences and for constructing new 'prospective identities', based on a narrative of becoming for a particular social category (Bernstein 2000, 76). Moore and Young (2001) explain the easy alliance between a postmodern, a radical constructionist epistemology and those concerned with social inequality:

Starting from the assumption that all knowledge is embedded in the interests of particular groups of 'knowers', postmodern critiques appear to provide powerful support for the cultural demands of subordinate groups, whether these are ethnic, gender or (although increasingly less frequently) class based. However, by arguing that knowledge is inseparable from how it is constructed, they cannot avoid the conclusion that all knowledge, whether based on professional expertise, research or the experience of particular groups, is of equal value. (Moore and Young 2001, 449)

This position erroneously assume that because all people are equal (in terms of moral worth), the epistemological status their ideas and beliefs should also be regarded as equal-- in fact, epistemic privilege may even be granted to local/ indigenous knowledge and cultures (Sayer 2000). In South African curriculum debates, this postmodern position has been captured by Prinsloo:

Africanisation, from a postmodern perspective can be understood and located in a mixture of cultural, political, economic, social, ontological and epistemological initiatives to celebrate the local, the particular, the distinctiveness of being African, and being in-Africa/ from-Africa. The establishment, celebration and (often) reinvention of African identities, African ways of being and ways of thinking are oppositional strategies against years of being subordinated to the normativity of Western descriptions and prescriptions for ways (and classifications) of being and thinking. (Prinsloo 2008, 10)

Moore and Young (2001) critique standpoints such as these on the basis that they are unable to take us further than deconstructing dominant forms of knowledge and arguing about whose experience should inform the curriculum:

We are left with a sociology of knowers which says little about knowledge or the curriculum itself. (Moore & Young 2001, 453)

Following arguments of sociologists of education committed to social realism such as Moore and Young (2001), Moore and Maton (2001) and Young (2008), a ‘middle way’ is proposed that recognises both a social and an epistemic dimension to knowledge production. In other words, knowledge is viewed as a product of ‘both intra-discursive and referential relations’ (Sayer 2000, 33). With regard to the social relation, this position recognises that the knower’s history, culture, interests and experience inevitably enter into all forms of knowledge; and that knowledge draws on experience, but crucially, is not determined by and should not be reduced to it. This position

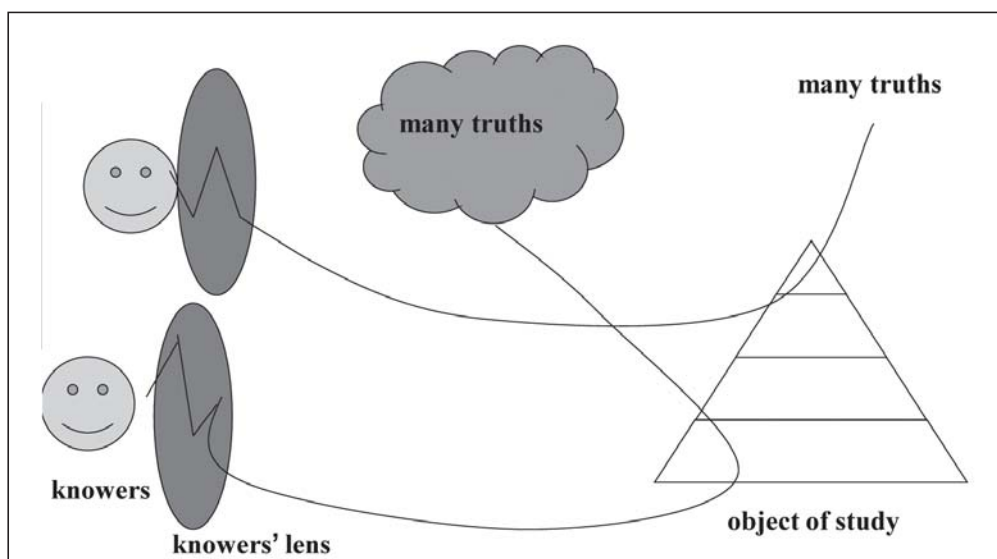


Figure 2: Radical constructionism

holds that not all forms of knowledge are equal, nor are there no means of discriminating between different knowledge forms.

All knowledge has a subjective quality, which should be acknowledged reflexively. But it does not follow that this determines its truth-value or practical adequacy. (Sayer 2000, 60)

In fact, this position asserts that formal knowledge should be set apart from everyday knowledge precisely because it is different, can rise above the context of its production and is therefore more difficult to produce and learn.

With regard to the epistemic relation, Sayer (1992) points out that the nature of the object of study (the referent) also shapes and constrains what knowledge form is possible. He suggests that the relation between an object of study and a knowledge claim about it is a necessary epistemic relation (the relation between the referent and the sign is not entirely arbitrary); whilst that between the knowing subject and her knowledge claim is a contingent or arbitrary, social relation. Whilst recognising that all knowledge is socially constructed and therefore fallible, without reducing knowledge to the context of its construal, the social realist position holds that, under certain conditions, the epistemic relation can transcend the arbitrary, social relation. Historically, highly specialised knowledge has been validated by research and disciplinary communities who, through the practice of peer review, seek (but do not always succeed) to ensure that the epistemic prevails over the social relation. Thus, a social realist position holds that knowledge production (and its reproduction in education institutions) is shaped by both social and epistemic relations, and that, as a result, all knowledge is fallible, but not equally so (see Figure 3).

We now turn to a sociological conceptualisation of curriculum knowledge. Bernstein (2000) developed a concept called the ‘pedagogic device’ to describe and analyse the process whereby discourses of knowledge are translated into a curriculum and later into pedagogic communication. Provocatively, he states:

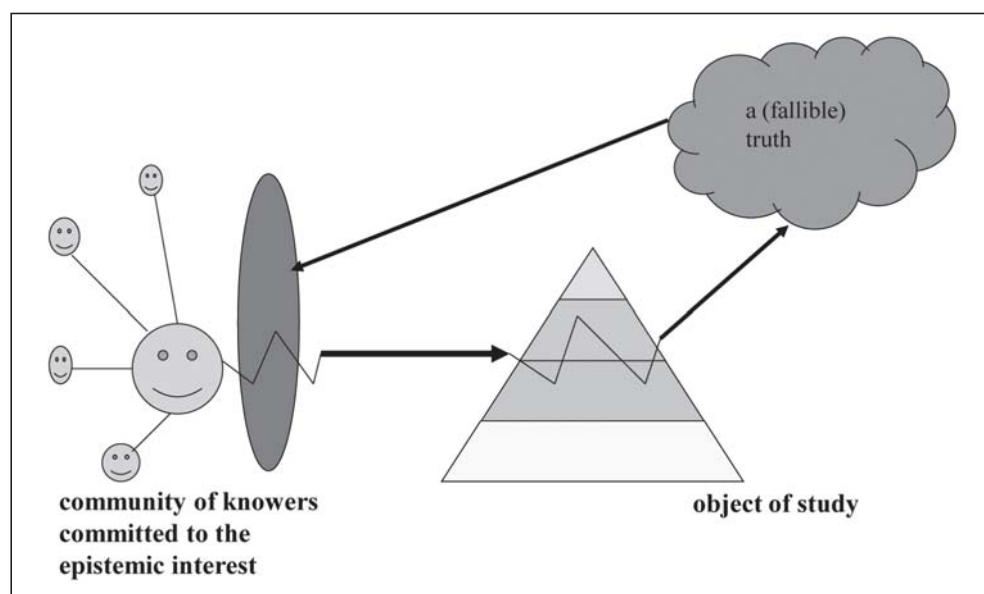


Figure 3: Social realism

whoever appropriates the device has the power to regulate consciousness. Whoever appropriates the device, appropriates a crucial site for symbolic control. The device itself creates an arena of struggle for those who are to appropriate it.’ (Bernstein, 2000, 38)

In post-colonial contexts, we should not be surprised at calls to decolonise the curriculum and attempts to place symbolic control in the hands of African elites:

The choice of what to teach, who to teach and how to teach and what to research has to be driven by Africans themselves, from our perspective, our vision of the future and our experiences ... The uniqueness and originality of our identity and scholarship would determine our power, our value, our condition, our contribution and competitiveness in the global village. (Makgoba 1997, 175--176)

In conceptualising the pedagogic device, Bernstein sought to understand how society’s social structure shapes the way it distributes knowledge, and how its education system differentially specialises consciousness. The ‘pedagogic device’ operates at three distinct fields of practice, each with its own set of ‘rules’; that is, the field of production-- where new knowledge is produced and positioned; the field of recontextualisation, where knowledge from the field of production is selected and transformed into curriculum knowledge; and the field of reproduction, where actual teaching and learning takes place (with differential results). The table below summarises the structure and typologies of the pedagogic device. In this paper we are particularly concerned with the relationship between knowledge structure and curriculum and with the extent to which context gets into the recontextualising rules.

**Table 1: The arena of the pedagogic device (from Maton & Muller, 2007)**

| Field of Practice          | Form of regulation      | Symbolic structure    | Main types                                     | Typical sites                                    |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Production</b>          | distributive rules      | knowledge structure   | hierarchical / horizontal knowledge structures | research publications, conferences, laboratories |
| <b>Recontextualisation</b> | recontextualising rules | curriculum            | collection/ integrated codes                   | curriculum policy docts, textbooks               |
| <b>Reproduction</b>        | evaluative rules        | pedagogy & evaluation | visible/ invisible pedagogic codes             | classrooms, assessment                           |

Bernstein observed that *pedagogic* discourse (the curriculum texts and teacher communication produced by the pedagogic device) has its own logic, which is different to that of the *knowledge* discourses produced in the field of production.



Pedagogic discourse is constructed by a recontextualising principle which selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order (Bernstein 2000, 33).

According to Bernstein, this is due to a 'discursive gap' that always occurs when knowledge is relocated from the field of production to the field of recontextualisation. This 'discursive gap' provides a space for ideology to play that is usually filled by the curriculum developer's ideas about the purpose of education, the ideal moral and social order, and sometimes by notions of an ideal learner and of how learning occurs. Bernstein points out that, especially with regard to schooling, the state usually tries to set the 'recontextualising rules'. These historically and culturally arbitrary ideas shape how knowledge discourses reappear in the curriculum and how pedagogic subjects (students) are constituted. As argued above, the current globalising and postcolonial context in South Africa has created the socio-political conditions for new 'recontextualising rules' to emerge as new elites seek to gain control of symbolic power and the pedagogic device by calling for curriculum renewal.

Late in his life, Bernstein (2000) began to work on the nature of knowledge itself. He first distinguishes between vertical and horizontal discourses-- the former describes abstract context-independent forms of scholarly 'uncommon sense' knowledge leading to specialised forms of consciousness, whilst the latter describes more concrete, everyday, 'common sense' knowledge forms, whose meaning is carried by their contexts (Maton and Muller 2007). Later, Bernstein divides vertical discourse into those knowledge forms with hierarchical knowledge structures and those with horizontal knowledge structures. Hierarchical knowledge structures have a 'coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure' (2000, 157), where meaning is hierarchically organised and integrative. Horizontal knowledge structures are segmentally and cumulatively organised, taking the form of a 'series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts' (2000, 157), such that different discourses sit alongside and compete with each other, rather than building vertically. Bernstein draws a final distinction between those knowledge structures with 'strong grammars' and those with 'weak grammars'. Hierarchical knowledge structures exhibit strong grammars, whilst horizontal knowledge structures vary, with some having relatively stronger grammars and others relatively weaker grammars. For Bernstein, the 'grammar' of a knowledge structure is the degree to which its concepts and relations can be operationalised to provide relatively precise and consistent empirical descriptions that allow the knowledge to be tested and confirmed or disconfirmed empirically, thus contributing to the rational progression of that knowledge form. Maton and Muller (2007) suggest that knowledge structures with strong grammars advance due to the fact that their new theories integrate and subsume old theories and can be tested empirically. This is not the case with horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammars, where contestations are settled through critique and power:

In contrast, significant changes in horizontal knowledge structures are all too often ideological rather than rational revolutions. Here alternative theories are in a war of hearts and minds, and choices between competing claims to insight are based more on a 'knower code', that is to say, on *who* is making knowledge claims rather than on *what* is being claimed and *how*. (Maton and Muller 2007, 27)

Working within the social realist school, Maton (2000, 2006, 2007, and 2009); Moore and Maton (2001) and Maton and Muller (2007) have extended Bernstein's analysis of knowledge structures to include an analysis of educational knowledge. Maton (2000) has developed 'legitimation code theory' for analysing the generative principles by which knowledge claims are legitimated and authorised. Similar to Sayer's work quoted above, Maton's analysis is based on the co-existence of two analytically distinct sets of relations that together shape education and knowledge production fields; the epistemic relation (ER) and the social relation (SR):

1. The epistemic relation that generates a knowledge structure is the relation between a knowledge claim and its object of study; (this is a non-arbitrary, necessary relation intrinsic to the knowledge itself).
2. The social relation that generates a knower structure is the relation between the knowledge claim and its subject or knower; (this is an arbitrary relation based on power relations and contextual contingencies).

Maton (2007) asserts that these two relations are always present in any knowledge claim, but the key to legitimation code theory is to identify which relation is dominant. Where the epistemic relation is dominant, the social relation is usually subordinate, giving a 'knowledge code' reading (ER+/ SR-). Where the social relation is dominant, the epistemic relation is usually subordinate, giving a 'knower code' reading (SR+/ ER-). Thus, if claims about knowledge are justified on the basis of the possession of specialised knowledge, skills and procedures, then a 'knowledge code' is assumed. If knowledge claims are justified on the basis of the possession of specialised dispositions, attributes and social location, then a 'knower code' is assumed. 'Knowledge codes' tend to underpin hierarchical knowledge structures with strong grammars and 'knower codes' tend to underpin horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammars.

Maton (2007) claims that the humanities and sciences have contrasting legitimation codes, and that these two sets of disciplines establish hierarchy (specialisation) in different ways. In the sciences, the hierarchical principle lies in its knowledge structure (ER+), while its knower structure tends to be flat and democratic (SR-). In other words, it doesn't matter who you are in the science disciplines as long as you possess the correct knowledge and can carry out the required procedures and methods (i.e. can use the strong grammar). By way of contrast, in the humanities, the hierarchical principle lies in the knower structure (SR+), which tends to remain implicit, while its knowledge structure is less vertical and less clearly bounded, exhibiting a weak grammar (ER-). In other words, while the knowledge forms are more contested and open-ended in the humanities, who you are and the inner dispositions as well as social and cultural capital that you bring to your knowing is what counts (although this often remains implicit). When these knowledge forms get 'recontextualised' in particular curricula, there is likely to be more room for 'ideology to play' in a curriculum that draws on disciplines with knower codes (e.g. the humanities) than in a curriculum that draws on disciplines with knowledge codes (e.g. the sciences). These differences in the characteristics of knowledge forms and the constraints that these place on recontextualisation (curriculum development) need to be recognised in any debate about curriculum renewal.

Maton (2009) has usefully extended the analysis of 'knower codes' by proposing a cline from strong to weak 'knower grammars', based on the principle of the degree of openness of the

code to potential knowers. He expands Bernstein's notion of an 'acquired gaze' to differentiate between a 'born gaze': the most exclusive, based on genetic or biological explanations; a 'social gaze': relatively exclusive, based on social categories such as race or gender; a 'cultivated gaze': a more inclusive gaze based on a socialised disposition that can be acquired through the right kind of education and enculturation; and a 'trained gaze': an inclusive gaze that is potentially open to all knowers, based on training in the methods and procedures of the knowledge. Maton raises an important point that the greater the inclusivity of the knower code, the greater the potential of the knowledge to progress through cumulative knowledge-building.

The 'social gaze' is typically adopted by those in the humanities and social sciences, who take the radical constructionist or standpoint described above. For example,

Africanization as a counter-narrative is therefore, a strategy to encourage Africans to describe *ourselves* and not rely on descriptions canonised and regarded as 'true'. The act of describing ourselves requires in many cases, an actual search for, and finding of long-hidden or previously erased sources and traditions. (Prinsloo 2008, 18)

A similar position is adopted by the Vice-Chancellor who has called for the Africanization of South African universities. He defines Africanization as:

the process or vehicle for defining, interpreting, promoting and transmitting African thought, philosophy, identity and culture. It encompasses an African mindset, or mindset shift from a European to an African paradigm. (Makgoba 1997, 203)

The 'social gaze' also appears to have been adopted in the Strategic Plan for the University of South Africa (UNISA), where it is stated that the curriculum is to be 'shaped by an African identity and context':

Our intention is that African knowledge and knowledge systems should be developed in their own right and that they should mitigate the dominance of western canons. Through such scholarship, we intend to contribute to a multiplicity of voices, *alternative* canons and diversity in thought. (UNISA 2007, 6)

Maton (2009) points out that by replacing one social gaze with another, (e.g., a Eurocentric with an Afrocentric gaze), this position perpetuates 'symbolic violence', leading to the fragmentation of knowledge into a series of incommensurable standpoints and their discourses.

A variation of the 'social gaze' has been advocated by Thabo Mbeki as part of his African Renaissance project:

An African University cannot but be an important and critical part of the African Renaissance. The challenge for the African University should be viewed as a call that insists that all critical and transformative educators in Africa embrace an indigenous African world view and root their nations' education paradigms in an indigenous socio-cultural and epistemological framework. (Mbeki 2005, cited in Pityana, 2007, 8)

In this quotation, Mbeki substitutes African knowers for ‘all critical and transformative educators in Africa’, implying that those who exclude themselves from his project are non-critical and non-transformative. The danger of promoting a version of Africanisation that adopts the ‘social gaze’ is that the potential to integrate and build knowledge generated by a wide range of knowers is forfeited.

According to Maton (2009), the ‘cultivated gaze’ shares a common starting point for debate, based on a common canon and community of experience and most importantly, *a shared means of conducting the debate*. He explains that this enables the ‘cultivated gaze’ to allow a greater range of knowers into the debate, so expanding its base of knowers. In this way, there is potential for the new knowledge that the new knowers bring to build on the old knowledge and so integrate their positions within the old ‘legitimate gaze’. This more nuanced position is found in the debates around the Africanisation of the South African HE curriculum. For example, Pityana declares:

I do not believe that this (Africanisation of HE) should be understood as inserting a new knowledge hegemony; rather it should open up spaces for interplay between diverse knowledge systems. This requires acknowledgment and legitimisation of indigenous science alongside that of the Western tradition and subjecting both to critical scrutiny. (Pityana 2007, 4--5)

If one assumes that this ‘critical scrutiny’ will result in the further development and integration of knowledge, then this position could be categorised as representing Maton’s ‘cultivated gaze’. This position is more clearly promoted by a South African curriculum specialist who wishes to explore the notion of ‘engagement’ as a means of integrating indigenous ways of knowing into the academe. Le Grange wants to

disrupt the dichotomy between Western and indigenous knowledge(s) by creating new spaces of engagement for knowledge production. Such a possibility lies in understanding how knowledge is/ was produced in all traditions: pre-modern, modern and post-modern. (Le Grange 2005, 1215).

I now consider the implications of applying Bernstein’s pedagogic device and typology of knowledge structures, and Maton’s legitimation code theory to the question, ‘How and to what extent should we respond to calls for curriculum relevance, responsiveness and Africanization?’ in South African post-apartheid higher education.

#### **4 IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM RECONTEXTUALISATION**

In debating curriculum recontextualisation and responsiveness, it is critical not to lose sight of the importance of the social conditions required for producing and acquiring specialised knowledge. This means that the need to meet immediate social, economic and political demands should not be allowed to undermine these conditions, nor the social institutions that have developed to produce and validate knowledge. This is related to the second point-- namely, the recognition that some forms of knowledge are more powerful than others because they can be applied beyond the contexts of their production.

We have seen that knowledge and knower structures differ for different knowledge forms. By recognising that different knowledge forms have different purposes, structures, grammars and legitimation codes, we can begin to understand that knowledge forms legitimated predominantly by the (arbitrary) social relation ('knower code') are more amenable/ vulnerable to calls for Africanization and social relevance than those legitimated predominantly by the (necessary) epistemic relation ('knowledge code'). The structure of knowledge in the field of production and its underlying principles of legitimation impose certain enablements and constraints on what type of curriculum is possible to construct in the field of recontextualisation. It is likely that when a knowledge form with a 'horizontal knowledge structure' and a 'weak grammar' based on a 'knower code' gets recontextualised into curriculum knowledge, it will accord greater space to the interests, dispositions and social position of the knower, than a knowledge form based on a 'knowledge code' – thus, allowing more discursive space for the cultural arbitrary and ideology to play. On the contrary, when a knowledge form with a 'hierarchical knowledge structure' and a 'strong grammar', based on a 'knowledge code' gets recontextualised into curriculum knowledge, the non-arbitrary nature of its sequenced content, methods and procedures, shaped by the nature of the object of study, will suggest a vertical structure for the curriculum knowledge. This type of knowledge normally allows less discursive space to the interests of the knowers and relatively less space for ideology to play. If the recontextualising rules of the curriculum development context are allowed to over-ride this vertical structure, then the integrity of the knowledge will be forfeited, and it is unlikely that students will achieve the required levels of specialisation.

A key challenge for curriculum development is to be able to identify which are the necessary relations and conditions for knowledge production, progression and acquisition, and which are the socially and culturally arbitrary relations that can be changed without sacrificing the integrity and power of the knowledge form itself. This requires sociological research into the specific ways in which social interests have shaped knowledge in specific contexts, including the relations between everyday, common-sense knowledge and abstract codified knowledge (Young 2008).

In the debates around recontextualising the higher education curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa, the key to undoing the symbolic violence of (neo) colonialism without undermining the possibility for knowledge to progress, may be to aim for Habermas' (1984) vision of a 'discursive democracy', where all knowers are welcome to participate in the debate, provided they meet certain conditions for communication (ideal speech) to occur. The goal would be to allow control of the pedagogic device to change hands without sacrificing the integrity of the knowledge heritage and its potential to progress via integration, subsumption and transcendence. Maton sums up this possibility:

The key to avoiding the Scylla and Charybdis of symbolic violence and relativism is to discover a gaze and a means of cultivating that gaze capable of embracing knowers from a multitude of social backgrounds. (Maton 2009, 22)

As suggested above, this is easier to achieve for knowledge forms with a knowledge code (e.g., the sciences) than for those with a 'knower code' (e.g., the humanities). Yet is it precisely those knowledge forms with a 'knower code', that African cultures, philosophies, art and music forms do, and can, make a significant contribution???

## 5 CONCLUSION

Undifferentiated calls for the Africanization and contextualisation of the curriculum (across all forms of knowledge) and for a curriculum that leads to economic development and competitive participation in a global economy are in practice, contradictory. Participation in a global economy demands high levels of scientific and technological specialisation and innovation. To achieve this, African universities need to offer high standard curricula, based on disciplines legitimated by a knowledge code. On the other hand, responding to calls for Africanization tends to focus attention on those knowledge forms legitimated by a knower code. An overemphasis on the latter could become a distraction and exacerbate the economic gap between those in the centre and those on the periphery of the global economy. Of equal concern though, is the fact that responding to demands of the dominant global order alone reproduces the fundamental epistemological divide between the ‘inner’ (subjectivity) and the ‘outer’ (objectivity) forms of knowledge which, amongst other pathologies, lead to cultural alienation or symbolic violence for many. It also leads to the irresponsible abuse of the environment by science and technology. Whether the integration of ‘indigenous knowledge systems’ into Western knowledge systems can contribute to overcoming the ‘great divide’ between the inner and the outer forms of knowledge remains a matter for further research and debate.

Finally, curriculum practice should also be understood as entailing ontological questions. This is largely beyond the scope of this paper. However, the recognition that curriculum practices construct particular identities and forms of agency for students should not be ignored. In a post-colonial, globalising context students are searching for new identities. They need to achieve agency and authenticity by learning new ways of thinking, acting and being. Learning is not only about acquiring content and developing skills; it is also about becoming and transforming the self. In order to do this, a curriculum should take students beyond the limitations of their natal contexts and cultures. They should learn about powerful, decontextualised, abstract and specialised forms of knowledge. However, in order to engage in (national) development and contribute to society, they need to return to concrete contexts of practice, and start seeing their old worlds in new, reflexive ways.

## NOTES

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