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ABSTRACT

South Africa’s attainment of democracy in 1994 culminated in an educational reform anchored on an outcomes-based curriculum which was initially labelled Curriculum 2005 (C2005). The reform process and ensuing policy was rooted in labour movement debates and informed by the outcomes-based education (OBE) experiences in Australia and New Zealand. The policy was soon viewed by some as an anachronistic albatross, with built-in contradictions that would eventually lead to its demise. It lasted 12 years after surviving heated contestation from a wide academic and political spectrum. This essay review concentrates on Jonathan Jansen’s critique and perspectives on OBE policy and its implementation in South Africa as articulated in his various writings between 1999 and 2009. His seminal “thesis” on why OBE would fail started a public debate that would attract other South African scholars into what would become one of the most important and captivating debates in the last decades of educational reform in developing countries. Jansen engages with issues of policy, knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy in a post-conflict society. He proposes what we can refer to as an epistemology of empathy that takes seriously the experiences of both the victims and the perpetrators of apartheid (including their descendants) and proposes a post-conflict “pedagogy of reconciliation.”

My thesis is that OBE will fail . . . because this policy is being driven in the first instance by political imperatives which have little to do with the realities of classroom life. (Jansen, 1999b, pp. 146–147)

INTRODUCTION

On March 24, 1997, the minister of education launched Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the new national outcomes-based curriculum framework for basic education in the post-apartheid South Africa (Department of Education, 1997). The rationale for outcomes-based education (OBE) has its roots in
the debates on the transformation of education and training within and between such groups as the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the African National Congress, and the private sector and community-based organizations. For some time, the Congress of South African Trade Unions had sought recognition for what workers knew and were able to do. The congress argued that an increased recognition of the skills that workers obtained on the job and in other settings outside the formal education system would give them better credentials for more pay and greater mobility, and thus would minimize their marginalization (Spreen, 2001). The separation of education and training had a negative impact on career paths of the workers, it was argued, hence the need for alignment and integration of education and training, and the desirability of a competency-based education as the instrument to provide and accredit training in the labour sector (Jansen, 1999b; McGath, 1997).

The concerns raised by the labour movement revolved around the skills accumulated by workers at the workplace for employment and remuneration purposes, recognition of prior learning and its progression and articulation within the education and training field. OBE as conceptualised and implemented in Australia and New Zealand appeared to be an adequate answer to these concerns. First, it emphasized the attributes achieved by the learners (defined as competencies in Australia and New Zealand and outcomes in South Africa) as opposed to an objectives-based curriculum. Second, it offered an outcomes-based curriculum within the context of a national qualifications framework, which provided for articulation, progression as integration of education and training. In addition, OBE appeared to respond to wider concerns with the principles and values articulated within the mass-democratic movement (e.g., access, human rights, social justice and redress), though these do not seem to have been mirrored in the structuring and implementation of OBE.

These proposals from the labour movement were systematically articulated by the National Training Board in its National Training Strategy Initiative, which laid the basis for a future national training strategy (Christie, 1994) that incorporated curriculum and assessment (Jansen, 1999a). For the National Training Board, growth in South Africa required modern technologies, which necessitated not only a literate labour force with skills in mathematics and science but also an attitude characterized by flexibility, versatility, problem-solving abilities and ability to work in teams (Christie, 1994). While the primary focus of this strategy as conceptualized in the Department of Labour was on skills development and accreditation of labour skills in the workplace, these skills eventually formed the basis for the development of the OBE-framed national curriculum in the Department of Education.

In broad terms, C2005 focused on the following priorities: (1) align school work with workplace, social and political goals; (2) emphasize experiential and cooperative learning; (3) pursue the value of diversity in the
areas of race, gender and culture; (4) develop citizens who are imaginative and critical problem solvers; and (5) enhance integration in education and training. The new curriculum advocated two levels of integration. The first level of integration involved the clustering of traditional school subject disciplines into learning areas. The content from different subjects was integrated around interdisciplinary themes. The second level of integration occurred between school knowledge as embedded in school textbooks and everyday knowledge as expressed in day-to-day life experience. The new curriculum developed broad critical competencies expressed as outcomes that would allow learners the latitude to follow variously articulated career paths across institutions of learning and in the workplace.

The Natural Science Learning Area (Department of Education, 1997) states that “theoretical knowledge is necessary but not sufficient” and that “the ability to apply theoretical knowledge, concepts, principles to practical daily life situations and issues is the intended outcome” (p. 11). In this quote, the Department of Education summarizes the overall orientation of C2005, namely the emphasis on active learning, with the role of the teacher as a facilitator of this active learning through knowledge derived from and applied to the local context. The pre-specification of outcomes promised to displace emphasis on content and make clear what learners must engage with and achieve, in order to guide assessment towards specific goals. Formative assessment was one of C2005 characteristic feature with summative examinations scheduled for the final year of school, in Grade 12. OBE’s C2005 was therefore a compromise curriculum which reflected and captured elements of constructivism, progressivism and traditional essentialism.

In its intent, C2005 was a dramatic departure from the authoritarian subject- and teacher-centred apartheid curriculum and pedagogy, as it marked a paradigm shift from a subject-dominated to an integrated curriculum with an active learner and a facilitating teacher. It can be described as a global curriculum reform phenomenon with adaptations and local responses in South Africa whose origins and evolution can be traced to competency-based debates in Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Canada and limited circles in the United States (Cross, Rouhani, & Mungadi, 2002, p. 176).

The optimism displayed by the protagonists of OBE would soon be met by firm and uncompromising critique by Jonathan Jansen, a university academic, scholar and educationist, whose ideas are the main focus of this paper (see details about him later). He charged that C2005 was an opaque policy doomed to failure (1999a), a challenge that surprised government, labour unions and sympatrising scholars. Jansen raised his preliminary concerns in an article entitled “A Very Noisy OBE: The Implementation of OBE in Grade 1 Classrooms.” This article provides “evidence on OBE implementation in thirty two Grade 1 classrooms in KwaZulu–Natal and Mpumalanga provinces during the first ten months of 1998” (Jansen,
It points to a range of challenges in OBE implementation, including poor understanding of OBE by teachers, lack of materials and content specification, obscure terminology and so forth. In “Why Outcomes-Based Education Will Fail: An Elaboration” (1999b), he saliently captures the contestations that dominated the curriculum debate, maps out the complexities of the different orientations in the curriculum field in South Africa after apartheid, and launches his main thesis that OBE in South Africa was doomed to failure.

Building on the two articles mentioned above, our essay review focuses on Jansen’s writings on curriculum reform in South Africa published between 1999 and 2009 (Jansen, 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2009a, 2011). We scrutinize some of his major theoretical insights and contribution to the curriculum debate. We start with a brief snapshot into the context of OBE implementation in South Africa. We then review Jansen’s biographical and academic trajectory as well as the social, political and educational circumstances that have framed his work to highlight how he rose from harsh marginalization in apartheid township life to become a supreme intellectual with a strong presence at the apex of South African curriculum discourse. In particular, we pay attention to four aspects in this regard: (1) Jansen as a theorizer; (2) Jansen as a policy analyst and critic; (3) Jansen as a public intellectual; and (4) Jansen’s concepts, theories and perspectives on curriculum reform. We conclude with a discussion of how competing discourses articulate to Jansen’s claims, and how we position ourselves in the debate.

CURRICULUM 2005: AN UNEXPECTED EXPERIMENT?

The significance of Jansen’s response to C2005 must be understood in context for three main reasons. The first concerns the politics of compromise on which the new political dispensation was established. The 1994 democratic elections mark the building of a democratic state, and building such a state is not an event but “a lengthy process in which all ‘organs of state’—e.g. the judiciary, parliament and government—as well as those bodies and groupings which make up civil society and cultural life, play their part” (Jonathan, 2006, p. 6). This process is particularly complex in cases like South Africa where the formal establishment of democracy was not “through revolution (regime overthrow), not through ‘replacement’ (regime substitution) but through ‘transplacement’: the negotiated transfer of power from the old regime to the forces of opposition” (Jonathan, 2006, p. 6). While apartheid state hegemonic power gave way to democracy, the particular formula agreed upon through negotiations, based on compromises from both sides, guaranteed the safeguard of fundamental continuities across established organs of state and existing social structures that would require systematic transformation later. Kallaway (2002) argues that these developments culminated in an “uncertain framework of
political and moral compromise amenable to manipulation and integration" (p. 10).

The second is about the decline of radical scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in an emergence of neo-liberal paradigm discourses widely shared in government and progressive education circles. Thus, the transition to post-apartheid education came to be thought about within a horizon of possibilities different from the radical tradition of the past (Cross, Carpentier, & Ait-Mehdi, 2008). Academics generally felt obliged to support government policy. While no scholar was directly coerced into compliance with national directives, most accepted an informal pact of no criticism of government initiatives and the latter might have subtly expected support. Under such circumstances, critique of government policy was unwelcome, if not perceived as a betrayal. Jansen’s critique emerged thus as a lonely voice easily discarded as misguided, anarchist or undermining the democratic transformation project.

More important were, however, the developments that immediately preceded the establishment of the new political dispensation in 1994. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, government and civil society had started mobilising for a curriculum renewal strategy. Beginning in 1989, officials of the apartheid Department of National Education sought to devise new curriculum policies to align with international trends and to rationalise existing curriculum in terms of relevance while avoiding duplication of content (Christie, 1996). These included the formulation of a Curriculum Model for South Africa (Department of National Education, 1991a) and the Education Renewal Strategy approved by the Committee of Heads of Education Departments (Department of National Education, 1991b). Both policies placed the apartheid notion of “culture” instead of race as in the past at the centre of curriculum choices to ensure curriculum diversity, within the newly proposed framework of “separate but equal” as opposed to the legacy of “separate and unequal” education.

From below, the People’s Education for People’s Power evolved into the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI)—a mass democratic movement of local expertise and scholars under the auspices of the National Coordinating Committee. From December 1990 to August 1992 it had the task of preparing education policy proposals for the anticipated newly elected government. NEPI embraced Paulo Freire’s ideals of a learner-centred pedagogy, a problem-based curriculum aligned with learners’ experiences of life and collaborative learning. Its proposals included a comprehensive curriculum framework which underscored redress, equity and equality within a unitary system of education.

It can be argued that from diametrically opposed camps and efforts (the apartheid government’s curriculum renewal strategy; civil society and labour’s people education for people’s power) the seeds were sown for the adoption of constructivist and progressivist tenets within curriculum reform in the country.
JANSEN’S POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY

Jansen grew up in the Western Cape under an apartheid system that classified, discriminated, marginalised, exploited and oppressed people on the basis of race and ethnicity. His ideas on curriculum are framed by pertinent aspects of the South African history and are rooted in his direct experience of past and current socio-economic and political realities and dynamics. Like other people of mixed race—officially labelled “Coloureds”—he lived in a racially designated coloured township in the Cape Flats. These are poor suburban areas surrounding Cape Town. From his childhood Jansen resented being referred to as “Coloured,” but he felt helpless in challenging a system that gave him an identity he did not regard as his own.

He personally experienced the pain of racial prejudice from both Blacks and Whites. The church protected him from the ills of the Cape Flats but it was part of the racist reality of apartheid. His would-be father-in-law threw him and his daughter out of his home because he could not stand a “coloured” boy dating his daughter. This reaction was ironic considering he had requested Jansen to preach at his church. At the time physical beauty was associated with fair skin and straight hair, as reflected in the concerns raised about his future family: “What the children would look like.” Jansen (2007) recalls that when he was 6 an Indian shopkeeper stared at him and remarked, “Come listen, this kaffir speaks English” (p. 127). Present in his memories are also his experiences in the segregated and overcrowded buses for Blacks in stark contrast to the near-empty air-conditioned buses for Whites. As he grew up he was to observe how White people asserted their dominance both at the workplace and in church through their language, culture and customs, hence his attraction to the Black Consciousness movement later.

After graduating from high school, he attended the University of the Western Cape for his Bachelor of Science degree, an institution also designated for “Coloureds,” predominantly Afrikaans speakers. His opinion column in a weekly paper, The Times, gives details of some of his experiences at varsity (May 5, 2011). He writes about how he resented the ethnically and racially designated University of the Western Cape, the form of formal Afrikaans it used and how Afrikaans speakers were positioned in society. He also never liked the fact that he was going to a university that was labelled along ethnic or racial lines. He describes how he had to invariably walk, take a taxi, jump into a train or take a bus to the university. His parents struggled to give him transport money daily. He would abandon the trip to the university and walk back home when he realised he was going to miss classes due to transport difficulties. On the days he made it to class, he would hitchhike back home arriving late only to wake up at 4:00 a.m. the next day. These are conditions that still resonate with a number of ordinary South Africans in the post-apartheid era of OBE.
Jansen went on to pass undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications: BSc (University of the Western Cape), Higher Education Diploma, BEd (University of South Africa) and postgraduate education in the United States (Master of Science, Cornell and PhD, Stanford). In the United States, he joined the anti-apartheid movement as the secretary of the Student Representative Council of South African students. Since returning from the United States he has occupied several senior positions in various non-governmental organisations, civil society and academic fields and he is currently the award-winning vice chancellor of the University of the Free State and vice-president of the Academy of Science of South Africa.

Three issues are worth highlighting in the life of Jonathan Jansen with respect to the evolution of his ideas and scholarship. The first is his passion for evidence in the act of theorizing, which characterizes his theory of practice and methodological distinctiveness at the time when policy critique tended to be abstract or conceptually dominated by critique of policy literature. Jansen departs from this practice by consistent inclusion of detailed narratives of practices and experiences on the ground, on which most of his analysis rest. Implicit in his work is, in Bourdieu’s (1988) words, the principle that “theory without empirical research is empty, empirical research without theory is blind” (p. 774).

The second is his role as policy analyst and public intellectual, that is, “a person who has shown distinction in their own field along with the ability to communicate ideas and influence debate outside it” (IGCS, 2006, p. 1). His series of opinion articles published every Thursday by a daily newspaper, The Times, is testimony to an analyst and public intellectual who has established a pragmatic relationship with learners, teachers and parents, and sites of learning, a relationship that permits a fearless openness to the most trenchant criticism that he receives from all quarters without compromising the great value of what he has to say. In this regard, Jansen is able to take the familiar and challenge us to go beyond our imagination, seeking alternative explanations and, in the process, construct new theories. Jansen occupies a distinctive place in the academic and educational landscape of South Africa, the region and indeed the world. He is an international education consultant and advisor to public, private and local, regional and international organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The third is his role as an education theorist. A major influence in his initial writings came from Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness movement who was killed by the apartheid government in 1977 while in jail for his role in the struggle for freedom and democracy. Biko inspired Jansen (2007) to realise how Black identity and the common experience of Black South Africans provided a rallying point for challenging the apartheid assigned ethnic and racist categorization: “The assertiveness of the black condition” Jansen argues, forced a “look at the fragility of whiteness,
its false power, its presentation of itself as a single model of goodness” (p. 129). Jansen saw Biko’s writing as turning “the tables on the relationship between knowledge and authority” (p. 129) so that Blacks ceased being consumers of White authorities’ official history with its various ideological leanings. For him, Biko embodies the importance of a shift “within black academic and scholarly work from knowledge consumer to knowledge maker . . . a psychological, emotional and political shift that is liberating to black scholars as it is intimidating to many white scholars” (p. 129). It is against this background that Jansen (1991) assembled the collection Knowledge and Power in South Africa: Critical Perspectives Across the Disciplines.

In Knowledge and Power in South Africa, adopting a somewhat polemical style, Jansen argues that beyond the modalities of access and participation, the experience of racism and oppression cannot be divorced from the process and product of research, and reclaims race as a radical analytical category for understanding the complexity of South African society. He calls for an academic agenda where theory and research emanates from and affirms a black way of knowing. He also seeks to go beyond neo-Marxist explanation of race and class dynamics (Jansen, 1991). The book is an attempt to interrogate the social and natural disciplines and how they were complicit in the apartheid project as they conveyed apartheid ideology and reinforced myths of White supremacy and Black subordination. He recognizes how the dearth of a new generation of Black academics and researchers is not just a function of lack of access and opportunity but also lack of personal and intellectual confidence and assertiveness to claim their place in the South African open society (Jansen, 1991). He attributes his “sense of pride and self worth” as a Black person to Biko’s Black Consciousness, which gave him the confidence to write “b(l)ack” in search of a new consciousness about a common identity that defies racial birthmarks or political ideology or national origins (2007, p. 132).

His theoretical work gained better expression with a prolific series of articles, papers, speeches and media intervention to concentrate on the curriculum issues and OBE and C2005 in particular (see, e.g., Jansen, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). His article, “Why Outcomes-Based Education Will Fail” marks a major transition in his theoretical and policy thought from earlier polemicism (reclaiming the role of race in intellectual and knowledge production) to discourse rooted in pragmatic realism that takes seriously the South African contextual complexities as a basis for making policy choices. For him, this meant an epistemological break with the discourses that only emphasize the emancipation of the oppressed to consider the fate of the perpetrators as victims of their own history—compassion towards their unique experiences. The philosophical foundations for such a project rest on what we would describe as an epistemology of empathy across colour boundaries anchored in Jansen’s conceptions of a post-conflict curriculum knowledge and pedagogy.
Introspection into his experiences as dean at the University of Pretoria as well as his constant visits to schools around Pretoria offered him decisive opportunities to transcend his own limitations and make certain epistemological and theoretical moves. For him, his constant encounters with students were inspiring: “In these weekly encounters, students teach me about the pace of change, the kinds of things that matter to them, the troubled nature of their own social environments with respect to race and gender, their readiness for change, the ways in which they prefer to respond to ‘transformation,’ and the fears and concerns they have about their own identities and those of others” (Jansen, 2005, p. 209). Four years later Jansen (2009a) would translate this experience in *Knowledge in the Blood*, where he would lay the foundations for a major curriculum and pedagogical project for reconciliation. In this book he coined the concept of bitter knowledge to refer to the stereotypes, symbols and beliefs, which represent “how students remember and enact the past” (p. 5). It was perhaps inspired by Hoffman’s (2004) notion that learners who inaugurated the new dispensation, schooled when political negotiations were under way were nonetheless carriers of “potent indirect knowledge.” Hoffman (2004, p. 291) uses the construct of “indirect knowledge” to refer to the “experiences of historical catastrophe” or historical knowledge about national, communal and familial events transmitted into the minds and hearts of second-generation children in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Jansen refines this particular construct drawn from the experience of the Holocaust to explain the consequences of another major process in the 20th century—the aftermath of apartheid.

Bitter knowledge is a product of intergenerational transmission of spoken and unspoken messages from parents through five influential agencies: the family, the church, the school, cultural associations and the peer group. Three kinds of messages are transmitted in this process: “The first message is about racial exclusivity (we belong by ourselves); the second is about racial supremacy (we are better than them); and the third is about racial victimization (we are being targeted by them)” (Jansen, 2008, p. 5). These messages, he argues, have not been interrupted in spite of major changes in the formal institutions of democracy. As such, White students do not have a memory problem, as they did not live under apartheid; but they have a knowledge problem, which remains bitter knowledge. Jansen (2008) concludes that the persistence of racial incidents only indicates “that we have failed white youth by not interrupting their troubled knowledge—the consequences of which are now painfully visible throughout the country” (p. 6). Dealing with such a complexity, where the perpetrators and the victims share the same pain and suffer from different kinds of trauma that require healing, points to new post-conflict curriculum knowledge and a post-conflict pedagogy that he names the pedagogy of compassion or reconciliation. An epistemology of empathy that takes seriously the experiences of both the perpetrators and
victims provides the philosophical foundations for such a project. We will return to this aspect later.

JANSEN’S THESIS: THE PROMISE AND LIMITATIONS OF OBE

In “Why Outcomes-Based Education Will Fail: An Elaboration,” Jansen (1999b) starts by acknowledging the potential of outcomes in privileging the attributes that learners should develop and how these can be assessed. He warns, however, about the difficulties in realizing outcomes in poor-resourced contexts, and the problem of interpretation of these, given the diversity of schools in South Africa, the experiences of other countries and the broad philosophical arguments against OBE. He advances 10 reasons why OBE was going to fail. These reasons are rooted in political, philosophical, moral, epistemological and practical underpinnings. The premise of his criticism is that the policy was for political expedience with nothing or little to do with classroom realities (Jansen, 1999b, 2002). These reasons are addressed in the following sections. For brevity and clarity some of them have been combined.

Complex Language and Terminology. His first observation relates to how the language associated with OBE is “too complex, confusing and at times contradictory” (p. 147). Given its shifting and inaccessible terminology, the majority of teachers did not have the philosophical, psychological, sociological, psychological and even curriculum base from which to engage with the underlying tenets of OBE. For example, the concept “outcomes” required an understanding of a cluster of related terms such as “competencies, unit standards, learning programmes, curriculum, assessment criteria, range statements, equivalence, articulation, band levels, phases, curriculum frameworks” (p. 147). Some teachers conflated OBE with C2005. Jansen (2009) says that teachers defined OBE in very practical terms invariably as “learner-centred instruction, activity-based learning, group work, learning by discovery, less direct teaching and more teacher facilitation, less focus on content coverage, and learning by doing” (p. 304). Under such circumstances, it was difficult to translate an ill-understood curriculum policy into practice.

OBE as a Panacea of Society’s Economic Growth. OBE policy was presented as a solution to the country’s economic development needs. It would ensure growth, job creation, skills creation, improve literacy and productivity. For Jansen, this claim serves a political agenda. No studies have provided evidence of this correlation between curriculum change and “significant social or private benefits” (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985, pp. 60–64, 229–235, cited in Jansen, 1999, p. 148). OBE was also marketed as providing a solution to long-standing pedagogical problems. The proponents of OBE argued that it would ensure transition from teacher-,
subject- and text-dominated approaches to learner-centred approaches with the teacher as a facilitator of co-operative learning. Jansen sees this claim as representing an impossible “conceptual leap of staggering proportions from outcomes to dramatic changes in social relations in the classroom” (Jansen, 1999a, p. 148). The basis of such transformation in the classroom social relations is not provided.

**Flawed Assumptions on the Realities in Schools.** The “flawed assumptions about what happens in schools, how classrooms are organised and what kinds of teachers exist in the system” are a good indicator of the failure of OBE, Jansen (1999, p. 149) observes. The rhetoric that OBE is transformational, collaborative, flexible, trans-disciplinary, open, empowerment-oriented approach to learning he concludes is, therefore, idealistic and unrealistic. The poor quality of teacher qualifications and lack of the requisite skills resulted in their lack of confidence and flexibility to operate in widely varying contexts. Given that some of the learners came from socio-economic backgrounds which did not endow them with the social capital to match that of the school (not just in terms of language, but also exposure to the elaborated linguistic code associated with middle-class communication, cultural conventions that arise out of exposure to a variety of learning media such as television, radio, computers but most importantly access to books), it was imperative for teachers to start with the basics of reading and writing. Some teachers argued convincingly that it was easier to continue with familiar teaching methods instead of paying lip service to the new policy. Most teachers were said to be “talking for more than 90 percent of the teaching time, whether in White or Black schools” (Jansen, 2009a, p. 306). The teachers exhibited what MacLaughlin (1997) describes as orientations towards “non-implementation” and at best “co-optation” with very scant instances of “mutual adaptation.”

Jansen (1999b) declares that anyone believing that an OBE innovation would be implemented with the “original insights in mind never spent enough time inside the average South African classroom” (p. 149). Jansen makes a pertinent observation that the purveyors of OBE quickly and conveniently forgot the real effects of the apartheid system on the quality of personnel within schools. Even with a strategy of staff development and workshop for teachers, the availability of adequate and competent personnel to carry out this professional development activity nationwide was a challenge. Attempts to support teachers through 5-day workshops proved either too basic or inadequate for the different of levels of teachers. No one heeded calls for more time and training.

**Political and Epistemological Objections to OBE as a Curriculum Policy.** The African National Congress and its allies in the new government are said to have predicated their politics on process which is the antithesis of outcomes. The educational and political struggle had emphasised the “process
of learning and teaching as ends in them” (Jansen, 1999b, p. 150). Although the phenomenon of democratisation propelled the adoption of OBE, Jansen raises the possibility that pre-specifying objectives is undemocratic as teachers were not afforded the opportunity to conceptualise OBE. A few “expert consultants,” often White who dominated the hierarchy of knowledge, drove the OBE process. In addition to the instrumental means–ends view of knowledge, pre-specifying objectives trivialises the epistemological basis of certain subjects and disciplines. Jansen captures R. S. Peters’s argument that subjects have the criterion of worthwhileness built into them with their own standards of excellence. Therefore subject disciplines can be evaluated according to these standards inherent in them rather than according to some pre-specified outcomes. In addition, OBE learning area outcomes were silent on specific values relating to the need to fight racism and sexism, for example. Instead generalised, broadly de-contextualised statements that did not challenge the reality of apartheid were proffered. Was there a hidden agenda to perpetuate the status quo? Most significantly, Jansen argues that the stated outcomes were not content specific and therefore could be subject to a range of interpretations.

**OBE Trivialises Curriculum.** Jansen pointed out that the trivialisation, atomisation and fragmentation of curriculum knowledge organised around competencies and learning areas simplified and overlooked the interdisciplinary basis of teaching tasks. It appears there is some contradiction here since learning areas were rooted in the integration of subject knowledge. There is no doubt the competencies approach would simplify the internal logic of the individual disciplines. The complexity of knowledge progression—referred to as vertical progression of strongly framed and classified curriculum by Bernstein (1977)—was downplayed as what was assumed is the step-by-step linear knowledge between outcomes. Jansen’s observation was to be validated as a major weakness of OBE’s C2005 by the Curriculum Review Committee of 1999, appointed by the minister of education to review the implementation of C2005. Contrary to the stated aim of redress of inequalities, there was evidence of a widening performance gap between former White schools and former Black schools (Jansen, 2006). In addition, the overall performance of South African schools in comparison to other less developed or poorer countries in the region and internationally was shocking. Learners underperformed, lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills. Jansen (2003) refers to how “South Africa scores lowest on almost any measure of learner performance in international and comparative benchmarks on the quality of education” (p. 311).

**Outcomes Cannot Operate in a Content Vacuum.** Failure to specify subject content knowledge could lead to continuities or discontinuities with apartheid curriculum depending on the school’s ideological context and the teacher’s background and orientation. Content selection was being left in
the hands of teachers. C2005 reduced knowledge in the classroom to the constructs that teachers and learners individually bring into the classrooms (personal knowledge embedded in personal experience) or just a product of classroom interaction through some form of progressive pedagogy (group work, integrated studies, etc.). This aspect is well captured by Muller (2000) when he says that “a success can be made of such an under-stipulated curriculum, but only if the teacher has a well-articulated mental script of what should be covered, and if the pupils come from homes where they have been well prepared to respond to such putative freedom, in other words, only in schools by and for the middle class” (p. 14). Like Jansen, Muller acknowledges that given the realities of the schools, OBE was not only an anachronism but was doomed.

OBE Requires Multiple, Simultaneous and Interdependent Innovations Within the New Education System. The successful implementation of OBE requires a revamping of the entire education system (Jansen, 1999b). Re-engineering the system required training and retraining of teachers, new forms of assessment, different classroom organisation to facilitate monitoring and assessment, additional time and revamped administration and management of schools, parental support and involvement as well as the development and provision of new learning resources. The conditions for successful curriculum change needed to be addressed at multiple levels and dimensions. Jansen observed that the fiscal capacity and political will to master such a complex nationwide curriculum change was simply not there.

A Radical Revision of the Assessment System That Militates Against Curriculum Innovation Is Required. In addition to teachers being called upon to select content and develop their own materials to teach content, which in most cases they were not familiar with, the emphasis on continuous assessment placed administrative burdens on those who misunderstood the concept and the practice. “In the absence of adequate support such as “release time, aide support, smaller class sizes . . .” (Jansen, 1999b, p. 152) the conditions on the ground (large class sizes and rationalisation of teacher supply) militated against the successful implementation of C2005. Jansen (1999a) aptly observes that OBE met its most enduring resistance from the persistence and dominance of summative national examinations in the final year of schooling. The underlying modus operandi of OBE was learner-centred pedagogy in which continuous assessment was critical to determine learner progress. The continued existence of final-year national summative examinations appeared to negate this ethos. Consequently the pressure of these examinations compromised the logic OBE approaches. Changing traditional forms of assessment already entrenched in teachers’ practices was also another major obstacle: “[G]iven their complexity, outcomes-based performance tasks probably cannot be used very frequently by classroom
teachers; thus they will probably not totally replace more traditional assessments . . .” (Marzano, 1994, p. 6, quoted in Jansen, 1999b, p. 153).

OBE: “AN ACT OF COMPENSATORY LEGITIMATION” AND “AN ACT OF POLITICAL SYMBOLISM”

Jansen saw OBE as an “act of political symbolism,” which conferred legitimacy on a state that had to be seen to be acting to address the interests and concerns of the marginalised citizens. He locates the narrow character of OBE and C2005 in the wider political and social context, where battles for educational transformation were being fought. First, his analysis focuses on the failure to take into account historical, socio-economic antecedents as a basis for curriculum policy reforms. An “already weak culture of teaching was further undermined by the intensification of the administrative burden of change.” Rationalisation of teacher supply further limited “the human resource capacity for managing such change” (Jansen, 1999b, p. 154).

In his article, “Essential Alterations? A Critical Analysis of the State’s Syllabus Revision,” Jansen (1998c) explains how the syllabus revision process as “an act of compensatory legitimation” by a vulnerable state. The educational sector was highly volatile after the 1994 elections. The Ministry of Education, with its weak and vulnerable leadership failed to translate constitutional and bureaucratic constraints of political transition into strategic opportunities for transformation. Under such circumstances, syllabus revision was not organic and true to the intrinsic character of subject disciplines but a response to the external media, political and public constituencies. So a minimalist and superficial syllabus reform would provide breathing space. The bureaucrats could coast along with this tinkering with dire consequences for the nation in the long term as evidenced by the continued poor numeracy and literacy scores. In the early 2000s, Soudien (2009) notes that “high level policy administrators have begun to admit that perhaps C2005 was socially, culturally and in terms of class, an inappropriate policy for the country and that it could be responsible for the challenges that the country is currently going through” (p. 42).

The second level of Jansen’s analysis deals with the symbolic character of OBE. He exposes “a politics of symbolism at play in policy development which is disconnected from immediate concerns about educational practice” (Jansen, 2002, p. 201). Whilst introduced by Jansen within the South African context, the concept of “political symbolism” relates to what other scholars elsewhere refer to as legitimation. Ginsburg, Cooper, Rajeshwari, and Hugo (1991, p. 5) make the point that educational reform can be considered as “symbolic gestures designed to indicate governmental . . . awareness of problems and sympathetic intentions, rather than serious efforts to achieve social change” (p. 5). There are two important ways of looking at the meaning of the construct of political symbolism. On the positive side, symbolism entails a strategic mobilisation of symbolic
resources to precipitate the efforts and energy of the people towards the achievement of realistic development, transformative or change goals. In this sense, Buckland (2005) acknowledges “the importance of symbolism in education and the need to provide bold symbolic actions . . . that signal that the reform of the system has started” (p. 36). Symbolism is meant to reposition people and reframe people’s mind-sets by providing the feelings or perceptions and sometimes some experience that things have indeed changed or the country has achieved a point of no return. But could OBE’s C2005 in its conception “provide tools of deconstruction of the totalising colonial project”? (Soudien, 2009, p. 29). This is an aspect that has captured Jansen’s attention.

Jansen linked South African political symbolism to impressive policies, frameworks or directives designed to change education, which do not have “implementation” as their primary commitment, or to the setting of educational goals that are not meant to be achieved: “What if the impressive policies designed to change apartheid education did not have “implementation” as their primary commitment?” (Jansen, 2002, p. 199). This view is based on the assumption that politicians do not always invent policy to change practice; they translate policy into a symbolic break from the past rather than the substance of change—hence symbolism. Policies were driven by a very strong need to break symbolically with apartheid, often without an understanding of how one changes symbolic formation at the level of consciousness. Jansen (2002) argues that people get duped, deceived or led to believe that change is about to come in substance while, in fact, politicians are searching for legitimacy. The symbolism of OBE failed to provide “value” legitimation—a strategy of legitimation “accompanied by giving people what may have been promised” or “the needs they have expressed” (Apple, 2000, p. 66). Jansen (2002) says it is to “symbolic value” that prominence was attached by both politicians and the public which “lend credence and support to the production of policy itself rather than its implementation.”

It appears that political symbolism played second fiddle to symbolic capital, where OBE realigned with the interests of the culturally and economically privileged. The practical implication of political symbolism is that it appears to pay lip service to the aspirations of the marginalised majority. Hoadley (2010) critiques OBE as highly problematic given the reality of the majority of schools and asserts that it was a middle-class model which perpetuated the class reproductive function of education. Soudien (2009) says that OBE was deployed as if the social landscape was largely middle class. It was a labour movement ideal translated into a middle-class project. While these authors have remained silent on how such a diversion might have occurred, Jansen (2002) acknowledges a critical reader’s insightful comment that “part of the contestation was about gaining influence and power, but the currency of exchange was educational vision and the policy arena was thronged with gatekeepers and ‘analysts’ who were
ready to block and discredit the attempts to construct any sort of comprehensive policy” (p. 214). Jansen further locates this diversion in the context of the competitive struggles for social positions, prestige and social status that followed the demise of apartheid. Given the legacy of social inequalities and knowledge hierarchies inherited from apartheid, he poses the question: Who gains access to the policy research field and on what grounds? He associates this phenomenon with the apartheid-generated social hierarchies which translated into hierarchies of knowledge, reflecting apartheid racial and class distortions. In the post-apartheid era, these hierarchies appear to have continued dominating policy research and practice through the cultural, social and symbolic capital enabled by apartheid privileges. Under such circumstances these hierarchies could hardly speak for ordinary people’s interests.

The labour movement’s concerns with skills and competencies for workers were translated into what appears to be a very costly experiment: the C2005 that Jansen largely on his own would confront from its inception. In a review essay, Jansen (2003) states that “an obvious question cries out for theory: ‘Why with a considerable electoral victory of the dominant party in government (approaching a two-thirds majority in both elections, in 1994 and 1999), a host of more than 30 universities and education research institutes, unprecedented international donor support and a relatively stable infrastructure for schooling (compared to Namibia or Zimbabwe, for example)—why . . . has so little change been effected ‘on the ground?’” (p. 311). This is indeed a key enduring question which drives not only Jansen’s critique, but also those of other critics, scholars and educationists.

**AN UNWILLING STATE?**

The disturbing and lingering questions about curriculum reform in South Africa are: Who are the real change drivers? Can the architecture of OBE be attributed to the influence of dominant stakeholders and interest groups? How could there be such a disjuncture between political aspirations and educational interests? For Jansen (1998a) “there is no way of understanding such behaviour outside of a political analysis of state and curriculum in the South African transition” (p. 9). The Ministry of Education lacked “the political will to redirect educational and curriculum policies to reflect the broad visions for alternative education, which mobilised political struggle in the past three decades and more,” Jansen (1998, p. 9) argues. He sums up the bureaucratic leadership as placatory, legalistic rather than interventionist and strategic, with consequent triumph of conservatism and maintenance of the apartheid status quo.

Other scholars make similar claims to explain this apparent state of paralysis. Padayachee (1998, quoted in Chisholm, 2005) says the roles of
academics, intellectuals, NGOs vis-à-vis the state in the curriculum-making process are defined by the nature and politics of transition. For Chisholm (2005) the contestations and struggles that typify transition periods within the post-colonial state are a testimony of the legacy of power and fragility. Fragility arises out of the weakness of the “nation” as constituted by civil society before “the establishment of the state.” The post-colonial moment defines the relationship between civil society and the state and explains what voices are privileged.

However, the state cannot be the only construct that determines the world. Even during the colonial era there is some agency in the lives of subordinate people signifying “a self awareness that is not totally dependent on the dominant order and seeks to reconstitute itself on its own terms” (Soudien, 2009, p. 235). The dialectical and historical relations of domination, exploitation and resistance manifested in the state, capital, class and race relations can be perpetuated under the guise of the “new” political, bureaucratic and economic players such as the African National Congress, trade unions and government departments. The aspirations of the new players are not always different from those of the previous players, but nevertheless provide a smokescreen for legitimising the political symbolism of OBE. The absence of a vanguard class that could interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions of the neo-liberal economic agenda might explain why an educational revolution never started in South Africa.

“THE INDIGENOUS FOREIGNER”

Popkewitz (2000) refers to the “hybridity in national imaginaries of reform through the idea of the ‘indigenous foreigner’” (p. 174)—a type of hero and heroic global discourses of change that are deployed or appropriated into certain sites “through the construction of national imaginaries” (p. 174). OBE is one such contested heroic discourse that informed the curriculum reform in South Africa with “new intentions and new concepts.” Popkewitz reminds us how though devoid of history, the indigenous foreigners “circulate as if they were local” hence the difficulty of finding social traction in “interpretations and possibilities of action” (p. 10–11). This phenomenon captures the counteracting effects of the global and local in any location not just in Africa. At play is a multi-polar force field where systems of legitimation go beyond the “democratic representation version” of the nation state to respond to regional and global formations. The effects of an open moorland that enable border crossing of discourses is the emergence of a borderless education where regional and international standards of performance and competitiveness reveal the state and nature of education within the nation-state vis-à-vis the region and globe. The comparative competitive element provides a vision of what is possible if and when educational reform is truly enabling and empowering. The
local–global nexus has the potential for being a mechanism for safeguarding academic and intellectual rigour.

Embracing the global discourse of OBE was a response to “a related call for the reorganisation of primary and secondary education and teacher education along the lines that correspond to the skills and competencies ostensibly required by workers in a globalising world” (Morrow & Torres, 2000, p. 35). However, the authenticity and relevance of the curriculum policy to practice would ultimately not be determined by adapting or patching a foreign discourse onto complex and multiple local realities, but in the state’s “ability to confront and resolve the broader contradictions within which curriculum practice is located” (Jansen, 1990, p. 35). The indigenous foreigner would need to be critically applied to reflect the needs of new localities in which she or he operates—pointing to the need for Krishna Kumar’s notion of “bonds without bondage” in “transnational cultural interactions” (Jansen, 1990, p. 37). The nation, educationists and intellectuals appeared to be in OBE bondage for a variety of reasons. As a result of academics late entry into the curriculum reform discourse the real casualty was the provision of education for social justice.

CURRICULUM REFORM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

University intellectuals and curriculum specialists took a backseat and allowed the national, political and bureaucratic agenda to stir curriculum discourse practices from outside the field. Those who jumped onto the bureaucratic bandwagon were to argue later on that “something had to be done” (French, 2011). It cannot be discounted that they were driven by self-serving interests. This leads Wang (cited in Pinar, 2010, p. 230) to conclude that if curriculum reform makes it possible to address social justice issues, then “the promotion of social justice has been undertaken by the South African State than by Universities” (p. 230). This observation confuses appearances and reality. If we take the thesis of the failure of OBE as largely proven, then both the state and university intellectuals are implicated in the continuities or discontinuities of apartheid educational effects as they invariably complied and collaborated with epistemic cultures that maintained the status quo with little evidence of resistance.

The significance of Jansen’s thesis that OBE would fail lies not in its fulfilment, but in the salient aspect regarding curriculum and pedagogy that his critique points to. These triggered an unprecedented and characteristically South African curriculum debate in the history of the field. Through contestation, analysis and a series of formal reviews, OBE would eventually be discarded. An authentic social justice trajectory might lie in the in-depth public debate and the opportunity for detached academic theorising which Jansen’s scholarship spawned.
JANSEN’S THESIS REVERBERATES IN CURRICULUM SCHOLARSHIP

The issues raised by Jansen in his critique of OBE are wide ranging and far reaching. Subsequent scholarship responded to or elaborated Jansen’s thesis in ways which propelled the field of curriculum studies while generating theory by both local and outside scholars. Jansen’s thesis still provides a launch pad from which these scholars take a retrospective gaze into the past, reflect on current realities and theorise what is possible. The controversies and intricacies of the issues he touched on more than a decade earlier continue to be theorised from multiple perspectives.

Some scholars have challenged the theory of knowledge that underpins the curriculum, that is, constructivism manifested in learner centeredness, and called for the provision of content knowledge and content pedagogical knowledge through the re-institutionalization of textbooks, banned because of their association with apartheid curriculum. Taylor (1999) elaborates on the centrality of formal knowledge to achieving educational equity given the weak professional background of the majority of teachers, the dominance of knowledge integration and everyday knowledge as well as weak conceptual progression in. The irony that “curriculum 2005 requires teachers to become curriculum developers, classroom managers and learning mediators in the context of a discourse which is unfamiliar, perhaps even unrecognisable” is not lost to Harley and Parker (1999, p. 194) either. It was never clear to most teachers what clusters of knowledge or content should be brought together to facilitate learning, in what sequence, and at what level of competence (Muller, 2000, p. 15).

The evidence of the failure of OBE has become a familiar and recurring narrative. South African pupils came last in a list of 39 countries with a Maths mean score of 275 out of a possible 800 (Howie, 2000, quoted in Soudien, 2009, p. 43). The trend was the same in science. School underperformance was confirmed by several other empirical studies at primary level in mathematics and reading, and at secondary school in mathematics and science (Taylor, 2009, p. 9). The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) Grade 6 scores for mathematics pointed to the same phenomenon—South Africa is outperformed by eight surrounding countries, many of which have a gross domestic product of one-tenth to one-fifth of South Africa’s (Taylor, 2009).

A critique based on anecdotal evidence from leading universities indicates that OBE appears to have set students from marginalised and poor communities up for failure. Consequently the student dropout from universities rose sharply. Attempts at redressing educational inequalities through opening up access became a failed policy (French, 2011, p. 7). Matseleng (2006) argues that despite what appeared like commonsense appeal of OBE, the approach was flawed as outcome statements could not be the basis for programme design.
The Curriculum Review Committee, chaired by Linda Chisholm, concluded that OBE’s C2005 was indeed anachronistic in South African classrooms and context. The committee reiterated, elaborated and crystallised what Jansen and other scholars had brought into public arena and consciousness. The committee agreed with critics and scholars who argued for the need to disarticulate the curriculum from human resource development strategies grounded in the “skills shortage” ideology. It is worth noting that OBE ideology continued to shape South African educational discourse practices a decade after the review committee had officially characterised it as an albatross. A moderate approach to curriculum review was adopted where features of progressive and constructive pedagogies were retained while conceptual coherence and vertical progression were introduced to restore the authority of the curriculum and the teacher. OBE continued to prevail, not on its own terms and logic, but through its value in conferring legitimacy to the state.

OBE IS DEAD

A decade after Jansen’s articulation of why OBE would fail, the minister of basic education would announce in Parliament, “OBE is dead” (Motshokga, 2009). The government made a radical change of position. On the recommendations of a review committee (South African Department of Education 2009, p. 24) the government has officially recognized the failure of OBE’s C2005 and National Curriculum Statements. It is poignant to note that the report’s critique draws on Jansen’s (1999) work and the subsequent voices of scholars that elaborated or extended his thesis. The National Curriculum Statements Review Report hooks into the C2005 Review Committee report of 2000 and reiterates that “curriculum and assessment descriptors were vague, ambiguous and difficult to measure and low in academic content” (South African Department of Education, 2009, p. 38). The shift is to another curricula initiative—Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statements (CAPS)—which is emphasising implementation and teacher needs through the centrality of knowledge of subject disciplines. Consequently textbooks are being reintroduced.

Jansen’s earlier declaration articulated core challenges that bedevilled the curriculum field and the education system in South Africa. He continues to lament the “window of opportunity” lost “to build a new school system founded on a strong curriculum that built the foundations of reading, writing and thinking in the early years” (Jansen, 2010). He argues the legacy of OBE like that of apartheid knowledge will linger long after it has been declared moribund.

For Jansen (2011, pp. 69–72) besides the cost of undoing the intertwined damage of apartheid and OBE, the costs of an enduring legacy of OBE are incommensurable. In his most recent book titled, We Need to Talk (Jansen, 2011) he refers to six not-so-obvious damages of OBE. The first is financial
with hundreds of millions of rand spent “in training teachers, developing materials, preparing curriculum facilitators, hiring international experts, commissioning expensive reviews and evaluations, writing and rewriting learning guides, arranging conferences, and so on.” The second is the cost of losing the opportunity to build a new school system founded on a strong curriculum that could have established the foundations of reading, writing and thinking in early years. The third is a motivational cost particularly now that the excitement and expectations of the early years of democracy have faded away and teachers, many of whom feel that they have been duped, display a degree of exhaustion. The fourth is the legacy cost related to the fact that OBE is settled in the consciousness of most teachers and will continue “to influence negatively what teachers and learners actually do in their classrooms for a long time to come.” The fifth is the economic cost which reflects the reality that many OBE graduates cannot be absorbed into the marketplace. The sixth is the fact children already disadvantaged were exposed “to high-brow constructivist theories that kept many of them illiterate instead of developing those vital competencies of reading, writing and calculating” (pp. 70–71).

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

What, then, ought to be the new role of curriculum scholars who were invariably absent, silent bystanders, resisters or collaborators to the bureaucratic project? Given the unchanged field of power and its deterministic tendencies, the question is: “What is to be done” if the South African curriculum reform agenda is to take into account the aspirations of the majority of its people while addressing the need for one and not two nations? Apartheid’s enduring legacy and the failure of OBE have for Jansen (2006, p. 189) transformed into new and disturbing questions.

Del Pilar O’cadiz, Wong, and Torres (1998) allude to the importance of an “emancipatory educational paradigm, which takes seriously the presuppositions of critical and emancipatory pedagogy” (p. 8) and the use of the language of critique and possibility. While critical theory has potential, Jansen views it as inadequate in accounting for the complex post-conflict situations Blacks and Whites face, the various traumas they carry, and the intimate but conflicting knowledges about the legitimacy of their histories that constitute their identities. Jansen (2009b) argues that critical theory takes sides and cannot deal with “the clash of rival memories within the pedagogical space” (p. 155). The oppressor/oppressed binary of current critical theory accounts undermine the “possibilities for a post conflict pedagogy that recognises the pain and trauma on both sides without the need for slippage into moral relativism” (p. 155). He asserts further that the potential of critical theory to subvert race, class and gender interests of state and society is limited in a post conflict situation. The question though is: Does moral relativism not reside in the very
nature of dominant and subordinate relations of power where worldviews as determined by access to and possession of symbolic capitals are often misrecognised?

FROM CRITICAL THEORY AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TO POST-CONFLICT PEDAGOGY

Jansen (2009b) makes a leap from critical pedagogy in search of post-conflict pedagogy as strategy characterised by disruption of bitter knowledge ("knowledge in the blood"), pedagogic dissonance and hope. He starts by challenging the legacy of critical theory:

Critical theory remains a crucial body of scholarship in education that offers a lens for understanding the role of schools in perpetuating and subverting the race, class, and gender interests of state and society. But critical theory, interpreted broadly, is severely limited in post-conflict situations for making sense of troubled knowledge and for transforming those who carry the burden of such knowledge on both sides of a divided community. Critical theory receives and constructs the world as divided between black and white, working and privileged classes, citizens and illegal immigrants, men and women, straight and queer, oppressors and oppressed; its dialogical press notwithstanding, the world is taken as torn among rival groups. (Jansen, 2009b, p. 256)

He argues that while critical theory has superseded the incisive class analyses of the 1960s and accounts for a more intersectional account of oppression, it remains pedagogy of the oppressed. Rather than take sides like critical theory, post-conflict pedagogy, he argues, seeks to “first understand the emotional, psychological and spiritual burden of indirect knowledge by all sides in the aftermath of conflict” (p. 152). The teacher is also implicated within the narratives. The post-conflict pedagogy he suggests is not only reconciliatory, but it appears therapeutic in the aftermath of national cataclysms. It could be argued that while a pedagogy of reconciliation is therapeutic and allows perspective taking from the view of the other, the conditions that shaped the contesting, indeed clashing memories are part of the current habitus of the citizens of South Africa—hence his apt figure of speech “knowledge in the blood.” When this knowledge is combined with symbolic capital of different classes and racial or ethnic groups, it will continue to explain the enduring reproductive role of education and the relationship in the context of the nation-state.

The critical question remains: How can an enabling curriculum be realised for the attainment of social justice? The knowledge, pedagogy and assessment undergirding curriculum development, implementation and evaluation processes ought to be problematised and theorised. Young (2010) observes that policies that place emphasis “on learners, their different styles of learning and their interests, on measurable learning outcomes and competences and making the curriculum relevant to their experience
and their future employability” (p. 12) often marginalise “powerful” knowledge—the very reason why schools exist.

CONCLUSION

Jansen’s contribution to the curriculum debate offers a path for innovative research and theorization. First, it can be located at the level of epistemology which represents a long search from his radical positioning about the role of race vis-à-vis class and other sociological categories in the domain of intellectual and knowledge production, which aimed to privilege the voices of the silenced, marginalised or subjugated discourses within South African academia and fields of policy, to a more benign and compassionate approach encapsulated in what we have referred to as an epistemology of empathy rooted in the experiences of both the victims and perpetrators of oppression within South African society. Such an epistemology finds inspiration in the concept of bitter knowledge, the only resource through which the perpetrators of oppression can negotiate their survival or redemption from a dark past. Realizing the failure of critical theory as a post-conflict pedagogy—which in his view remains pedagogy of the oppressed—he proposes instead pedagogy of compassion or reconciliation. The implication is that polarization should give place to dialogue, and negotiation of shared meanings, which requires a great deal of unlearning, relearning and new learning—to ensure that knowledge and pedagogic action ceases to perpetuate the principles of the internalized arbitrary of the past—taking into account the realization that past memories have been traumatic to both poles of the South African society.

We have not made claims for fixed truths in Jansen’s ideas. They certainly might embody internal contradictions, inconsistencies and omissions in as much as they offer a path for new theoretical and pedagogical possibilities. To quote Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1991): “To be able to see and describe the world as it is, you have to be ready to be always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain, all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour” (p. 259). Nonetheless, his work is worthy of the most serious attention in the curriculum field in South Africa and elsewhere. In this regard, his debate on OBE has opened an opportunity for the discourse of curriculum reconceptualisation. The controversy around OBE mirrors the complexity of curriculum, the relationship between policy and practice and the role of curriculum scholars in national discourse practices. Even within competing conceptions of curriculum as product or as process, there are contestations of what counts as worthwhile while the process is shaped by different readings of social structure and the power of human agency. In some respect, OBE exemplified the totalising discourses of modernity while responding to the post-modern appeal to difference and the aspirations of diverse races, classes, genders, ethnic, cultural and religious realities of the
educational context of South Africa. Jansen continues to be a very strong voice in articulating and analysing these issues.

As South Africa embarks on yet another attempt at curriculum reform and development, it would be worthwhile for national and international curriculum scholars to engage with the process for purposes of internationalising the emerging discourse practice for the advancement of the curriculum field. It is not in policy alone that curriculum reform should be underpinned, as it tends to fulfil political symbolism and the lure of policy craft. It can be argued that it is to the orthodox conceptions and processes of curriculum planning, development, implementation and evaluation (that not only place knowledge at the centre but also engage with issues of pedagogy) that should be always the object of curriculum theorisation. Some of the questions to the curriculum problems in South Africa include the following:

- What is required to disrupt the recurring thesis of OBE failure?
- How can curriculum discourse move from a policy formulation orientation to a curriculum theorisation?
- Critically, how can knowledge be brought back into the curriculum?

These questions have implications for South African teacher education and schooling discourse practices.

Curriculum scholars from around the globe have an opportunity to engage and theorise the continuities and discontinuities of the legacies of apartheid education and OBE in the context of counter-veiling influences of a complex and highly contested environment. It is an open invitation that emanates from Jansen’s thesis.

NOTE

1. MacLaughlin (1997) describes mutual adaptation as successful change implementation which is characterised by modification of the policy plan or project design to suit the needs and interests of participants and institutional setting while the participants also modify their status quo in response to policy plan or project design during implementation. Co-optation refers to adaptation of the language and design of policy plan or project design, but there is no change on the part of participants or institutional setting. New or proposed strategies are modified to conform in a template fashion to traditional practices that the innovation is expected to replace. This is a result of resistance to change or inadequate education and help about the innovation for the implementers. Non-implementation refers to projects that break down during implementation or they are simply ignored or resisted during implementation by participants.

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