BOOK REVIEW

Higher education post-apartheid: insights from South Africa

Chrissie Boughey and Sioux McKenna, Understanding Higher Education: Alternative Perspectives, African Minds, 2021

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The implications of apartheid and decolonisation in higher education continue to be at the centre of critical debates in South Africa. Researchers of higher education continue to grapple with complex issues regarding curriculum, quality assessment, student development, as well as other aspects of teaching and learning. The need to understand the variety of perspectives that exist in the context of teaching and learning and not least challenges faced is still higher on researchers' agenda.

In *Understanding Higher Education: Alternative Perspectives*, Chrissie Boughey and Sioux McKenna provide critical insights into the changes that occurred within South African higher education over the past 20 years. The book problematises higher education issues in South Africa whilst acknowledging the contextual realities of the Global South. Boughey and McKenna essentially examine teaching and learning in South Africa and ask what changes occurred from the higher education reforms implemented post-apartheid. The book draws upon the structural developments in teaching and learning across universities and demonstrates how colonialism and apartheid affected access to knowledge. Its purpose is to inform the readers about the implications of globalisation and neoliberalism by reflecting on how this interplay enabled and constrained participation in higher education.

The book is organised into seven thematic chapters. In the first chapter, the authors focus on the value of higher education in a global world where the knowledge economy is critical. The chapter makes a case for higher education as a public good as opposed to being a private good, demand for high skills, quality assurance standards, accountability, and transparency within higher education. Chapter 2 turns to demonstrate the ability of social and critical theory in providing explanatory power concerning change in higher education. The authors show how the critical reality framework provided a lens of understanding policy changes in higher education. Of particular note are the consequences of apartheid and colonialism that shaped the higher education structure by enabling/constraining new ideas. Chapter 3 is concerned with the impacts of neoliberal policies within the higher education system. The authors' critiques reveal that these policies affect the funding framework, governance structures, qualification frameworks, compliance, and accreditation systems.

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Student agency is the central theme of Chapter 4. Here, the authors reveal the power of discourse linked to understanding university students in a context where social structures influence student success and constrain the learning process. It takes on issues such as ideological institutional practices that tend to enhance misappropriation of teaching and learning theories, the manifestation of language practices resulting in language problems, and lack of access to powerful disciplinary knowledge.

In the following chapter, the authors emphasise how the curriculum enables learners to access learning experiences that are valuable for social mobility. They highlight that critically challenging the dominant ideas and practices that legitimise knowledge in the curriculum enhances learning experiences. Chapter 6 illuminates the academics' agency based on their ability to balance teaching, research, and community engagement. The authors also observe that, also in South Africa, the academics' agency continue to be shaped by the global, national, and institutional trends fostering managerialism in universities and further subjecting academics to the principles of the new public management.

The final chapter concludes the book by ascertaining the growth of South African higher education in the context of institutional inequalities. In addition, the authors suggest a robust funding system that would enable differentiation, equity, and research culture. In the last section, the authors provide a COVID-19 postscript to articulate the implications that emerged from online learning. Chiefly, their concern is that online learning has adopted a technicist approach to learning; hence, this digital transformation results in digital divides that perpetuate inequalities among learners. Boughey and McKenna argue that equity requires the value of harmonising forms of knowledge to sustain epistemological access, epistemic justice, and maintain a social and critical deliberation on curricula.

The authors have delivered the key message in a consistent tone that enables higher education researchers to connect instantly with the subject matter. Boughey and McKenna demonstrate that widening participation in higher education is a vital tool to enhance social justice. Their contribution is valuable for the reason that they addressed topical issues concerned with student learning in higher education by providing a historical account of the factors that influenced the systemic changes. The book acknowledges that managerialism and the principles of new public management seem to dominate the higher education discourse in South Africa.

The book demonstrates that universities tend to overlook contextual realities, which sets the ground for decontextualizing students. One can note how the limited access to powerful disciplinary knowledge hinders students to develop new knowledge that enables innovation, thus restricting human capital development (Shay, 2013). Valuable insights to curriculum planners in higher education on how to be innovative when dealing with pedagogical knowledge are offered by the book, which could enable students to access powerful disciplinary knowledge equitably. Interestingly, the comprehensive application of the critical realist framework in this book provides researchers with new perspectives of dealing with teaching and learning in their respective fields.

The implications of massification in higher education, as the book shows have tremendous effects on resource allocation. The authors call for reimagining higher education in a context where public funding is declining, yet issues of access and equity are still a challenge. Notably, it seems that teaching and learning would be severely challenged by this shift, thus largely affecting students from poverty-stricken backgrounds in South Africa. Masehela (2018) argues that unequal access to higher education negatively affects students from low-income backgrounds due to financial constraints. As research from across the world and not least from South Africa has shown, poverty remains to be a contributing factor to the lack of access to higher education.

The timely critical debates raised by this book challenge the higher education agenda in the context of South Africa given that teaching and learning continue to experience a paradigm shift due to the 2015/16 #FeesMustFall movement, which advocated for decolonised higher education. The intellectual debates conceived in the book connect with ongoing scholarly engagements regarding the transformation in higher education post-apartheid. The debates interrogate the apartheid legacy characterised by inequalities that affect teaching and learning in higher education. The contemporary higher education system in South Africa responds to the realities of transforming apartheid policies and practices and educating diverse students who often come from low-income families (Scott & Ivala, 2019).

The challenge of student development and provision of skilled labour in higher education remains critical. In reading this book, one gets a sense of reflecting on how higher education institutions can improve employability in a context where graduate work readiness is linked to teaching and learning as well as university reputation. This requires rigorous thinking concerning language issues and knowledge inequalities that potentially affect the acquisition of employability skills. Essentially, a paradigm shift is necessary for enabling universities and industries to collaborate to create teaching and learning strategies that support employability. Crucially, one ought to note that higher education and work relations are context-bound, thus requiring effective coexistence (Marginson, 2019). As such, the constructive critiques raised in the book create conditions for further intellectual development to respond to the demands placed on higher education to produce work-ready graduates.

The key strength of the book is that it orients the reader to understand that institutional differentiation should facilitate teaching geared towards promoting epistemological access and epistemic justice. The book is beneficial in the sense that it illuminates how the historical context of South Africa higher education influences the present practices. It has been demonstrated that the change in student demographics calls for a rethinking at an institutional level to facilitate systemic change. Accordingly, the critical theory employed for the analysis provides valuable insights that demonstrate the factors that enabled and constrained systemic change within higher education.

This book provides an exciting opportunity to advance the knowledge of researchers who intend to employ critical analysis perspectives in the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education. Interestingly, Boughey and McKenna argue that the decolonised knowledge discourses still lack a clear definition, thus making it difficult to produce and teach. As a result, conceptualising decolonised knowledge in higher education remains to be a significant issue for further research. The future investigation would possibly explore how decolonised knowledge intellectually contributes to social justice.

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