



Borderless Curriculum in the Post-Human Era: Reflections on the United States of America and South African Initial Teacher Pedagogical Practices

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the opportunities and challenges of a borderless curriculum as the alternative to reimagine a better future premised on initial teacher education. The paper comes against the background that curriculum projects remain nationalised, depriving learners and educators of an opportunity to learn from the best educational practices outside their borders. The paper is located in posthumanism, where a borderless curriculum through technology can be positioned to respond positively to human tragedies such as war, systematic racism, human trafficking and conflict. Borderless curriculum involves unlearning in order to learn by harvesting best practices across borders to reimagine a comprehensive initial teacher education that addresses the lived realities of the learners globally. The paper argues that the posthuman era provides a platform for nations to share knowledge in the virtual and blended space to deconstruct prejudices while evoking living and working together across curriculum and spaces to improve initial teacher education.

KEYWORDS

Borderless curriculum; teacher education; post-human era; decoloniality; global challenges; South African curriculum; United States of America curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The need for a borderless curriculum project resulted from one of the authors' sabbatical research projects at Appalachian State University in the United States of America (US). During the sabbatical leave, there were cultural, educational and social exchanges between students and staff members. Through this interaction, both authors observed that there was a wide knowledge gap in the curriculum practised outside the borders that deprived learners and lecturers of an opportunity to enrich themselves with global education trends. It was clear that the initial teacher education was designed to primarily serve the interest of citizens or people living in a particular state, with little or no emphasis on how initial teachers can be instrumental in contexts outside their state borders, let alone national borders. Moreover, it was clear that while universities are expecting to explore knowledge production and dissemination far and wide, it was not happening at a rate which could fully equip initial teachers for the global stage, denoting a minimalistic approach to initial teacher education. This is despite the pressure from the industry and corporate world on the faculty and administration of universities to internationalise their campuses, curricula and classrooms (Atalar, 2020, p. 65) to meet the new demands placed by posthumanism. Despite the pressure, some countries still train initial teachers for the national context. For example, in the US, student teachers are basically trained to teach in US states' context only and similarly, in South Africa (SA), the approach to initial teacher education is rather exclusively to the SA context. However, in a global context, where migration has become the order of the day, the development of initial teachers should move beyond the borders, local context and methodologies and embrace a pluviosity approach to teacher education so that the teachers can at least teach competitively across the globe (Kilinc et al., 2018; Moyo et al., 2022; Omodan, 2022). Posthumanism has made this possible through various technological devices and programmes. Consequently, citizens can connect directly with others, regardless of geography, in social networking, commerce, politics, and science (Bethlehem, 2014; Dube et al., 2022).

It is in this context that we engage in a long and difficult—yet necessary and doable—project of demonstrating the need for a borderless curriculum in initial teacher development. We submit that a borderless curriculum approach to initial teacher development is positioned to ignite modes of working together that can also develop solutions to international problems (Al-Youbi & Zahed, 2020) by having a comprehensive approach to issues available to learners across a range of contexts. To achieve this, we argue that shifting our attention to posthuman thinking can give an impetus to train and develop initial teachers to work across borders in different contexts and with different learners. The borderless curriculum within the auspices of a post-human era is the very idea that argues that people can step outside their boundaries, potentially embracing every form of life and every technological structure (Valera, 2014, p. 489). It is an approach of knowledge sharing, exchange programmes for students and staff and promoting dual degrees, which enable initial teachers to comprehensively understand both the

possibilities and ambivalences associated with teaching and learning within and outside of political borders.

We appreciate that various kinds of research have been conducted across borders in various fields by different countries and universities as part of the internationalisation of education. For example, cross-border work involving curricula or syllabi and between states in federal countries such as the US or Germany. The idea of that project was intended to better understand how to take advantage of the potential of cross-border content for educational goals in the European Union's policy context (Pepler et al., 2016). Another international project conducted by Crosling, Edwards and Schroder (2008), sought to prepare graduates for employment in 'the global economy' where they may work internationally. Many universities have adopted a strategy of 'internationalising the curriculum. While the idea seemed noble, they highlighted that staff resistance occurred in that participation in the programme, which was seen as contravening traditional notions of academic autonomy. Another noticeable international collaboration was Norway with countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, and Sudan. The collaboration sought advantageous positions in trade, commerce, and business (Bredlid, 2013).

Cognisant of the foregoing research, we believe our project, as shown in this paper, is unique and contributes knowledge in the internationalisation of initial teacher education in the following ways: firstly, they focus on a borderless curriculum between a university in South African and the United States of America with reference to initial teacher education. Again, it is unique in the sense that we use post-human thinking, where the use of technology can bridge knowledge and cultural and social divide between the two countries in the initial teacher programme. Such an approach is, we believe, inevitable given that today's classrooms have become cosmopolitan centres, "comprised of a *mélange* of people from differing geographical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, with significant historical trajectories of movement" (Hawkins, 2014, p. 93). We thus argue that embracing post-human thinking in initial teacher education settings should propel us towards recognizing the need for a borderless curriculum using various technological systems available to narrow the knowledge gap of (and about) the other. This could mitigate against threats and associated prejudice related to what does (and does not) happen on one side of the border or the other, thus enhancing initial teacher education's capacity to address the lived realities of learners across contexts, as new ways of teaching and learning are ignited through post-human framework. The paper is arranged as following, theoretical framework, borderless curriculum opportunities, challenges of the borderless curriculum and reflections on the projects.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POST-HUMAN THEORY

The paper is couched in post-human theory. We begin this section by arguing, with Seltin (2009, p. 43) that post-human does not signify the end of man; rather it signifies the end of certain misguided ways of conceiving human identity and the nature of human relations to the social

and natural environments, other species, and technology. Post-human research is neo-foundationalist in that it aims at re-grounding concepts and practices of subjectivity in a world fraught with contradictory socio-economic developments and major internal fractures (Braidotti, 2016, p. 16). Therefore, posthumanist thought moves the centre of contemporary philosophical reflections from the question of technological possibilities and of its alleged ethical limits to the question of the limits of man, interwoven in his original essence (Valera, 2014, p. 485). We see this theory as a relevant frame within which to couch an argument for borderless curriculum that is premised on understanding the impossibility of offering actual exchange opportunities to all initial teacher education students from SA to USA (or even North Carolina) and vice versa. Technological advances premised on post-human thinking allow reimagining new teaching methods in preparing initial teachers for global engagement. The issue of technology is central to the post-anthropocentric predicament (Braidotti, 2103, p. 89) and should be exploited to build new meaning and possibilities for initial teacher education for both the USA and SA. As argued by Braidotti (2016, p. 18), the high degrees of technological mediation and the undoing of the nature-culture divide create a series of paradoxes, such as an electronically linked pan-humanity that is split by convulsive internal fractures (Braidotti, 2016, p. 18). In premising a borderless curriculum within posthumanism, the goal is not so much a hyper-technological appliance of the human being but a progressive elimination and fluidisation of the differences (Valera, 2014, p. 483). The post-human theory in our context is a move towards a wall-less or building-less classroom where students in the US and SA can be taught the same content and engage the same assignments, and each other, regardless of distance and time. This way of reframing initial teacher education could better prepare teachers for a cosmopolitan environment; a borderless curriculum seeks to ignite these conversations at a small scale with the hope that ideas from it will develop and influence policy making in the US, SA, and other countries that will join the project as it develops.

In the following section, we show the available opportunities provided by a borderless curriculum premised on posthumanism in initial teacher development for both the United States of America and South Africa.

Borderless curriculum in the post-human era: Opportunities

In this section, we discuss some of the opportunities associated with borderless curriculum projects in relation to initial teacher education. The first point discussed is broadening initial teacher education capacity.

Broadening initial teacher education capacity

The interactions with students in the US during the first author's visit indicated a need for a more comprehensive approach to teacher education that foregrounds educational and curriculum issues outside the borders. The students provided a comprehensive understanding of the US system in terms of assessment, grading, standardised testing, and policies relating to education, especially in the state of North Carolina. Cognisant of this, we recognize a need to broaden initial education to include elements of comparative education where students cover

other components outside their context and a borderless curriculum positions itself as an approach to bridge the knowledge gap. The borderless curriculum approach could allow students to appreciate their strengths and weaknesses as they prepare to engage in the teaching field and, more so, help curriculum planners for initial teacher education to rethink a comparative approach to education rather than exclusively focusing on specific and individual provinces, states, or countries. Thus, we submit that a borderless curriculum could provide initial student teachers with an opportunity to know a learner outside their borders and place of comfort. To us, borderless curriculum has an opportunity for “an examination of boundaries of ethnicity, race, culture, and power and urges us to move across psychological, social, and conceptual barriers to better understand our own lives and experiences and those of ‘others’” (Reyes & Garza, 2005, p. 154). The focal point of a borderless curriculum premised on posthumanism consists not as such in a critical acceptance of the technological promises – like there is for transhumanism – but in an intertwining and hybridisation of human beings with other living beings and machines (Valera, 2014, p. 488). The following section gives a second opportunity for a borderless curriculum.

Allows creation of academic networks to improve initial teacher education

For the first author, interacting with staff and students in the US was an eye opener. The interaction revealed a knowledge of teacher education towards skewed entirely toward one’s country of origin, thereby cultivating a minimalistic approach to educational issues. After the sabbatical leave, both authors continued networking to cover the knowledge gap, thus facilitating the idea for a borderless curriculum approach to initial teacher education. Through this collaboration, initial teacher education programs in the US and SA could rethink pedagogical practices to include elements outside their respective borders so that learners might have a more comprehensive approach to educational issues. By arguing this, we do not mean that the two universities involved in this research should abandon prior networks; rather, we submit that the networks should go deeper to include shared degrees and programmes. As things are, the synergies available are confined primarily to academics among themselves, with little attention given to students and how such synergies might enhance their teaching careers. Thus, a new look into university partnerships could emerge with a focus more centred on students also benefitting, especially in the context of globalisation, which has accelerated the need for interconnecting networks of people, culture, ideas, and practices (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Smith, 2013) as a way to improve humanity and address the ever-spiralling conflict exacerbated by prejudice, misconception and lack of knowledge of what is happening on the other side of the border. Valera (2014, p. 486) is right to argue that posthumanism is thus the idea of a speculative transformation of the human that can be developed through a range of synthetic activities (Valera, 2014, p. 486)

Allows dismantling of traditional hierarchies in education

A borderless curriculum in post-human thinking could enable involved countries to dismantle traditional or compartmentalised approaches to education (Smith, 2013). Both SA and the USA

are compelled to appreciate that educating a child does not rest merely on average test scores, but on the gamut of emotional, cultural, and life experiences that help a person's self-actualising flow (Kazanjian, 2016, p. 87). In addition, as proposed by Giroux (2005, p. 20) borderless curriculum allows initial teacher-students to understand otherness in its own terms and to craft other borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power. Furthermore, we see a borderless curriculum offering political, social and pedagogical functions for reorienting the historicity and ideology of dominant institutions with the people, cultures, and identities that have been excluded (Kazanjian, 2016, p. 88). This is against the background given by Giroux (2005) that students often reveal the historical and social limitations of institutions in the dominant curriculum, which directs and frames social relations.

Promotes utilisation of technology in accordance with posthumanism

As envisaged in this paper, a borderless curriculum can be facilitated by the utilisation of technology which lessens the distance between students and teachers in the United States of America and South Africa. For the authors, such technology has been instrumental in meeting, project grant writing, and mapping the way forward to enrich initial teacher education through borderless curriculum that broadens the thinking of this project and circumvents distance. Technology has addressed many challenges in this project, such as how dual degrees, training and supervision of postgraduates could be handled between two universities. The use of advanced technologies as espoused in posthumanism is critical to fostering continued engagement with colleagues across borders. Thus, technology shrinks the distances between two countries while promoting effective engagement between students in the United States and South Africa. This lessens the need for (and expense associated with) continual physical exchanges between academic staff and students since most collaboration, teaching and learning can be hosted using online platforms. This will also equip the student teachers to comprehend that the future is technological, and their teaching profession can effectively utilize technology to learn about what happens in other countries in terms of education (Wolhuter & Jacobs, 2021).

Enhances internationalisation of higher education

In recent years, universities worldwide have responded to calls for internationalisation of education, and this has become one of the key performance areas of academics. The borderless curriculum between the University of the Free State and Appalachian State University presents an opportunity for the two universities to further cement existing collaboration. Thus, having colleagues from both universities involved in the borderless project is an exciting endeavour that reconfigures how teaching and learning could be envisaged. Any university seeking relevance in this posthuman era should embrace the need to influence their existence beyond borders; borderless curriculum projects allow nations to enhance internationalisation and evoke collaborations by harnessing various technological tools and pedagogical skills. In its grandest vision, such curriculum has transformational potential, especially if borderless curriculum

becomes a tool to offer solutions to humanitarian crises such as wars, xenophobia, and systematic exclusions of people of colour, among many other variables.

TRAJECTORIES OF BORDERLESS CURRICULUM IN THE POST-HUMAN ERA

While there are various opportunities presented by borderless curriculum project to initial teacher education, some challenges need to be navigated and negotiated to champion social change through education. These challenges largely emanate from the context that states and countries have ideologies they preserve through teacher education, which can consequently limit novel strategies that could enhance initial teacher education capacity. This section presents some of the challenges we perceive which require more navigation and negotiations between countries.

Stereotyped educational policies concerning initial teacher education

One of the threats to a borderless curriculum is the nature and design of teacher education in the United States of America and South Africa. For example, initial teacher education at Appalachian State University is heavily regulated by the state of North Carolina, and by national accrediting bodies that regulate both institutions of higher education and the teaching profession. Moreover, the politics of education exert pressures in American education that vary significantly from state to state. The state has a hand in virtually everything from text selection, standards and curriculum to teacher salaries and licensures. In the same vein, Kazanjian (2016, p. 73) argues that the United States public education in this hyper-connected world emphasizes standardisation and accountability. By doing so, schools driven by national trends and initiatives fail to help students to become global citizens.

Similarly, in South Africa, initial teacher education is governed by the Department of Higher Education within the auspices of Minimum requirement for teacher education (MRTEC) and universities are required to adhere to the standards set by the department. This is partly because most African countries are sensitive to the power play and the historical and continuing asymmetries in power in international research collaboration (Bond, Marín, & Bedenlier, 2021). The foregoing denotes how nations have been designed for self-preservation through education while at the same time, there is an overwhelming pressure for nations to open up and collaborate with other countries. Despite the pressure, there remains very limited space for innovations that might benefit students and enhance teacher education through a borderless curriculum. Thus, any proposal based on the opportunities provided by the borderless curriculum tends to suffer stillbirth since the curriculum for initial teacher education is externally funded and influenced by stakeholders, some of whom have no clue about the need of internationalising teacher education. Furthermore, as stipulated by Postiglione (2016, p. 32-33), we should not “ignore how international cooperation in higher education is shaped to some extent by socio-historical contexts that include cultural traditions, colonial experiences, and postcolonial transformations, all culminating in a set of new pressures affecting the roles and strategies of higher education systems and institutions”. However, cognizance of the borderless

curriculum stresses the need for negotiations between government and universities to address historical factors which can affect attempts to ensure learners benefit from the knowledge of what is taught outside their borders.

Inbound as opposed to reciprocal immigration

Borderless curriculum project is always threatened by a mass movement of people to the United States of America, leaving countries such as South Africa to face brain drain. This is due to the perceived benefits associated with migrating to the United States. This does not mean United States citizens are not moving into South Africa; rather, that there are higher numbers of migrants inbound to the United States compared to South Africa. The implication is that United States of America will forever have cultural diversity and enjoy the pluralism brought by immigrants to the American context, although that diversity and pluralism is a highly localized phenomenon in the US. However, the goal of borderless curriculum is to expose various strategies that countries have used to develop their economies, making them attractive to young people from different countries. If countries are willing to share and solve economic challenges together, it will limit economic migration, and this could be possible through education. Reciprocal immigration among participating universities will allow diversity and ensure 'fair' to all participating countries (Beaton, Postlethwaite, Ross, Spearritt & Wolf, 1999).

Limited funding to support borderless curriculum

Funding is one of the major constraints to international university projects (Bond, Marín & Bedenlier, 2021), and borderless curriculum project is no exception. Funding is necessary to ensure the project achieves its intended goals of creating comprehensive teacher education that will address the lived realities not only for the student teachers in the United States and South Africa but beyond where the project will make inroads. Part of the funding includes developing dual degrees, funding students and lecturers exchange programs, curriculum development for modules that cover comparative education between US and SA and finally, funding to equip lectures without PhDs. While we note this challenge, we appreciate the role of technology in facilitating conversations that promote the borderless curriculum in initial teacher education. To navigate this, posthumanism thinking, especially the use of technology, has the impetus to mitigate the challenges of resources. We are convinced that a borderless curriculum relating to initial teacher education is inevitable, doable, and desirable to a better, more advanced humanity (Velera, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This paper was part of the reflection of the borderless project envisaged by the University of the Free State and Appalachian State University. The paper is part of a long journey to reconfigure initial teacher education between the two universities so that we might both produce teachers who have knowledge of the other side of their borders and compete globally to address the needs of the modern-day learner. As such, the paper couched in posthumanism showed the opportunities for a borderless curriculum. It went further to present threats that could hinder the borderless curriculum approach to initial teacher education between the two countries. The

paper presented here argues that posthuman thinking in the educational setting should propel us towards igniting the need for a borderless curriculum using various technological systems available to narrow the knowledge gap of the (and about) other. This, in turn, could mitigate wars and threats associated with prejudice about what happens and does not happen on the side of the border. We are stronger when we work together, and with all the opportunities out there still to be seized, now is the time for universities to look across borders, cultures and disciplines to create lines of communication and collaboration (Hamdullahpur, 2013, p. 29).

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