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Reimagining Curriculum Renewal: A case study of Physics and Astronomy

This study provides an introduction to the University of the Western Cape case study on curriculum renewal. It explores different conceptions of curriculum and curriculum renewal. It offers a critique of existing thinking about curriculum renewal as something that occurs within refined phases within the education system, where the thinking often sees curriculum renewal as occurring through linear and hierarchical chains of command from policy to practice. Drawing upon previous conceptualizations of curriculum renewal at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of the Western Cape, this study explores a bottom-up approach to curriculum renewal. A rather non-linear process, framed around the concept of intertwined phases of engagements within the higher education system and national imperatives, noting that disciplinary actors, social actors and organizational bodies envision curriculum in different ways for different historical, political, sociocultural and economic reasons. The study contradicts widespread perceptions of the curriculum as a text designed by government official authorities to be implemented in the institutions. It illustrates how the physics and astronomy curriculum renewal involves dynamic processes of interpretation, mediation, negotiation and institutional quality assurance processes across multiple departments and interconnected discipline-applicable arrangements.

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