



Research in curriculum studies: Reflections on nomadic thought for advancing the field



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Background: Key to sustainability and expansion of any field is the intellectual works of its scholars who engage in their field as in-becoming and who continually strive towards its advancement. For researchers of curriculum studies this involves being knowledgeable and conversant of the underlying discourses framing and challenging the field.

Aim: In South Africa, field of curriculum studies has been critiqued for being a quick-fix solution to social problems by merely approaching the curriculum as a 'dumping ground' and for its over-emphasis on curriculum as a schooling matter. The intent of this article was to exemplify other, more current, challenges and accomplishments of the research constituting the field.

Setting: The publications of South African National Research Foundation-rated researchers specialising in curriculum, because their scholarship is deemed central to building societal knowledge through quality and high-impact research.

Methods: A meta-study was conducted to determine trends in a particular cluster of publications to identify the ways that researchers are advancing in the field of curriculum studies in South Africa.

Results: Four pertinent findings were evidenced. Firstly, strong localism/nationalism of the field. Secondly, the higher education context as highly researched. Thirdly, the multidisciplinary nature of South African curriculum studies research. Fourthly, strong impetus from sociological work in the field.

Conclusion: We reflect on nomadic thought as a starting point central to the pursuits of researchers in advancing the field of curriculum studies as an intellectual activity and practice of complicated conversation.

Keywords: curriculum studies; complicated conversation; nomadic thought; meta-study research, National Research Foundation-rated researchers.

Introduction

Research in the field of curriculum studies

Curriculum studies is an academic field comprising scholars who conduct research to understand curriculum. In other words, curriculum studies is an intellectual practice and enterprise in which curriculum is made the object of study. Pinar (2014) points out that although contemporary curriculum research may have originated in the USA, it has become recontextualised worldwide in nations with distinctive histories and cultures. Pinar's (2014) contention is important because it highlights the political dimension of curriculum studies, as decentring of the field is an antidote to globalisation. The situated and reconstructed character of curriculum studies offers a challenge to standardisation and homogenisation that is associated with globalisation. The two editions of the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (Pinar 2003, 2014) show that the distinctiveness of national histories and cultures continue to structure the curriculum as it is enacted in classrooms in specific local contexts. Moreover, curriculum research in many nations has focussed on curriculum policy-making and implementation. It is in the context of these particular national interests that scholars of curriculum in South Africa have been engaged in, making it possible for us to speak of the distinctiveness of South African curriculum studies and reflect on its advancement.

The first attempt to capture some of the intellectual history and present circumstances of the field in South Africa is published in a collection of essays edited by Pinar (2010). This collection of essays (Pinar 2010) and the later chapter on 'Curriculum research in South Africa' authored by Le

Grange (2014) tell us that this field in South Africa has remained divided because of the country's apartheid history and that curriculum research is mainly focussed on school curriculum. Although Pinar (2010) and Le Grange (2014) provide readers with some sense of the field's history and present circumstances, they do not enable us to postulate architecture of the field in South Africa. The latter would require a broader survey of the field.

As mentioned, situatedness characterises curriculum studies worldwide and the locatedness of curriculum research potentially counteracts imperialisms associated with globalisation. However, the situatedness of curriculum research can also give rise to narrow nationalisms/localisms and one danger here is the thwarting of the field's advancement. In order to challenge the provincialism that localism can invite, in the most recent *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, Pinar (2014) commissions four introductory chapters to challenge accounts presented by authors from different nations, which we briefly outline here. Our assumption is that parochial localism hinders the advancement of the field. In the first chapter, Autio (2014) highlights the moral dimensions of education, and makes the point that it is the morality that makes education educative. Autio's (2014) use of 'moral' is not in a moralistic sense but more akin to ethics, a commitment to engage in an ongoing basis the worthiness of knowledge – about the worthiness of what is included/excluded in teaching/learning programmes. Moreover, it is this sense of the 'moral' that informs our 'profession's ethics, our commitment to study, and teach as we engage in academic research to understand curriculum' (Pinar 2014:2) and to understand curriculum as a complicated conversation that occurs among scholars of the field and between scholars and students. The first aspect that this meta-study could comment on is the loyalty of South African curriculum scholars to the profession's ethics. In the second chapter, McCarthy, Bulut and Patel (2014) discuss the reconfiguration of power that globalisation accelerates, with a particular focus on race. They point out that race cannot be viewed in isolation but needs to be understood in contemporary times as 'structured through contradictory processes of globalisation, localisation, migration, and technologies of surveillance' (Pinar 2014:2). By the latter, McCarthy et al. (2014) are referring to biometric technologies of information, face scanning, finger printing, DNA sampling etc. The authors' focus on race could, of course, be extrapolated to other forms of discriminations that globalisations and new technologies quicken or reconfigure. So, the second aspect that this meta-study might comment on is what attention South African curriculum researchers are giving to issues of race, gender, sexual orientation et cetera, and whether in such deliberations attention is given to the contradictory processes involved in the construction of various discriminations, including through technologies of surveillance. In the third article, Smith (2014) discusses the influence of neoliberalism on education that entails, among other things, privatisation, standardised assessments and the use of technologies to make teaching/learning more efficient. He asks a pertinent question,

about how education might be reimagined given the pervasiveness of neoliberalism when the latter is bringing into question the very assumptions that education has been based upon. Smith (2014) suggests that neoliberalism needs to be analysed on an ongoing basis, so as to work through it, and that inspiration for this ongoing examination could be found in the wisdom traditions, which may be indigenous, religious or philosophical. The third aspect that this meta-study might therefore comment on is whether curriculum researchers in South Africa are focusing on issues associated with neoliberalism and whether their research offers responses to Smith's question or suggestion. In the fourth chapter, Wang (2014) focuses on the issue of non-violence, which she elaborates as an embodied sense of interconnectedness among humans, which affirms compassion and a positive affiliation with others. In other words, she argues for an embodied sense of affirming our common humanity. She finds support for her argument from several philosophical, religious and ethical traditions, including the African notion of *ubuntu*, the Chinese notion of *Tao* and indigenous peace-making traditions in North America.

Wang's (2014) ideas could be extended to all efforts that affirm our common humanity (our humaneness) which may be human rights discourses, dialogues on sustainable human futures et cetera. The fourth aspect that this meta-study could comment upon is whether South Africa researchers are writing about ways of affirming our common humanity through building solidarities (even though complicated) in intra-national and transnational spaces.

With these international discourses in mind, we set out to explore what curriculum studies discourses have been researched by South African scholars in the field. A meta-study was conducted to engage with the following question: In what ways are National Research Foundation (NRF)-rated researchers advancing in the field of curriculum studies in South Africa?

Meta-study research

Four common purposes of a meta-study are: to contribute to knowledge development in the field; inform policy decision-making processes; synthesise findings and/or determine trends in a particular cluster of studies (Paterson et al. 2001; Pope, Mays & Popay 2007). Well-known researchers in health sciences, education and other social sciences have also started to acknowledge the value of conducting research in this way (Du Preez & Simmonds 2014; Simmonds & Du Preez 2014). Meta-study research supports the need to capitalise on the 'analysis of the theory, methods, and findings of [existing] research and the synthesis of these insights into new ways of thinking about phenomena' (Paterson et al. 2001:1).

The global increase in knowledge production too has created a need for research to be synthesised and packaged in less relativist ways so that more trustworthy generalisations

could be made (Pope et al. 2007:3). It is dynamic, iterative and therefore requires tailored methods and approaches based on review questions posed (Dixon-Woods et al. 2005:49; Pope et al. 2007:12). Although tailored (unique in purpose and operandi), to ensure validity and reliability, each study must be explicit about how the sample is derived, what needs to be analysed and how (Paterson et al. 2001; Pope et al. 2007).

In the meta-study conducted for this article, the authors opted to determine trends in a particular cluster of publications so as to identify the ways that researchers are advancing in the field of curriculum studies in South Africa. The NRF of South Africa (an independent statutory body) has a rating system that identifies researchers who are counted among the leaders in their fields of expertise and gives recognition to those who constantly produce high-quality research outputs (NRF 2019). The NRF rating processes are coordinated by academics of specialist committees who evaluate the international and national peer reviewers' reviews on the quality and impact of researchers' research over an eight-year period.

Researchers receive rating within categories (A, B, C, Y or P), with each category having sub-categories to further specify recognition according to factors such as the national/international significance, impact and quality of research et cetera. We drew our sample of publications from the research of NRF-rated researchers because we regard this research as valuable to recognising publications that are building societal knowledge through quality and high-impact research. How did the authors arrive at their sample would be elaborated on as level 1 in the meta-study design. However, firstly a schematic representation of the meta-study process (Figure 1).

Level 1: Design and organisation

We set out to identify the population, sample and corpus of documents. The population comprised NRF-rated researchers. We were able to identify the population on NRF website through publically accessible information stipulating the names of rated researchers (see documents provided at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/rating>). A document listing approximately 3900 names, disclosed each researcher's surname, initials, title, rating, institutional affiliation and specialisation. From this list we arrived at 40 researchers' ($N_0 = 40$) profiles who listed curriculum as one of the areas of specialisation. By consulting the websites of the institutions that researchers were affiliated with, we learned that all curriculum researchers were affiliated with South Africa's higher education institutes, except four who were based at international institutions in New Zealand, the UK and Hong Kong.¹ These profiles also revealed that all but two of the researchers were based in faculties/departments/schools of education or centres for teaching, learning and programme development. The two researchers who were not based in traditionally education-driven fields were based at

1. Scholars who hold permanent positions at universities outside South Africa could qualify for NRF-rating if they are associated with a South African university by means of appointments such as extraordinary professors and research fellows.

the departments of architecture and physiotherapy. This emphasises that curriculum researchers are predominantly aligned with the broad academic field of education.

We then developed working procedures to establish initial inclusion and exclusion criteria so that a sample could be identified and the corpus of documents (publications) could be selected. The criteria included accessing (1) each researcher's scientific publications in the last 8 years, including 2019 (2010–2019), (2) only scientific publications that took the form of articles in accredited journals, chapters in academic books and edited/authored academic books and (3) publications that referred to curriculum and/or curriculum-related concepts. We decided to use this timeframe because it correlates with the NRF rating system, which evaluates a researcher's past 8 years of scientific research output. To update the sample as much as possible, we included 2019 publications that were available during the data collection period (April and May 2019). We opted only to include publications listed above in criterion (2) because we could then ensure that a peer review process had been undertaken, strengthening the contributions that made to curriculum. We excluded other works such as: conference proceedings, study guides, textbooks and editorials. Reference to curriculum and/or curriculum-related concepts was an obvious criterion considering that the focus of this article is to identify the ways by which researchers are advancing this field. Whether the publications were single or co-authored was not taken into consideration because we acknowledge the significance of sole and collaborative research.

Between April 2019 and May 2019 we worked together with our institutional librarians to search different databases (ResearchGate, Academia.edu; Google Scholar and institutional websites) to identify the publications meeting our criteria. To check the completeness and accuracy of the publications that we were able to access online, the scholars whose curricula vitae (CVs) we did not have were asked to voluntarily email a CV of their publications (2010–2019). This led us to a sample of 813 publications (N). We had to obtain full texts of these publications to ensure that they all met the inclusion criteria. Although this was a lengthy process, especially when the texts were not openly available as pdf and when texts had to be requested through interlibrary loans, still we persisted, as this was crucial for a complete, valid and reliable database. We then refined our initial selection criteria by choosing the seven highest cited publications of each researcher. Having a sample of the most cited publications, we believed that this could be used as a measure of research's impact, a signal towards research exemplifying the best practice and ultimately an indicator of the advancement of curriculum studies. This refined sample selection was done by consulting the Google Scholar profiles of each researcher. In the case researchers did not have a profile, we searched Google Scholar for their publications per title to retrieve an indication of the number of citations. The seven most cited publications that met the criteria were then selected. Only two authors did not have seven publications

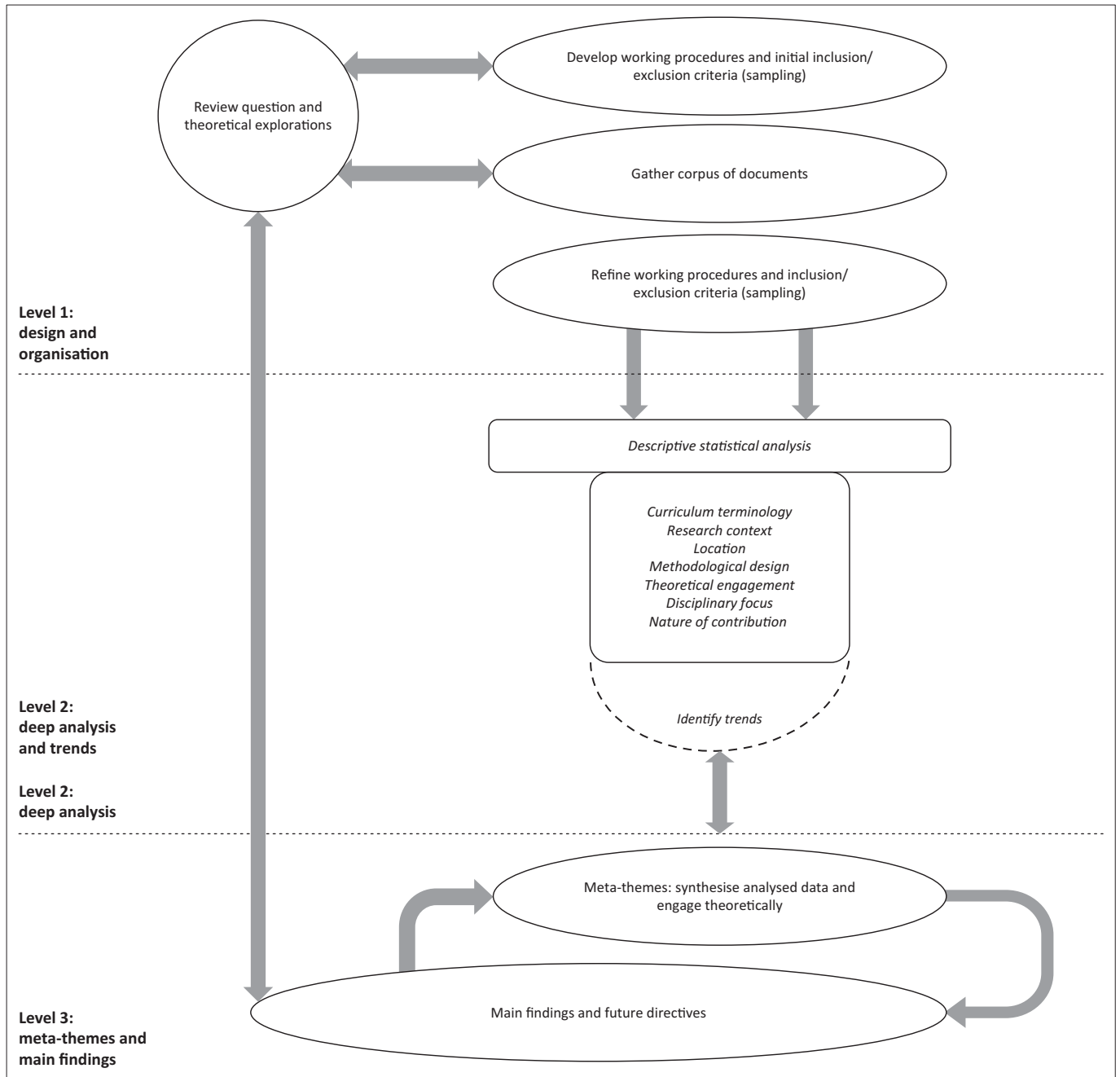


FIGURE 1: A schematic representation of the meta-study process.

that met the criteria, which lead us to reach a sample of $n = 273$ (consisting of 14 books, 16 book chapters and 243 articles), constituting 34% of the population ($N = 813$). This sample was deemed sufficient to ensure data saturation and external validity because it was a representative of all the publications in the defined criteria and allowed for generalisation based on the phenomenon being studied (see Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole 2013; Fox, Hunn & Mathers 2009). The data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods so that patterns could be arrived at. Descriptive statistics are simple quantitative measures such as percentages or mean values that are used to summarise data (Kaliyadan & Kulkami 2019). In this study, we used percentages to summarise the quantitative data. To ensure validity and reliability during analysis, an audit trail was kept. Each publication was

referenced and analysed on one Excel sheet according to the accompanying Word folder comprising full texts. The research employed a consistent approach to the analysis to ensure that all publications were analysed and captured in exactly the same manner. The percentages summarising the data findings were calculated and checked by the authors to ensure their accuracy.

Level 2: Deep analysis and trends

The research question posed by this article is: In what ways are NRF-rated researchers advancing the field of curriculum studies in South Africa? In order to engage with this question, we firstly established review questions that would drive the analysis of the publications in our sample. Publications have

common constituencies that are contextual, methodological and theoretical in nature. It were these more deductive constituencies that led us to our review questions as they enabled a detailed account of the research conducted to frame our inquiry and provide the foundation needed to reach more informed understandings of the ways in which researchers were advancing the field of curriculum studies in South Africa. The following seven review questions framed our analysis:

1. Where is curriculum referred to in the text?
2. In what context was the research conducted?
3. In which country/countries was the research conducted?
4. What was the methodological design?
5. Which theory was engaged in research?
6. Is the research multidisciplinary? If so, how?
7. Is the curriculum contribution claimed by the publication theoretical or practical in nature?

Each review item measured the findings as they emerged from predetermined categories stipulated by the review questions. Using descriptive statistics, the findings were recorded on an Excel document so that calculations and measurements per finding could be arrived at. See Table 1 for an illustration of the findings.

Below the table, a motivation for the item in each review question, followed by the inductive findings that emerged and related measurements are given.

Each publication was first analysed in terms of the curriculum terminology used. We perused this to identify whether and where researchers explicitly used the term curriculum. It became evident from the publications that only 35 (13%) did not make explicit reference to the *term curriculum*, they relied rather on curriculum-related concepts such as teaching, learning, pedagogy and instruction. Although 55 publications (20%) used the term in their titles, 67 (25%) in the abstracts and 108 (40%) in the keywords, most researchers (235 publications, 86%) did refer the term in the body and/or references of publications. This states that the majority of researchers sampled made explicit use of the concept in their research.

As for the second review question, we deemed it important to determine where the research was conducted as a way of establishing the *contexts* of the research and the *stakeholders* with whom curriculum research was generated. The 'context' of higher education (128 publications, 47%) was the most researched topic. Publications that focussed on researching teaching methods, learning approaches, assessment practices, teaching-learning materials programmes, lived experiences (students/lecturers), researchers, academic staff development and institutional transformation were common in this context. Schooling (primary and secondary) was the second most researched field with 75 publications (27%) researching principals, teachers, learners, classroom practice, teaching-learning and assessment related to basic schooling. Publications addressing national and/or departmental

TABLE 1: Research findings from the review questions.

Review item	Findings	Number of publications	Percentage of sample (<i>n</i> = 273)
Curriculum ¹ terminology	Text does not include curriculum	35	13
	Included in title	55	20
	Included in abstract ²	67	25
	Included in keywords	108	40
	Included in body and/or references	235	86
Research context	Schooling (primary/secondary)	75	27
	Further vocational training (TVET/vocational education)	3	1
	Higher education	128	47
	National education/departments of education	27	10
	Policy studies	25	9
	Society (non-education)	15	5
Location	Research conducted in South Africa	228	84
	Researched conducted outside South Africa	23	8
	Comparative research, including South Africa	22	8
Methodological design	Qualitative	111	41
	Quantitative	25	9
	Mixed research	17	6
	Conceptual (non-empirical)	120	44
Theoretical engagement	Curriculum history	20	7
	Curriculum development/design	22	8
	assessment	19	7
	Teaching-learning	73	27
	Curriculum as a field	4	1
	Professional development	44	16
	Philosophy of education	12	4
Sociology of education	79	29	
Disciplinary focus	Not multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary	48	18
	Multidisciplinary with a non-education field	19	7
	Interdisciplinary with a school-based national curriculum subject	43	16
	Interdisciplinary with a field	55	20
Nature of contribution	Transdisciplinary with sociology of education	108	40
	Theoretical contribution claimed	119	44
	Practical contribution claimed	154	56

TVET, Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

education contexts (27 publications, 10%) and policy (25 publications, 9%) were less researched. Fifteen (5%) publications referred to research outside education, in community, public and corporate contexts. The least researched context was that of further vocational training (namely Technical and Vocational Education and Training [TVET]/vocational education) with only three publications (1%) referring to this field. In correlation with the context, the third review question analysed the publications to recognise the *location* of the conducted research. The vast majority (228 publications, 84%) of the research was conducted in South Africa. Twenty-two publications (8%) included the research conducted in South Africa in comparison with other countries, and for 23 publications

2.The term 'curric*' was searched for in full texts to account for all possible variances, for example curriculum, curricular and curricula.

3.For publications that did not provide an abstract, the introduction was analysed.

(8%), the research was conducted in countries such as Zimbabwe, Hong Kong and Eritrea, with no reference to South Africa. The *methodological* design of the research conducted was analysed as the next review question. This also correlates with the context and location as it further elaborates on how the research was designed. Research was designed by conceptual studies such as literature reviews in 120 publications (44%). Empirical methodologies were employed by 111 qualitative design publications (41%), 25 quantitative (9%) and 17 mixed-methods research (6%). Case study, ethnography, document research and narrative inquiry were common qualitative designs. Quantitative research included experimental and non-experimental designs, and mixed-methods included both explanatory and exploratory designs.

The fifth review question required that the publications be analysed to reveal the *theory* engaged so that we could identify the theoretical base drawn by researchers. Majority of the publications (138 or 51%) employed curriculum-orientated theories. From maximum to minimum, these were theories pertaining to: teaching-learning (73 publications or 27%); curriculum development/design (22 publications or 8%); curriculum history (20 publications or 7%); assessment (19 publications or 7%) and curriculum as a field (4 publications or 1%). Theories on sociology of education were also dominant as 79 publications (29%) engaged with theories pertaining to gender, race, socio-economics, politics, knowledge, democracy, identity, inclusivity, leadership and other sociological aspects influencing curriculum. Professional development and philosophy of education theory was also engaged by 44 (16%) and 12 (4%) publications respectively.

The last two review questions required analysing the publication in its *entirety*, more holistically to determine the *disciplinary focus* and the claimed contribution. Only 48 publications (18%) were not multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary as they focussed only on curriculum in different sections of publications: the background, intellectual conundrum, theory, methodology and discussion. The rest of the publications were multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary in one or more sections of research. A total of 108 (40%) publications applied or integrated their research with sociology of education in terms of gender, race, class, culture, ethnicity, identity, human rights values, disease, disability, ability, social justice, inclusivity, diversity, democracy, violence, transformation, spatiality, economics, politics, leadership, management, unions, decolonisation, Africanisation and indigenisation. Fifty-five (20%) were interdisciplinary with the following fields of study: early childhood development, technology, language, history, doctoral education, life sciences, natural sciences and philosophy. Forty-three (16%) were interdisciplinary with school-based subjects of national curriculum (mathematics, history, natural science, life sciences and language). Nineteen (7%) were multidisciplinary with non-education fields (health sciences, theology, architecture,

engineering, human and social sciences such as management and journalism). Lastly, when analysed to identify the *curriculum contribution* claimed by the research, we opted to distinguish whether the contribution was practical or theoretical. A practical contribution is procedural and often situational, making the knowledge contribution pragmatically laden, whilst the theoretical is conceptual and abstract (cf. Shay 2016). Although they differ, both forms of contributions are deemed important because advancing the field of curriculum studies is both a practical and theoretical endeavour. In the publications analysed, in 154 publications (56%), contributions were practical in nature as the research initiated novel curriculum designs, research methodologies, policy enactments, teaching styles, learning strategies and professional development approaches. We drew on two publications to provide examples of practical contributions. Through a comparative study (cited for approximately 97 times), the book edited by Carnoy, Chisholm and Chilisa (2012) compares student learning in primary schools to make recommendations to policy makers to improve student performance in mathematics. By researching characteristics of teachers and teaching, how curriculum could be designed and developed is put forth with the aim to contribute to successful student learning. Msibi (2012) also makes a practical contribution with his research (cited for approximately 136 times) that learns from the lived experience of sexually marginalised black high-school students to raise awareness in schools and initiate greater support for non-normative sexualities. Problematising and conceptualising the possibilities of hidden curriculum, school culture and re-education of teachers on pertaining to non-normative sexualities are novel contributions towards pragmatic change. Contributions of other 119 publications (44%) were theoretical in nature as the curriculum research lead to theory-building, meta-levels of theorising through problematisation, critique and evaluation to make abstract, and conceptual and normative propositions for curricula. Two examples are provided here. The paper by Young and Muller (2010), with approximately 355 citations to its credit, makes a theoretical contribution that advances the field of curriculum studies. It confronts and problematises the view that 'access to powerful knowledge is a right for all not just the few' and puts forth a theory coined as 'three futures for education' to propose scenarios of powerful knowledge, how it is acquired and the crucial role of formal education in this process (Young & Muller 2010:24). Brown and Czerniewicz (2010) provide another example of a publication that made a theoretical contribution to curriculum studies in their article that has received approximately 320 citations.

This publication interrogates the pervasive discourse of the concept of 'digital native' as an exclusionary dichotomy that discriminates students and their learning. This leads to a type of digital apartheid, which the authors propose, instead, be framed by a new discourse that they have conceptualised as a theory of digital democracy. Both these publications stimulated normative (rather than descriptive) conceptualisation, innovative reasoning and abstract thinking to generate new theory.

Level 3: Meta-themes and main findings

A meta-study by nature takes a broad rather than in-depth view of a topic. So, in this section we discuss the findings based on the review questions this study attempted to answer. Our comments on the findings are broad and necessarily have to be followed-up by in-depth studies into the themes constructed in this article.

A prevalent observation based on the findings of the meta-study is that the NRF-rated South African curriculum researchers surveyed in this study are seriously engaging in research with the aim of understanding curriculum. Their commitment to doing so is evident by the proliferation of research on curriculum produced, even if they are doing so in disagreement and in isolation (confined to particular communities) and in their noteworthy advancements of the field through the nature of the emanating contributions as both theoretical and practical. We can, in some sense, infer that curriculum scholars in South Africa are engaging on an ongoing basis with questions concerning the worthiness of knowledge – Autio's (2014) sense of 'moral'. There is an understanding of professional ethics of this field.

However, there is not much evidence of complicated conversations occurring among South African scholars, with the exception of a few key publications over the last eight years (2010–2018), for example Pinar (2010) and Samuel, Dhunpath and Amin (2016). Complicated conversations among South African scholars from different research communities (divided ideologically) is a necessary condition for the advancement of the field. The present decolonial moment in South Africa might be the spur for such complicated conversations (Le Grange 2018).

The first theme that the findings illuminate is the strong localism/nationalism of the field. This is expected given the fact that the field of curriculum studies is influenced by distinctive histories, cultures and interests of particular nations. As mentioned in the introduction, localism is an important counter-force to the homogenisation and standardisation associated with globalisation. However, as intimated, there are dangers to narrow localisms/nationalisms that could thwart the advancement of the field. Tentatively, we suggest that some South African curriculum scholars have mitigated this threat to the field's advancements by engaging in critical conversation with scholars from abroad. Exemplars of this are found in Pinar (2010) and Samuel et al. (2016).

The second theme that emerges from the findings of this study is that the context of higher education is highly researched by South African curriculum scholars. This is surprising, given the strong focus on school curriculum internationally and in South Africa, including in the first decade of the 21st century. As Le Grange (2006) wrote:

When the word curriculum is invoked it is generally understood as applying to school education, that is, to the prescribed learning programmes of schools or more broadly to the learning opportunities provided to school learners, rather than to higher education. A survey of articles published in prominent

curriculum journals such as *Journal of Curriculum Studies* and *Curriculum Inquiry*, for instance, shows that very little space is given to articles on higher education. Ironically, the term was first used in relation to higher education rather than school education. (p. 189)

It remains true that specialist curriculum journals and handbooks reporting curriculum research continue to place emphasis on schooling rather than higher education. However, evidently there has been a shift in focus over the past decade in South Africa. This might be so because there has been a growing interest in understanding higher curriculum in the past two decades. Internationally, the growing interest is evident in several books published, including Barnett (2018), Barnett and Coate (2005), Leask (2015), Margolis (2001) and Wolf and Hughes (2007). In South Africa, this growing interest in higher curriculum is obvious in published works such as Bitzer and Botha (2011) and Samuel et al. (2016), and more recently Jansen (2019). The shift in emphasis from curriculum research to higher education context is influenced, among other things, by growing inequality in the world; a global environmental crisis; academic freedom and institutional autonomy that is under threat in the neoliberal university; rapid growth of new technologies (impacting knowledge production and exchange); an emerging fourth industrial revolution; mobility of students; and calls for the decolonisation of university curriculum. The upshot of this is a need to ask critical curriculum questions, such as the perennial curriculum question, 'What knowledge is of most worth' (Spencer 1884); 'Whose knowledge?' (Harding 1991); and '[Is] knowledge enough ...?' (Le Grange 2019). Although more in-depth studies are needed, this shift in emphasis towards higher education might be an indicator of the advancement of the field of curriculum studies in South Africa.

The third theme is the interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary nature of South African curriculum studies. Scholars of the field have invigorated lines of connection in multiple ways, connecting curriculum studies with other foundational disciplines of education such as philosophy of education (Le Grange 2012) and sociology of education (Young & Muller 2010) connecting with the fields outside of education (Fisher, Lange & Nkambule 2017), and even connecting with indigenous knowledges (Lotz-Sisitka 2011). What we are witnessing here is the deterritorialising of curriculum studies, which is where its transformative potential lies. As Le Grange (2011) states:

[T]he assemblage of disciplinary knowledge may be understood as movements that constitute them as territories and fields of interiority but also having points of deterritorialisation and lines of flight along which the assemblages of disciplinary knowledge are fragmenting and losing coherence giving rise to transdisciplinary knowledge networks. (pp. 749–750)

If the field is to productively engage challenges (local and global) of our time, then multiple vectors of connection need to be invigorated, including the connections that Smith (2014) and Wang (2014) suggested, as discussed in the introduction of this article. In this way, the field of curriculum studies in South Africa is constantly growing, unbeknown and captivated in the wonderment of what it can do or become.

The fourth theme is the strong focus on sociological work in curriculum studies. There could be several reasons for this. One is a strong focus on the work of the late British sociologist, Basil Bernstein by some scholars from former English medium universities, which has given rise to a community of Bernsteinian scholars (Le Grange 2014). Examples of works produced by NRF-rated scholars that draw insights from Bernstein are Bertram (2012), Blignaut and Au (2014), Hugo and Wedekind (2013) as well as Lockett and Naicker (2019). Although, this community remains largely insular, we have seen critical engagement with their works (see, e.g. Zipin, Fataar & Brennan 2015). Another reason for a strong focus on sociological work could of course be related to legacies of South Africa's apartheid history of racial discrimination and how race, class, ethnicity and gender, for example, intersect. This has been researched by some of the NRF-rated scholars sampled in this article: Chisholm (2012); De Lange et al. (2010); Du Preez and Simmonds (2011); Hoadley (2017); Msibi (2012); and Perumal (2016). Advancing the work in this area is important for the field but could be enhanced by taking into consideration the insights of McCarthy et al. (2014) on the reconstitution of racial identities in an age of biometric technologies of information and other related technological advancements.

Reflections on research findings: Preliminary considerations of nomadic thought as an intellectual activity and practice for advancing the field

The main findings reveal key directives for researchers of curriculum studies to consider in their current and future advancements of the field. These include the following:

- Complicated conversations among South African scholars from various research communities are a necessary condition for the advancement of the field.
- In-depth research on intellectual work (both theoretical and practical), such as the transformative potential of deterritorialising curriculum studies, is needed as a means of being conscious and explicit of the strong localism/nationalism of the field.
- Engaging discourses of globalisations and continuously changing technologies in terms of their ethical and moral bio-technological advancements and challenges would enable a deeper discourse to problematise, enhance and transform the field of curriculum studies.

In our reflections on these directives a heightened awareness to recognise the importance of considering the intellectual activity and practice of the field became paramount. Owing to strong localism/nationalism of the field, juxtaposed its interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary nature and strong sociological focus, we were attracted to the conceptualisation of what Braidotti (2011, 2013) posits as nomadic thought. As an intellectual activity and practice, 'nomadic thought amounts to a politically invested cartography of the present condition of mobility in a globalized world'; it is the 'materialistic mappings of situated, i.e. embedded and

embodied, social positions' (Braidotti 2011:4). As cartography, it is both an analytical and exegetical tool, aspiring for the critical thought and creativity needed to (re)imagine theoretical alternatives towards socially relevant knowledge rather than the neoliberalist, data-mining productions of theory for its own sake (Braidotti 2013). As a nomadic subject, the researcher has a heightened moral and ethical compass in its critiques of dominant, phallogocentric, relativistic and dualistic versions or visions of the subject, identity and knowledge and recognises 'a creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between ... but within' the constituencies being engaged with (Braidotti 2011:7–8). In another way, 'the paradoxes, power dissymmetries, and fragmentations of the present historical contest rather require that we shift the political debates from the issue of differences between ... to differences within' (Braidotti 2011:8). The political acts on the discursive and material to draw multiple connections, so 'what is political is precisely this awareness of the fractured, intrinsically power-based constitution of the subject and the active quest for possibilities of resistance to hegemonic formations' (Braidotti 2011:64). Nomadic thought is not intellectual activities and practices that are constantly in unconscious motion, or fluid without borders, instead it possesses 'an acute awareness of the non-fixity of boundaries' (Braidotti 2011:65). For Braidotti (2011:65), 'the nomad is a post-metaphysical, intensive, multiple entity, functioning in a net of interconnections.' Imagined in this way, the post-human predicament cannot be negated because it raises important questions of how human researchers (as nomadic thinkers) navigate the 'complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations' (Braidotti 2013:2). This promotes nomadic thought as transformative becoming (Braidotti 2013:167) through nomadic interventions that encourage counter-discourses to mobilise untapped resources and traditions of thought that were never mainstreamed with the intent to foster thinking about the processes rather than the concepts themselves, so that the impetus is not on the content but about the terms of the conversation (Braidotti 2011:14). For research in curriculum studies to advance the field, mere participation in its complicated conversations is not enough. As advocated by nomadic thought, the terms of the conversation (or the field) need to be acknowledged, challenged and reimagined through engaging multiple vectors of connection, as embedded and embodied, so as to advance the field from *within*. As a starting point, scholars should engage the key directives for curriculum studies that have been proposed by this article through nomadic thought.

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Authors' contributions

Both authors contributed equally to this work.

Ethical consideration

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