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Abstract

The growing demands on higher education have placed an unprecedented external pull on universities. Bernstein (Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: theory, research, critique, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Lanham, 2000) refers to this “outward” pull of the late twentieth century as the “regionalization of knowledge”. One of the consequences of this “facing outward” is contestation over curriculum and what should be privileged. Should it privilege knowing, doing or being? Should it foreground formative training in the basic sciences or applied problem-solving? Is its priority educating the mind or preparing for a vocation? These questions can set up a series of “false choices” about the purpose of higher education, what it means to be educated and what our priorities should be in curriculum reform. The aim of this paper is to move the discourse beyond these polarities by making visible the “stakes” in the curriculum reform debate illustrated in the Muller thinkpiece (High Educ 70(3):409–416, 2015). The paper offers a conceptual framework for understanding current curriculum contestation and applies the framework in an illustrative manner to a particular higher education curriculum reform initiative in South Africa. The framework shows how “what does

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it mean to be educated?” will vary depending on the different types and hence purposes of curriculum.

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