



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Imagining the Curriculum

Ronald Barnett, Institute of Education, London
Seminar, 17 June, 2010

www.ioe.ac.uk



Centre for Higher
Education Studies

The curriculum in higher education: a problem – or two

- Absence of serious debate
- Explanation?
- Framing of teaching and learning in the context of research (and professors' research interests)
- (more recently) orientation of higher education in direction of the learning economy by the state
- NB: not that there is no curriculum in HE – just an impoverished one
- So: is there/ could there be a space in which to imagine the curriculum
- - and with what kind of vocabulary?

Inadequate mantras

- Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge
- Skills, skills, skills

NB: a shift towards skills as such; and a placing of K in the world (mode 2)

Problems:

- Neither my knowledge nor my skills may be adequate tomorrow;
- I may have all the knowledge or skills in the world but (a) I may not be inclined to use them; (b) if I do, I may use them inappropriately.

Being in the world

- Not just being in the world but *being* in the world;
- What is it to be in the world?
- In a world that is changing and contestable at that?
- We have to be in certain kinds of way;
- Persons of a certain kind
- So is emerging a (renewed) concern with students as persons

Hopeful language(s)

Not just

- 'Complexity skills'
- Personal transferable skills'
- Communication skills'

(nonsenses)

But also

- 'Reflective practice' (diaries/ logs/ portfolios)
- 'Communities of practice'
- 'Creativity'

And even

- Multimodality

A schema

- Knowing
- Acting
- Being

NB: even knowledge and action require engagement, ultimately; they cannot be inert.

Forms of inquiry (Liu)

- Intellectual inquiry
- Practical inquiry
- Emotional inquiry
 - Being oneself; placing one's being into the inquiry
(cf the personal pronoun ('I') in PhD theses)

Crossing the disciplines

- The weightings of the three dimensions vary
- Characteristically, one is dominant
- Performing arts - being is uppermost

- Other dimensions (Bigland; Becher; Liu):
 - Hard/soft (quantitative/ qualitative)
 - Academic/ professional

The reclamation of the student

- Both knowledge and skills are exterior
- Now, the student as person is being called forth
- Reflective logs; attitudes; values; 'global citizen'; personality structure
- Sense in post-modernity that the individual has to give of herself; always remaking herself
- A heavy burden (that is too much for some)

The rebirth of 'breadth'

- Formerly, breadth – a matter of breadth across disciplines
- Then a mix of knowledge and skills
- Now: the insertion of the student into the process of inquiry
 - 'Personalisation'
- But unduly technologicised, eg:
 - Personal tutoring systems;
 - Problem-based inquiry;
 - Interactive WLEs

Proposal: the ecological curriculum

- Being in the world
- Sensitive to its interconnectedness
- Not inert but engaged
- - in its sustainability and even its improvement
- A care for the world
- The student as global citizen
- An active empathy for the world
- - a demanding set of experiences

Lifewide learning

- Distinguish lifelong learning/ lifewide learning
- Lifewide learning – explicitly connects with the life-world of the student
- Many students are lifewide learners
- - with learning experiences that are contributing to their formation as global citizens

Learning challenges for universities

- Students in time and space complexes
- Local/ global
- Their own life-worlds
- Learning not confined (with knowing or skill boundaries)
- Now learning is in life/ for life/ across life
- Students are ahead of their universities (very often)
- They are 'designing' their own learning strategies

Imagining the curriculum

- **(So)** we need fundamentally new thinking
- No longer ‘new maps of knowledge’ or ‘maps of skills and competencies’
- But a curriculum for the student’s total life-world
- Aware of its own place in time and space
- We need imagination!
- Totally new thinking, bringing elements of K/A/B together in new configurations

Conclusions

- The medieval university curriculum – reflected universal themes
- Now the curriculum has become parochial (bounded by particular Knowledge and Skill)
- But now a liquid world in which the self is called upon to give an account of itself
- A post-modern age and a post-metaphysical age
- But new universalities press forward – of being, of becoming, of the life-world, of a global age, of sustainability
- Huge challenges
- The first step is that of imagining the curriculum
- Dare we do so?

