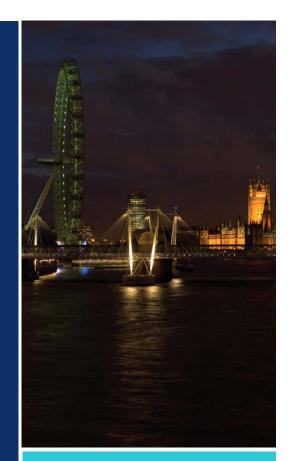


Imagining the Curriculum

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

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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
- 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 K 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?



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