Imagining the Curriculum

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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, 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’
(nonsense)
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?