Reconceptualising the Curriculum: from commodification to transformation

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ABSTRACT *This article inveighs against the prevalent commodified discourse in Higher Education especially as it impacts on curriculum planning, quality assurance and learner typologies. It expresses a concern that educational research, in offering models drawn, but now divorced from, practice, may contribute to this negative impact. As an example, a polarised model distinguishing features of 'traditional' from 'emerging' curricula is criticised as contributing to this commodification; as diminishing the status of university teachers, as offering an instrument to reductive quality assurance systems and as militating against the disciplines operating as communities of practice. In contradistinction to this dichotomizing model, but extrapolating from the same article, a 'both/and' model outlining elements of process- and discipline community-based 'transformational curricula' is offered. It is perhaps impossible to write about the evils of externalised models and reductively abstract discourse without contributing to that very effect. The article therefore ends with two voices which are not those of educational researchers.*

The social, political and institutional constraint that most inhibits the way I work? The all-prevailing model of the university as a roll-on-roll-off skilling factory and of anybody challenging that model as rather amateur, rather blinkered clingers to a past Golden Age. Less obviously and more seditiously, that learning is a goal-orientated, rather than a developmental and transformational activity. Once that is accepted, the rest follows: the government and stakeholders can properly intervene to specify the goals (and the goal posts); the curriculum, teaching and assessment can properly be planned to ensure that the requisite proportion of the population can achieve those goals, everyone involved in the business of education can have targets and be accountable (but not rewarded … !) for achieving them.

I used to think, thanks to Kuhn, that a paradigm was a lofty intellectual construct, a consensus about the epistemology, methodology and philosophic basis of a discipline. That was what shaped practice, gave validity and rigour, informed pedagogy, mapped out and inspired the discipline's goals. However, that has been replaced: the paradigm under which I work, which constrains (or tries to!) all I do,

is a political and pragmatic framework of audit and (I suspect provenly wrong-headed) managerialism. Funnily enough, the audit culture itself is, though tiresome, not essentially burdensome—I'm used to assuming complete responsibility for what I do and for those I teach, and audit actually makes me 'accountable' for only a minor part of that. However, with audit and operationalism comes a daily interface with handed down (or hand-me-down?) systems designed to control my output. Under the guise of 'quality maintenance' comes a system designed to do that—to control the quality level of a product (chocolate bars, lavatory cleaner, year 2 core module).

That desire for control, I believe, is not and never should be part of any sort of and any level of education. It not only inhibits, it vitiates learning and teaching, which are based in a freely-offered common investment in the process by all parties. It may enable training in performance skills, with which I have no problem—provided all parties accept that that is what they are doing and enter the training course freely and willingly. There may well be a training aspect as part of tertiary education, but training should never be offered as, or charged for as, education.

I do not know why we university teachers never said—'that is not what we do' when all this started. I suspect that it was insecurity about our own professionalism and a (rather childish) wish to be given a gold star as validation from outside authorities and a *bigger* gold star than our rivals. Well, we have certainly reaped the whirlwind and had the vestiges of independent professionalism stripped from us. I think those of us who collaborated have done a grave disservice to young university teachers. We have been criminally neglectful not only of the values of education, but of the needs of this and the next generation of students.

What do I do? I write articles and arguments like this; I research topics at the interface of my teaching and disciplinary work, such as dialogism, in the enabling environment of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology; I edit discipline-specific books and an international Arts and Humanities journal, which tries to give a forum for teachers to develop other and aspirational professional voices. (Our mission statement is explicit: 'Articles will be characterised by profound thought about both the interface between research and teaching and the transformational purposes of a higher education'.) I work with my discipline's Learning and Teaching Support Network Subject Centre, go to Teaching and Learning and Scholarship of Teaching colloquia and help at 'new lecturer' days. I work for the Quality Assurance Agency, trying to implement a different conception of 'quality' and sit on an 'Idea of Education' steering group in Oxford. I work with two very enlightened research projects—the Patchwork Text [an innovatory assessment format of multi-voiced, accretive writing (Winter *et al.*, 2003)] and the Cornell 'Writing in the Disciplines' consortium (Monroe, 2002). I draw on and cherish my colleagues in the Humanities Higher Education Research Group, and a group of friends and collaborators in the US and UK, whose conversations and counselling sessions are conducted by regular emails. I have the wonderful privilege, for 12 weeks a year, of teaching a dozen students in small supervision groups, in an institution that has for over 600 years failed to adopt command and control structures.

In my writing and papers I try to challenge the paradigm—the models and discourse that frame what we do. I do so very conscious of those coming into

university teaching, on whom such frameworks impinge excessively. Not to rant, but to suggest other kinds of models and to challenge underlying presuppositions, which seem to me to be often unfounded, sometimes banal, and rarely honest.

Conceptualising the Curriculum

My modes of thought are, ingrainedly those of a classicist: I look to models and polarities. So when I ran a Learning and Teaching Support Network Subject Centre/Humanities Network colloquium on Conceptualising the Curriculum, I started gratefully by summarising the defining polarities laid out in an article by Ron Barnett and colleagues 'Conceptualising Curriculum Change' (Barnett *et al.*, 2001). This article, extrapolating from interview data across various disciplines and types of institution, starts by listing the distinguishing features of two types of curriculum: 'Traditional', and 'Emerging'. The traditional, focused on the discipline, seems aimed at the traditional scholar, working away on the knowledge base of the subject; progress is by problematisation and by written debate. In the emerging curriculum, the subject area has disappeared as a focus: skills are transferable and all the aspects have an intrinsic and marketable value in themselves. In knowledge or, rather, information management, not understanding is the principal informing idea (see Table I).

TABLE I. Traditional and emerging curricula

Traditional curricula	Emerging curricula
Knowing that	Knowing how
Written communication	Oral communication
Personal	Interpersonal
Internal	External
Disciplinary skills	Transferable skills
Intellectual orientation	Action orientated
Problem-making	Problem-solving
Knowledge as process	Knowledge as product
Understanding	Information
Concept-based	Issue-based
Knowledge-based	Task-based
Pure	Applied
Proposition-based learning	Experiential learning (p. 437)

These distinguishing features, though not hard and fast, are clarifying. Such a list enables the curriculum designer to focus on the sorts of features we are introducing, the kinds of teaching and assessment strategies that are appropriate. It enables 'traditionalists' to identify themselves as such, and to consider whether and why they should adopt elements of the 'emerging' lists. The colloquium delegates were, however, both hostile and critical; the day was spent, in fact, trying to define and defend what curriculum is. The answers probably would have been recognisable to the article's authors:

- Curriculum is the imparting of a core body of disciplinary knowledge and skills.
- Curriculum is a series of learning experiences generated by empowered students facilitated by Faculty staff (a proposal made by one Head of department decried by others as Utopian).
- Curriculum is a contract, the rules of the game, laid down so both players (students) and referees (Faculty, examiners) know what to do and can be seen to be playing fair.

These answers actually reflect three fundamentally different models not just of the curriculum, but of higher education. The first is the traditional disciplinary answer—higher education is a matter of inducting the student into disciplinary practices such that they can, if they wish, progress from student to master.

The second sees higher education primarily as a series of encounters between students: the proposer talked of a first year of fully independent learning with no plenary sessions or lectures, where student work groups were helped to undertake research into knowledge areas and disciplinary history. Other Classics delegates found this hard to believe and said that were they to introduce such a system, their students, trained at school into convergent ways of working, would rebel: the English, History and Archaeology contingent were less pessimistic though still described the students as the major conservative force they had to deal with. There was also an unease around the move from teacher to facilitator: a sense that whatever the political correctness of the term, such a system necessarily handicapped students in the competition to achieve mastery over disciplinary knowledge and skills.

The third sees the structures of HE as self-enclosed, potentially arbitrary and certainly abstract conditions of exchange: of [the students'] money, time and effort for the institution's award of a degree.

Three different models reflecting the speakers' different sense:

- of the primacy of the discipline as a research community needing new entrants;
- of the university as the site of liberal education and liberating autonomy of learning;
- as the assessor and awarder of degrees.

The discussion was wide ranging (Fitzpatrick, 2003; Parker, 2003); a 'free and frank exchange of views' to use diplomatic language. However, no one was prepared to examine the values inherent in the model of curriculum change or to offer an alternative, beyond disputing the connotations of 'traditional' = 'conservative, unresponsive to change and student wishes' and 'emerging' connoting 'rising up into the light' [out of stagnation]. (We all, working as we do on a largely traditional Humanities curriculum, nevertheless took many 'emerging' features to be progressive and to be embraced—active learning, oral presentations, creating knowledge through interaction.)

Useful though I found the models and dichotomies in this important article, I fear that the very formulation of such models has destructive, as well as constructive

effects on HE teachers such as those who came to the Subject Centre colloquium. For those wishing to contribute to debate about disciplinary best practice, a model such as this of 'traditional' and 'emerging' curricula brings, I think, three unfortunate consequences:

- it contributes to the commodification of education (a popular cry) and specifically to the commodification of the students;
- it has implications, in this quality assessed age, for the confidence and self-positioning of university teachers as professionals;
- it militates against the subject areas and disciplines operating as communities of practice.

Let me try to defend these rather sweeping accusations:

Accusation 1: advancing a generic, employment-based curriculum

My main objection to a model such as 'Traditional' *v.* 'Emerging' is to its categories, especially in the latter (see 'Emerging Curricula' Table I).

The features listed are representative of the commodified, 'education = skills plus knowledge' discourse, and politically imposed values that pervade and belittle Higher Education. The underpinning insidious idea conveyed by such models is that HE curricula, be they academic, professional or vocational, are all to be judged and valued along comparable lines. The terms 'traditional' and 'emerging' are weighted: it must good to include as many features as possible that are emerging that are, just by chance, those chosen by the UK government as proper to institutions whose sole role is to prepare students for the employment market.

I am neither Luddite nor naive about this—I know where the demand for employability comes from—the Department for Education and Skills [sic]. But I know of noone outside government statisticians (who want as large a proportion off the jobseekers roll and onto the 'becoming skilled' roll as possible) who wants universities to become the country's employment training institutes. Employers don't seem impressed: they have training departments of their own who are expert in turning recruits into appropriately skilled employees and see no call to have that duplicated or undermined by 'amateurs'. One study of Humanities graduate employers came up with as desirable criteria the 'traditional' graduate skills of independence, self-motivation, intellectual maturity, autonomy, critical thinking and understanding of new structures [1]. In a different context, Barnett has reported that employers in this 'Age of Supercomplexity' want as never before what the Humanities can offer—an experience of evaluating and working with conflicting value systems and structures of knowledge, of acting despite and with partial knowledge (Barnett, 2001). Cornell's President cited the Committee on the State of Humanities' report that, given the denudation of intellectual life on campuses where Faculty and staff are devoted to 'the three moneys'—attracting it, training students about it or in how to make it—the Humanities must be brought back to the centre of the university experience (Rawlings, 2002).

So where is this coming from? I know of no data that say that say that is what

students want, except those innocent enough to 'buy into' the underlying proposition that came with the scrapping of grants—'you can be asked to pay now and become indebted for the future because your university education will ensure you get a higher paid job for the rest of your working life' [2].

First destination data being notoriously invalid, the only relevant data are those collected in recent longitudinal studies and from departmental graduate employment biographies. These set up very different parameters—portfolio working, postgraduate years abroad/years out, career gaps and contract job being the nature of the employment careers of a large proportion of graduates in their twenties. So even on the very narrow criterion, that the degree should enhance your working life, the 'training/apprentice' matrix being offered to programme designers is inadequate and irrelevant, for all but a handful of degrees (*Higher Education Digest* 43, Summer 2002)

So, what positive values become overlooked in this 'employability' model of the value of the curriculum? To go back to the list, I am struck by the absence of traditional 'liberal education' elements and by the presence of research-based professionalism, in the 'traditional' curricula. Traditional curricula are here conceived of as training in the qualities needed for specialists in a discipline, but this is performativity and employability by a different name—the choice would seem to be between adopting a training model for graduate employment (emerging) or one leading to postgraduate research skills (traditional). What about study for its own sake, for personal and lifelong intellectuality and critical appreciation? What about education for transformation and developing maturity? (I was incensed by a throwaway reference at a recent Learning and Teaching conference to research that showed that a high proportion of graduates when tested on subject knowledge 5 years after graduating had forgotten 90% of it (or some such figure.) The implication was clearly that the HE courses' subject knowledge is short lived and virtually useless.)

This is all part of the commodifying discourse which we academics in the 90s. thought (as if we hadn't read any socio-linguists!) that we could adopt to please the funders and powers that be. We, of course, would continue with our own values and ideals, but be willing to engage in a bit of diplomatic labelling when the occasion occurred. Now, a decade on, it is horribly plain that we have adopted the values and world view that went with the performative and commodifying discourse: because we account for our programme in terms of knowledge plus skills acquisition, we formulate HE in those terms.

The Commodified Student

As this commodifies education, so does it commodify the student—into a customer on a track to acquire a certain knowledge-and-skill packet to enable them to progress to the world of work. If this is challenged, the harsh or weary reply comes that this is, indeed, what this generation of students is—a generation of canny consumers of education, as fashion, as food, as drugs. If they are particularised, they are particu-

larised by types—'surface or deep learners', as strategic or plagiarising players of the system, which must therefore be constantly vigilant.

There is an element of emperor's clothes about all this. The assumption is that the consumer is a single-minded strategist: as with any other commodity, the student wants to have the biggest and best for the least outlay in terms of money and effort. Students will act strategically or illegally to get as much out of the system (in terms of grades), while putting as little in as possible. That is a market economy.

However, why should anyone actually want the commodity, Higher Education? The government has its answer—because the alternative is a lower quality job or dependency on state or parents. Well, yes, but is that the *motivating* factor? On the contrary, my perception of incoming students is that they are more naive than canny, expecting some riches, some deep engagement that, they accept, could not be given them in a completely rigid and denuded secondary curriculum. Essentially open to teaching, impressionable, very undeveloped and, potentially, very various. They deserve a curriculum based on different premises; their teachers deserve the contact hours, money, security, and recognition to design and implement a curriculum based on different premises.

Accusation 2: a threat to teachers' professionalism and self belief

These models arose from Barnett *et al.*'s research over different domains, but they were not received by our group as such. They were regarded as expert analyses of 'The Idea of the Curriculum': a would-be Platonic 'idea' existent as a disembodied Form, 'the Programme' against which particulars (any particular curriculum) could be measured/towards which any particular should aspire. It forms part of a body of expert research from *outside the discipline*, which needs to be assimilated by teachers and against which teachers can be judged—again by people outside the discipline. It was Plato, the philosophic modeller, who looked to transcendent Forms, but the dialogic teacher was Socrates and he looked to particulars. Both aimed to draw models to form and inform values and knowledge, but Plato deduced from the abstract and Socrates induced from the particular. As a pragmatist and pedagogue, rather than philosopher, I have no doubt which method is the more productive in affecting practice. If we demand of teachers that they adopt external models, and especially if we audit them on their compliance, we have both robbed them of their autonomy as professionals (aren't we supposed to value autonomy?) and misunderstood the nature of the teaching *profession*. Teaching intervenes, shapes and facilitates the engagement of the learners with the material. It is relational, developmental, dialogic and non-replicable: it cannot therefore embody abstract models though it can aspire to become better. Teachers can, it follows, be accountable for their practice, for their reflection in action but not for their achievement viewed in terms of 'deliverables': delivery of a model product or programme. A different, non-consumerist and non-commodity-led model of professionalism in teaching (and other vocations) must be developed for both inspirational and accountability purposes.

Use and Abuse of Curriculum Models in Quality Assurance Systems: confessions of an unregenerate subject reviewer

My invective is, of course, informed by the sinister use such research is put to by quality audit systems. Generic models of any kind which can be incorporated into a template enter immediately the discourse of quality 'assurance'. Now the UK's innovative Quality Assurance system of peer review has been got rid of as 'too intrusive and burdensome' (for which read, too liable to independent judgement, too little controllable by the Quality Assurance Agency) an equally burdensome, but internally supported, QA system has come into being—institutional audit. Internal systems are audited, systems that are required to link up 'discipline audit trails' and external quality audits such as external assessment systems.

Teaching Quality Assurance Subject Review teams (of subject academics trained as peer reviewers) were at least understanding about the trade-off between Quality Enhancement and Quality Assessment—too much of the latter, especially in small departments, invariably leading to impairment of the former. Review teams were able to come to peer judgements—judgements arising from a common understanding of the peculiar challenges and ideals of teaching in a given discipline. From the perspective of the new system of audit as was said in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (17 August 2002) peer review appears to be extremely enlightened, faulty though it undoubtedly was.

For the fundamentally flawed logic of the Subject Review process, whereby each department set its own goals, agenda and style yet reviewers were expected to judge according to an absolute and generic template, set review teams peculiarly free to gather, evaluate and defend their own judgements. That is to say, charged with applying conflicting criteria and well used to formulating judgements in the form of examiners' qualitative narratives, review teams were free to form their own bases of judgement about the overriding criterion: the student experience of learning. Despite a limited access to a real evidence base, in the course of the 4 × 18-hour days, the meetings, the talks to students, the dozen teaching observations and walking about departmental corridors, real knowledge emerged. This knowledge, in Barnett's terms (Barnett, 1994), was sceptical knowledge: a knowledge that acknowledged its own limitations. It was crystallised and expressed in a self-validating narrative, formulating and containing its own criteria: a quintessentially qualitative form of judgement. Much of this was lost in the post-review stage, but review team members meeting up subsequently on the whole agreed that they stood by the soundness of the judgements they had come to: despite desperate and crucial impediment and restriction, real insight had been gained into disciplinary education processes so much more complex than any audit system could comprehend.

My point here is that audit systems have to work with the [would-be Platonic] abstract Form of the Curriculum. Peter Knight, in 'Complexity and Curriculum', an article published in this journal, argues cogently that simple/simplistic models of the curriculum do a disservice to teachers and students alike. 'What is needed is an approach to coherence that breaks with the discourses of learning outcomes, rational curriculum planning, linear, simple systems and starts from the complexities of

learning' (Knight, 2001, p. 370) He goes on to 'criticise approaches to coherence that are based on … misbegotten metaphors of curriculum packages, delivery and reception, and on impressive lists of learning outcomes, achievement criteria, benchmark statements and suchlike shibboleths' (Knight, 2001, p. 371).

This chimes well with my sense that the way that Subject Review teams came to judgment was importantly process-based; that rather than applying external or generic models, judgment was based on induction and the resulting narrative had the potential to be a model for getting to grips with and disseminating complex teaching practice. (Though this was of course all in the teeth of the specific QAA maxim that not processes but outcomes were to be judged.) Because it seems to me, thinking back, that the soundness of the judgements reached and the benefits of peer reviewing (rather than quality management-based systems) all rested in the requirement to engage with individual and idiosyncratic complex processes of teaching and learning. In the highly energised and fraught teaching observations, judgements were principally made according to neither the prescribed criteria (use of Communication and Information Technology, of accommodation, etc. and achievement of intended learning outcomes) nor the institution's tendentious account of where this learning opportunity fitted in the total scheme of things. Rather, something much messier and more interesting emerged, validated by the constant requirement to see the session from the students' point of view. Turning that emerging perception back into judgement often challenged the categories we had expected to be investigating. This was the major benefit of peer review—for the reviewers, at least, and potentially for HE as a whole. By spending four intense days isolated from our usual roles and value systems, while bound into a newly-formed, *ad hoc* panel charged with judging others, we lost our preconceptions, our 'baggage', our received models, and gained emotional intelligence about the 'messiness of teaching' (Hammersley & Hargreaves 1984).

What came out of this exchange, movement and necessarily intense peer scrutiny and reflection on our disciplinary community's practices was precisely that: a sense of community that we were, whatever our academic divides and factions, actually part of one community of practice. It is in this sense that lies, I think, the only hope for professional accountability: a system whereby one is accountable to one's students, colleagues and discipline community for delivering a 'curriculum' in the highest sense an intellectually transformational experience of higher education. There could perhaps be a revised version of peer review: not to audit teaching, produce rankings, check up on fellow professionals or blow the whistle to stakeholders, but, rather, as part of professional self-regulation. The arrangements would be broadly reciprocal, whereby teams of peer reviewers from different institutions visit to observe teaching and hear presentations (open to students) about the departmental conceptions of the curriculum, teaching and learning strategy, support and monitoring procedures. No Base Room, no audit discourse ('Qaahili'), no Review Chair, just an attentive student and staff body free to contradict or offer their viewpoint. This would provide the home institution with a focus—presentation to self and peers—at the same time adding to the discipline community's sense of itself. It would provide a forum for new staff and new initiatives to be made known to a

wider audience, and encourage a culture of displaying and disseminating innovation and excellence—why not? The reviewers would clarify their thinking about teaching and learning by collaborating to produce an agreed, unprescribed narrative (no *post hoc* editing or Review Chair prescriptions), and take back to their own institutions a sense of differences and similarities within the common endeavour of teaching their subject. The only extra quality assurance measure needed is a thoughtful complaints procedure accessible to students and staff, so any respect in which the department is not living up to its declared 'mission' can be made public to the discipline community—a community of practice, and community of professionals, which regulates its own.

Accusation 3: external models inhibit rather than promote communities of practice

Peer review's enforced exchange of practitioners' views resulted in highly informed, intelligent and experienced 'grass roots' understanding of our disciplines' practices, a process that I see as completely contrary to that of adoption of external pedagogic expertise. Research on how communities of practice work (Wenger, 1998) shows that learning is almost entirely from reflection on practice: advice, training and professional development from outside the community are neither useful nor usable. Yet, despite the work of the Learning and Teaching Support Network's Subject Centres, there seems little time for and little confidence in subject communities' own knowledge. As was said at a recent Arts and Humanities Research Board consultation day at which imported models drawn from hard and soft sciences were rejected, 'teachers and researchers in the Humanities know a great deal and work extremely effectively. But we don't seem to have confidence in what we know'. There has been a rapid growth of Learning and Teaching Centres, of professional Learning and Teaching in HE certification. Although I should welcome these as providing a much needed boost to the status of teaching in the university, they are often generic and pander to the conception of the university that I object to so fundamentally—as a skilling place with operatives who likewise need to be skilled.

I have been enlightened and impressed by the work of the Subject Centres, many of whose Directors I have met, and by the conferences, seminars and colloquia held by the Humanities Subject Centres, which I go to in order to maintain contact with innovative work in Teaching and Learning in the Disciplines. I also have been inspired by the example of the Cornell Writing in the Disciplines Program, the precepts of which are being explored and expanded by the Cornell Consortium project 'Learning in the Disciplines' at Queen Mary College, University of London. The Cornell Program developed out of the generic writing program, 'Writing across the Curriculum' to emphasise that writing was a process not only of understanding the discipline but also of participating in the discipline. This had a revolutionary and democratising effect: the discipline as perceived as a community of practice is made up of and constantly reconstituted by its practitioners. By involving senior members of the Faculty (including Nobel Prize-winning scientists and such luminaries as the English department's Jonathan Culler), as well as doctoral students at the point in their careers when they were having to master their own material and finding their

own voice, 'Writing in the Discipline' classes bring together all levels into one creative community of practice.

This idea of the discipline I find particularly inspiring because it is so enabling—the models that matter are not those handed down or out as exempla, nor are they drawn from a research agenda but are from the everyday work of the discipline as recreated, revivified and expanded in the class/seminar-room. Again, they are internally generated out of practice, rather than measured against models drawn from outside. Drawing on the expertise as well as the validation of the discipline's masters, who could certainly claim to shape the discipline by their research, it stresses that, actually, both the agenda and life of the discipline comes from practitioners.

However, models drawn by and from within the discipline community have to be as multi-faceted, comprehensive and intellectually cogent as those posited from outside. They have to be commensurate if not comparable. They have to evaluate the processes of higher education: the students' progressive initiation into the practices and life of the discipline community, of their moving from outside to inside, from 'student' to practitioner. The point is not what they end up *with*, but what they experience while a student: the life of a scholar in a community practising its discipline. The quality that only the community of professionals that make up the discipline *can* assure is that of *under*graduateness.

Towards a Transformational Curriculum

A tentative alternative could therefore start not from a dichotomised model of curricular outcomes but from evaluating the character of the students' experience of and engagement with the discipline. [This follows on from the process-based rather than outcomes-driven approach argued for compellingly by Peter Knight in the article already referred to (Knight, 2001).] This could be a basis on which to describe the inherent value of the discipline's practices, reified as teaching and learning within the discipline. Such a curriculum would bring the student into the disciplinary community to develop and to contribute to that community's practices (including writing, presenting and debating), would not aim at a goal or be convergent, but inculcate a progressive cycle of engagement and critical reflection, of private and public, of problematising and trying out answers. I am tempted, despite my strictures above, to sketch out the skeleton of such a curriculum, to be fleshed out by each discipline. It could be called a 'Transformational' curriculum, based as it is in and valuing the teachers' and students' common engagement with the discipline's material—a messy, open, mutual set of relationships which forms the essential part of the maturing process of the intellectual person:

In reply: transformational curricula

Not 'knowing that' vs 'knowing how' but 'Valuing while critiquing knowing'.
Not written vs oral but both: 'Dialogic communication—oral and written'.

Not 'personal' vs 'interpersonal' but personal within the community: 'Cycle of engagement from private to communal and back'.
Not 'internal, discipline-based' vs 'external, transferable skills-based' but universal and enduring intelligence: 'Critically reflective orientation'.
Not 'problem-making' vs 'problem-solving' but 'From problematisation to offering provisional answers'.
Not 'knowledge as process' vs 'knowledge as product' but 'Knowledge as life-enhancing'.
Not 'understanding' vs 'information' but [Disciplinary community-wide] 'Engagement'.
Not 'concept' vs 'issue' but 'Criticism [in its largest sense]-based'.
Not 'pure' vs 'applied' but 'Critical-reflective upward spiral'.
Not 'proposition-based' vs 'experiential' but 'Progressive and truly life-long learning' …

I have used one research report's classification of findings to stand as an externally applied and commodifying paradigm. This is unfair in many ways, not least in that in the later part of that article there is a model that suggests a new model of HE, and points to an alternative and transformational curriculum. From pp. 438–440 there is a series of Venn diagrams, which map curricula in terms of three overlapping aspects: 'knowledge', 'action' and 'self'. This could be the start of a different taxonomy—one not (as here) of curricula, but of learning, not as here, analysed by an external expert researcher but developed, in the course of the three years, by the student.

There are well-established studies of learner behaviours, but they are largely posited on previously agreed goals. So learner types are distinguished by their strategies, approaches and routes to achieving the said goal—say passing a module, retaining a body of knowledge or completing an assignment or mickey mouse test. However, if the subject area is re-presented as a series of options, of activities, knowledges, interests that can be explored according to the aspirations of the student, would different patterns emerge? The curriculum conceptualised not in terms of types of learners' strategies, but of intellectual interests and engagements.

For example, different students prefer to be assessed by different routes not just because they are 'better' at say exams than coursework, tightly defined task or open-ended questions. It is also because the assessment type suits their aspirations. Some wish to have their assessment tightly associated with the whole year's work, to have their performance, in all senses, judged. Others are much less conscious of their role as learners and see, rather, the subject area as an ever expanding series of challenges, interests, questions. They want to map out the parameters of the subject, get to some kind of pyramid top, from where they can look over each aspect from some position of clarity, before being judged on the intellectual level they have achieved. And in a world where nearly all students who engage with their course get

a 2:1, they might have very different attitudes to what is being summed up in a summative assessment (they may consider assessment a necessary evil that neither enhances nor impinges on their study or may see the assessment as entirely definitive—the course is that which assessed and their intellectual and 'disciplinary self' is dependent on and validated by doing well in the assessment.).

Some of the distinctions drawn above fit with Ames and Archer's 'mastery' 'performance' typing of students: the difference lies in the source of motivation: extrinsic for 'performers' (who like to perform in and to a community) and intrinsic to 'masters' (motivated primarily by their wish to master the subject, by their engagement with the discipline, independent of external recognition) (Ames & Archer, 1998). I think this distinction important, because unlike most divisions it is not clear which behaviour is preferable; it also investigates student motivation, which in other learner taxononies is ignored as if students are lab rats after cheese.

Could Barnett, Parry and Coate's later model be expanded? The 'knowledge' domain could remain, representing the fundamental engagement with the subject that draws students to study it (and teachers to teach it). The 'activity' could include what students actually want to do with this knowledge (if the idea of 'learn and be tested on it' is not allowed to be primary). Some will want to acquire detailed knowledge of certain small areas, others to map the field in outline, to know 'where it fits'; others to see what others have made of it—approaches, isms, schisms, appropriations, representations.

The 'activities'—perhaps, better, 'engagements' may well be negotiable and allow for development through play—in the Winnicott sense not of 'non-serious endeavour', but in terms of playing with, trying out, discarding identity, purpose, shape. Engagements such as writing, making oral presentations, team tasks could all allow for such play: writing in various voices including pastiche, parody and other genres could be encouraged, team tasks could involve role play or creative presentations. The important thing is that such engagements are based on a thoughtful and creative look at disciplinary practices rather than tailored to research or employability agendas.

How does the 'self' sphere interact with the others? That is the big and hitherto largely untheorised question in curriculum planning, which still works largely with 'dependent/independent/autonomous' models of student progression. However, if Barnett, Parry and Coate's third model could be developed into one for the Transformational Curriculum, it may be that each student in a sense draws their own diagram of the interacting aspects of knowledge, self and action. What kind of learner is s/he? What kind of engagement is s/he particularly energised by, particularly good at? What, for him or her, is the domain/the discipline? Is it a body of knowledge, a set of approaches or ideas, a certain way of analysing a text, a particular form of writing and argument? Is it one particular problem, or area, that the student wants to solve or make her own? What range of disciplinary voices can s/he command? How does s/he judge: a text, a critic, her- or himself, others; how does s/he like to be judged? To go back to the beginning of this paper, how does s/he move from particular texts or passages to concepts and structures, or vice versa?

How do her or his intellectual concerns inform her/his ethical, political, religious and personal life?

All this is to propose that what is educative about the curriculum is the area of overlap, that is to say simultaneous engagement and interaction, between the domains of knowledge, activity and self; in fact, it could be said that this should be at maximum.

Thinking about this sent me back to wondering how one would characterise a curriculum that would engage the student's love of knowledge, and use that to reinspire the teacher's, would develop a mature critical self, which was nevertheless sophisticatedely appreciative, would incorporate the Barnett value of dealing with supercomplex paradigms and value systems while understanding how and why to invest oneself.

As I was writing that paragraph I received out of the blue an email from a student a few months after graduation with the sort of thank you note that every teacher lives for—not saying my teaching changed his life, but that my subject did. He didn't do outstandingly well in the final exams, and didn't need to as he has an already well-established career as an actor. However, he emailed to say:

> On that last week of intensive Tragedy work I had more exciting, surprising and plain big ideas about literature than ever before. The effort was emphatically worth the result, if not vice versa.
>
> So, anyway, that's why I needed to say thank-you—you injected the lot of us with an unanticipated appetite for the whole thing right from the first meeting last June. The better half of Euripides still awaits reading on my bookshelf, and I actually think it'll happen (though maybe slowly). May even finish Aeschylus someday (!). Unless it wants to trawl through my notes, the world will have to live without my triumphant tying-up of Sylvia Plath, *Caligula*, Primo Levi and *Arcadia* in one (rather baggy) bag, but I enjoyed every minute (actually not an exaggeration, I realize) of pulling it together.

There is a final note in Roald Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World* that I read to my assembled children when they were aged 5, 3 and − 2 weeks old. Not feeling at all sparky, I read with guilt:

<div align="center">

What a child wants
and deserves
is a parent who is

SPARKY

</div>

I feel that all students deserve an education that is SPARKY, and to graduate saying that they 'had more exciting, surprising and plain big ideas about literature[/History/ Chemistry …] than ever before and that it is no exaggeration to say that they enjoyed every minute of pulling it together'.

A transformational curriculum descriptor?

NOTES

[1] Oxford Brookes Department of English and Publishing 'What do Employers Want?' Research Project (report forthcoming).

[2] See phase one data on the limited add-on value of most HE institutions—the correlation with well-paid jobs being, to a large extent, with background, class and entrance into a prestige HE institution, rather than the course in itself. 'Access to what? How to convert educational opportunity into employment opportunity for groups from disadvantaged backgrounds. Analysis of factors determining graduate employability: Executive Summary' (*http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri*). Many institutions—the University of the Valleys and of Paisley, to name two, reported to at a recent conference on the Idea of Education at Oxford (ebook forthcoming *http://www.inter-disciplinary.net*) that in their areas of high unemployment their degrees make relatively no difference to employability, except in terms of resultant personal skills and confidence.

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