Transformational knowledge, educational leadership and curriculum design

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Opening questions

➢ Why do you think it is important for students to have access to higher education?

➢ What is the most important reason?

A challenge from the 'Quality Culture in Higher Education' White Paper 2017

[A]nyone who has ever set foot in a university or university college remembers … that lecturer who really opened your eyes and helped you to see the world in a new way; who really took you seriously as a student; who introduced you to the academic community. This is the foremost task of higher education. Knowledge is not a good to be communicated and consumed: it is something that forms and develops when lecturers and students come together….

One of the main objectives of this white paper is for students to receive an education that will be relevant to their working lives… What can [higher education institutions] do to ensure that students not only graduate with skills that are in demand in today's labour market, but also have the ability to adapt and renew themselves? How can they guarantee that students will make innovative, attractive and productive employees who will help to shape society for the next 20 to 30 years?

A potential tension in 'Quality Culture in Higher Education'

HE is about engaging students with academic knowledge

HE is about preparing students for employment

A possible future for Higher Education

Enhancing the employability of graduating students features significantly in the strategic agenda of higher education providers worldwide.

There has been a gradual shift in industry expectations of graduates from exhibiting academic expertise in a chosen discipline to a commercially aware candidate with a strong command of, and immediate ability to apply, a broad range of skills deemed essential in the workplace.

(Jackson 2014)

Future 1: Generic competencies

➢ The key purpose of higher education is to provide the next generation of professionals;

➢ This can best be approached by enabling students to develop the generic competencies that employers and society value;

➢ This will lead to both individual prosperity and economic development.

Problems with Future 1: The notion of generic competencies

➢ Just because we can describe a practice in terms of generic competencies, it does not mean that this is what actually at stake in this practice;

➢ We can describe the same practice in terms of as many generic competencies as we have the imagination to generate;

➢ Skilful practices are based on our knowledge, our understandings of particular tasks, our interactions with other people and things, and the setting we are in.

The importance of curriculum

➢ Bernstein's (2000) notion of the 'pedagogic device' can be seen to relate to three versions of knowledge:

> ➢ Knowledge-as-research;

> ➢ Knowledge-as-curriculum;

> ➢ Knowledge-as-student-understanding

(see Ashwin 2014 for an exploration of these distinctions).

➢ Knowledge is transformed as it moves between these three forms.

➢ Emphasises the power struggles as knowledge is transformed into student understanding
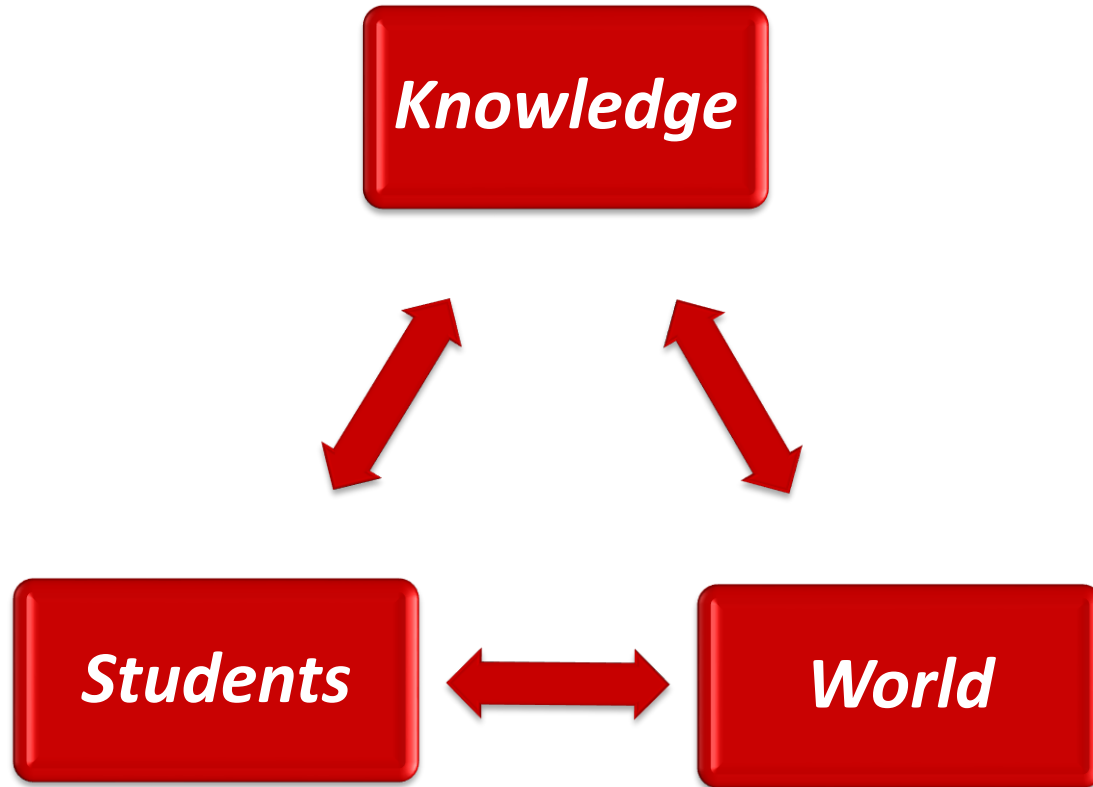
Future 2: A student and knowledge focused higher education

➢ Teaching in higher education is about designing ways in which particular students can develop an understanding of particular bodies of disciplinary and/or professional knowledge (Ashwin et al. 2015 based on Shulman 1987).

➢ The transformational nature of undergraduate degrees lies in changes in students' sense of self through their engagement with disciplinary and professional knowledge;

➢ Students relating their identities to their disciplines/professions and the world and seeing themselves implicated in knowledge;

➢ This does not always happen – it requires students to be intellectually engaged with their courses and to see it as an educational experience. This is dependent on both students and the quality of their educational experience (Ashwin et al 2016)

There is no destination with this discipline...There is always something further and there is no point where you can stop and say 'I understood, I am a sociologist'. … The thing is sociology makes you aware of every decision you make: how that would impact on my life and how it could impact on someone else. And it makes the decision harder to make (Esther, Selective, Year 3, Pedagogic Quality and Inequality Project).

Discipline	Studies	Least inclusive Account	'Watershed' account	Most Inclusive account
Mathematics	Wood et al. 2012	Numbers	Models	Approach to life
Accountancy	Sin et al. 2012	Routine work	Meaningful work	Moral work
Law	Reid et al. 2006	Content	System	Extension of self
Music	Reid 2001	Instrument	Meaning	Communicating
Geography	Bradbeer et al. 2004	General world	Structured into parts	Interactions
Geoscience	Stokes 2011	Composition of earth	Interacting systems	Relations earth and society

The transformative power of higher education for students

Implications of Future 2

Key role for Study Programme Leaders in ensuring that degree programmes are well designed and based on evidence-informed views of:

➢ who the students are;

➢ how and why the knowledge, which students are offered access to, is important and powerful; how it enables them to understand and change the world;

➢ who students will become through their engagement with this knowledge; how they will contribute to society including, but not limited to, their employment;

This is difficult, collective, intellectual work, which involves on-going dialogue and experimentation (Ashwin et al 2015).

Questions to support the design of curricula I

1. On what basis has knowledge been selected for inclusion in the curriculum? Who has had a say in selecting this knowledge?

2. What account has been taken of who the students are and what they know in designing the curriculum?

3. What new things will students be able to do because they have engaged with this knowledge?

4. How will those teaching the programme use their expertise to support students' engagement with these bodies of knowledge?

Questions to support the design of curricula II

5. How will other resources (including other students, teaching and learning interactions, readings, technologies) support this engagement?

6. How and why is this engagement expected to lead to new ways of thinking and doing for the students?

7. What evidence (from data on teaching practices, investigations of teaching practices, and the research literature) has informed the design of our degree programmes?

So what?

- ➢ There is a dangerous tendency in current debates in higher education that puts 'academic knowledge' and 'employability' in a false opposition;

- ➢ We need to develop clearer accounts of why the knowledge we are giving students access to is powerful and what it will enable students to do in the future;

- ➢ We need to look for ways of making this powerful knowledge accessible to all of our students.

- ➢ This can only be done through on-going discussion between academics, students and others and by recognising that curriculum design involves:
  - ▪ Collective bodies of knowledge;
  - ▪ The collective transformation of knowledge into usable material;
  - ▪ Contestation and power in shaping the curriculum and who is seen as 'owning' it.

- ➢ Study Programme Leaders have a pivotal role to play in leading these discussions in a thoughtful, rigorous and inclusive way

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