

Planning for a journey into the unknown: Some principles for the art of curriculum design

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Questions

- What are the purposes of a higher education?
- Who should be the beneficiaries?
- What curriculum content and processes are appropriate for those purposes and people?

“Alice: Which way should I go?

Cat: That depends on where you are going.

Alice: I don't know.

Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.”

Alice in Wonderland: Lewis Carroll

Agenda

- Key questions
- Background
- Things to think through
- Some principles

Background

- From elite to mass
- Economic purpose
- Globalisation
- Public to private

More means worse?

Wider student group
A more complex world

What is a curriculum for?

- The passing on of the best that is known
- Social change
- Economic development and wealth creation
- Individual self-fulfilment

Economic purposes

How far to
foreground?
What and how to
teach?

Globalisation

- Competition
- Staff and student flow
- Whose culture?

Networks

- Information speed and complexity
- Knowledge communities

The influence of global rankings



- Beyond control of government
- Mainly prestige measures including academic opinion
- Underplaying teaching and community engagement
- Focusing on individual institutions not systems



Who gets the best?
And what about the rest?

“A competitive
market in
private status
goods”

Public, private and the market

Openness and closure

“The near zero marginal cost revolution has already wreaked havoc on the publishing, communication and entertainment industries ...” (Rifkin)

Student-centred?

When we put together in one scheme such elements as:

- A prescribed curriculum
- Similar assignments for all students
- Lecturing as almost the only mode of instruction
- Standard tests by which all students are externally evaluated
- Instructor-chosen grades as the measure of learning

Then we can almost guarantee that meaningful learning will be at an absolute minimum.

Carl Rogers

Rational Planning:
the dominant model
across HE

Constructive alignment

- we specify the desired outcomes of our teaching in ... topic content (and) ...the level of understanding we want students to achieve.
- We then set up an environment that maximises the likelihood that students will engage in the activities...
- Finally, we choose assessment tasks that will tell us how well individual students have attained these outcomes..."

(Biggs)

Everything is known ...
I know and you don't ...

Socio-cultural dimension

- Identity
- Communities
- Capital

What does it now mean to be “academic”?

The tripartite role

- Teaching
- Research
- Administration / service

The disappearing academic?

Boyer's scholarships

- Discovery
- Integration
- Application
- Teaching and learning

What might we profess?

Complex learning and its development?

At last Some principles

- Learning is about self-creation and self-alteration
- Learning is social (communities, identities)
- Learning is a public good as well as a private good
- Universities should be inclusive places (sideways mobility)
- Learning should be a research-like activity
- Knowledge is increasingly specialist and connected
- Education is relevant and makes a difference
- Finally, curriculum must be researched



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