Revisiting ‘good’ education: towards a Connected Curriculum

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Overview

1. ‘Good’ education: revisiting scholarship
2. Research-based education
3. The Connected Curriculum framework
4. Your questions and comments
Theoretical framing (1)

Education defined here as *Bildung*, drawing on the field of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004):

- ‘self-formation’ through dialogue
- the widening of horizons

The human mind needs to remain ‘unsatisfied with what it imagines it knows’ (Fairfield 2010, 3).
Scholarships of discovery, integration, application and teaching  (Boyer 1990)

‘We believe that the time has come to move beyond the tired old 'teaching versus research' debate and give the familiar and honorable term 'scholarship' a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work.’ (1990, 16)
‘Good’ education: underpinned by scholarship

Scholarship is:

‘the principled space that connects integrity, research, teaching, learning, personal development, and contribution to the world’.

Scholarship ‘embodies the hermeneutic principle that the human mind must remain open, which is at the core of critical thinking and being’.

(Fung, forthcoming)
Towards values-based education

UNESCO calls for

‘a humanistic vision of education and development, based on respect for life and human dignity, equal rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity, and shared responsibility for a sustainable future. These are the fundamentals of our common humanity.’ (UNESCO, 2015, p.9)
Theoretical framing (2)

In William Pinar’s ‘curriculum’, teachers are ‘communicants in a complicated conversation that is informed by academic knowledge, subjectivity and the historical moment.’ (Pinar, 2012, 25-26)

‘Expressing one’s subjectivity through academic knowledge is how one links the lived curriculum to the planned one, how one demonstrates to students that scholarship can speak to them, how in fact scholarship can enable them to speak.’ (op.cit.,22)
Academic freedom for students (too)

We need ‘a curriculum that places an emphasis on the development of students as independent, critical thinkers’ (Macfarlane 2012, 730).
Research meets education

There is no contradiction between the imperative of good teaching and the imperative of research which critiques, refines, discards and advances human knowledge and understanding. (McAleese 2013, p.13)
Healey and Jenkins 2009

Studens are participants

Emphasis on research content:
- Research-led: Learning about current research in the discipline
- Research-tutored: Engaging in research discussions

Emphasis on research processes and problems:
- Research-oriented: Developing research and inquiry skills and techniques
- Research-based: Undertaking research and inquiry

Students frequently are an audience.
Why research-based education?

- Students *learn richly* through engaging in research and collaborative enquiry
- Our community comprises world-leading researchers
- We are committed to addressing global challenges: all graduates should know how to address complex challenges, individually and as part of a team
Research-based education: does it work?

• Huge focus now on researching the impact and effectiveness of research-based approaches to undergraduate learning

• Healey provides a bibliography of studies (currently more than 800), ‘Linking research and teaching’, at [http://www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources](http://www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources)

• Studies can be very context dependent: ‘research’ means different things in different disciplines, and curriculum design differs: so there are many variables at play
Research-based education: benefits emerging

• **Cognitive domain**: students are intellectually stretched as they engage with research questions and analysis

• **Affective domain**: working collaboratively and/or individually, students report higher levels of engagement and increased motivation and confidence. More spaces are created for considering values and ethics.

• **Skills domain**: very wide range of specialist and transferable skills developed
Programme Leaders’ Perspectives (Fung, forthcoming)

22 Programme Leaders interviewed

In Australia, Bangladesh, Chile, China, France, New Zealand, Nigeria, Qatar, Ireland, UK (England & NI), United States

Wide range of subjects: traditionally academic; professional; interdisciplinary.
‘Good’ curriculum: perspectives

Students should be encouraged to ‘ask probing intelligent questions, play the devil’s advocate, hold people to account’, and engage with ‘questions of evidence’ (George, Interdisc., UK).

‘Good’ curriculum is ‘case-based’ and relevant to real-world complexity (Susan, Sciences, Australia).
Too often there is ‘over-emphasis on the transmission of knowledge’, and ‘little emphasis on developing students’ abilities of identifying researchable questions’ (Hung, Sciences, China).

‘We’re probably weaker because they haven’t had that [research] grounding over the first three years and we’re trying to cram it all in one year’.

(Simon, Humanities, NZ)
Investigating together

Collaborative research activities are seen as a means of ‘structuring students’ thinking about what multiple perspectives mean, and how they can be valuable’

(Diane, Humanities, UK)
Most valued characteristics of curriculum:

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research connected</td>
<td>Students develop through <strong>gathering and interrogating evidence</strong> and through <strong>engaging with research and researchers</strong>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conceptually connected</td>
<td>Students <strong>build explicit conceptual connections</strong>, making <strong>critical and creative connections</strong> between apparently disparate elements of learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personally and socially connected</td>
<td>Students build relationships with faculty and one another to <strong>develop their personal identity and voice</strong>, as well as <strong>developing their public identity</strong> through connecting with the workplace and/or wider community.</td>
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UCL Connected Curriculum
Commitment to research-education synergies

“At University College London, our top strategic priority for the next 20 years is to close the divide between teaching and research. We want to integrate research into every stage of an undergraduate degree, moving from research-led to research-based teaching.”

Prof Michael Arthur, President and Provost, UCL, 30 April 2014
A core part of 20 year strategy: *UCL 2034*

Principal themes:

1. **Academic leadership grounded in intellectual excellence**

2. **A global leader in the integration of research and education**, underpinning an inspirational student experience

3. **Addressing global challenges through our disciplinary excellence and distinctive cross-disciplinary approach**

4. **An accessible, publicly-engaged organisation** that fosters a lifelong community

5. **London’s Global University**: in London, of London and for London

6. **Delivering global impact through a network of innovative international activities, collaborations and partnerships**
Connected Curriculum framework

1. Students connect with staff and their world-leading research
2. A throughline of research activity is built into each programme
3. Students make connections across subjects and out to the world
4. Students connect academic learning with workplace learning
5. Students learn to produce outputs – assessments directed at an audience
6. Students connect with each other, across phases and with alumni

Learning through research & enquiry
Fung 2015
Questions to prompt collegial discussion

• What is research in our subject(s)? What principles, practices and values underpin research?
• In what ways, and when, are our students already engaging in forms of enquiry and/or their own investigative research?
• Do our approaches to student assessment promote authentic enquiry?
Connected Curriculum dimensions

- Are students introduced to and inspired by the latest research in the field, including that undertaken by the department?
- Do their courses and the wider activities and events in their department enable them to meet, learn from and even challenge researchers and scholars?
• Is there a connective storyline of enquiry, e.g. in the pattern of learning/research activities and assessments, which helps students to build their own coherent learning narrative?

• Is there a clearly constructed sequence of enquiry-based activities across the years of study that enables students to go beyond accumulating knowledge and develop themselves reflectively as whole, critical, creative persons?
Connected Curriculum dimensions

- Can students connect outwards from their immediate subject(s) of study and learn to analyse and tackle multi-layered challenges using different ‘knowledge lenses’?
- In doing this, can they build understandings of and links with appropriate external communities and organisations?
- Are they encouraged to analyse their ethical bearings through developing research integrity, social responsibility and global citizenship?
Connected Curriculum dimensions

- Are students developing a range of professional attributes, such as leadership, project management, creativity, communication and problem-solving skills?
- Can students make and articulate conceptual and practical connections between their academic learning and the lifelong learning needed for employment and for their future lives?
Connected Curriculum dimensions

• Are some assessments of student learning outward facing, directed at an identified audience, giving students a voice beyond the class?
• Can students demonstrate an ability to use a range of digital media effectively, as well as different modes of writing, visual and oral communication, as they express their insights and arguments to others, both within and beyond the institution?
Connected Curriculum dimensions

• Are students explicitly invited into an inclusive research and learning community?
• Are there opportunities for them to meet, mentor and work collaboratively with their fellow students across year groups?
• Are alumni actively engaged in the learning and research community, e.g. by enriching the curriculum with their expertise, contributing to mentoring schemes or working with departments to enhance their educational provision?
The approach in summary

• Curriculum inspiration
• Encouragement to enhance taught programmes in ways which are authentic for the discipline
• Grants available for students and staff engagement
• Embedded into university-wide initiatives and quality review
• Changes being made to promotion criteria to reward educators and education leaders
Rewarding educators and education leaders
(Fung and Gordon 2016)

We argue that *if* we start to break down some of the structural and conceptual divides between research and education, we can

• develop distinctive new forms of research-based education

• *and* move towards achieving ‘parity of esteem’ for educators and researchers.
Governance and implementation: a shared endeavour

CC Steering Group

*senior colleagues and management from across UCL*

CC Development Group

*a large open forum to help shape Connected Curriculum’s trajectory*

Working Groups

*8 groups made up of staff and students leading on a relevant theme*

UCL ChangeMakers: funded ‘students as change agents’ initiative

UCL Arena: staff development partnership
Higher education is not a solo sport. Neither is life.

Good education, like good scholarship in the round, is a team game. We need to empower students and scholars to connect (intellectually and personally) at university, so that they can connect with and speak to the world.

Fung, D (forthcoming) A Connected Curriculum for Higher Education. UCL Press
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Over to you for questions and comments
References


