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3.   Meanings behind curriculum development in higher education (Marita Mäkinen & Johanna Annala, University of Tampere)

Abstract

Understanding curriculum development is ambiguous within the academic communities. The article reports on a study of the various meanings the academics give to the curriculum development in contemporary higher education (HE). The data consists of 45 theme interviews in two multidisciplinary universities, and the analysis was conducted by qualitative content analysis. In this article, the interpretations are discussed in the light of the framework based on the schema by Barnett and Coate (2005) and on the concepts of projection and introjection by Bernstein (1996). The results bring to the fore curriculum in a comprehensive framework. The given meanings varied within nine complementary domains, composed of polarities and interconnected views. The findings indicate that meanings of curriculum appeared diverse and vague, often narrow and not well fitted into the academic field. The findings propose a model of interconnected curriculum that can be useful when conceptualising curriculum and creating proactive curricular culture towards the nexus of research, teaching and learning in HE.

Introduction

Numerous interpretations have been made of curriculum in the discourse on higher education (HE). However, HE policy has not been engaged with scientific discourse concerning curriculum (Barnett & Coate 2005; Trowler 2005). Still the research-teaching linkages are crucial for understanding what kind of learning is to be enhanced in HE curriculum. An absence of research interest has left room for hidden functions of curriculum (Margolis 2001). For example, curriculum has served as an implicit intermediary in those processes through which students' trajectories and identity forming has been driven from within the university, often based on the cultures of disciplines (Becher & Trowler 2001). These practices may tacitly emphasise or elide the classic goal-oriented, product-based view (Tyler 1949), or other accents relating to traditional, emerging and transformative features of curriculum (Barnett, Parry & Coate 2001; Parker 2003).

On the other hand, the idea of 'emancipatory' curriculum by Fraser and Bosanquet (2006) represents a comprehensive perspective where the interactive and dynamic set of students' experiences is seen as central to curriculum design. Similarly, Barnett and Coate (2005) argue that a student's personal relation to knowledge plays a pivotal role in HE. They introduce an idea of curriculum as engagement, in which the cornerstone of studies is the process of coming to know. Barnett and Coate (2005) propose that curriculum should be one of the main concepts in the discourse on HE. It is through curriculum that the core of the discipline is put into practice, affecting students' learning. That is why the prevailing meanings of curriculum and their relation to curriculum theories should be reflected.

During the last decade curriculum has become one of the most significant means of regulating HE from outside the university. The societal approach has long traditions in

curricular work. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century Bobbit (1918/1972) harnessed curriculum as an instrument of social control. His idea was that curriculum is a way to respond to the challenges of contemporary society. Similar features are discernible in the HE policy of today. European Commission attempts to modernise universities for the competitiveness of Europe in global knowledge economy (COM 2008; EU 2009a; 2009b; 2010a). One means of achieving the goal has been the development of more flexible curricula (EU 2010b). Likewise in the US there have been extensive curricular reforms in HE occasioned by the dissatisfaction of economic life with the civic skills of university graduates, i.e. problem-solving, ethical-moral decision-making, interaction and communication (AAC 1985).

The service function regarding society and the world of work is stipulated in the legislation governing Finnish HE. According to the Act on University of Applied Sciences (UAS) (564/2009), the emphasis is on teaching based on the needs of labour market and regional development, whereas research university (RU) education is outlined to promote free research and to give the uppermost, research-based teaching, but also to educate students to serve their country and humanity (Universities Act 558/2009). When taking care of the tasks, higher education institutes (HEI) should operate in interaction with the society and promote the social effectiveness of research results. Moreover, the universities have to promote lifelong learning.

Consequently, HE curriculum design is firmly linked to political, social and cultural forces, but having its special character, traditions and diversity within different disciplines. To have a comprehensive view, we understand that curriculum development is an intentional and dynamic process, which reveals the values and principles in relation to learning, knowledge and disciplines, and the cultural and political purposes of developing HE (cf. Barnett & Coate 2005; Pinar et al. 1995).

Focus of the study

The aim of this study is to describe and analyse the various meanings of curriculum development in HE. Our previous findings (Mäkinen & Annala in print) suggest that the development of curriculum is driven primarily by norms coming from outside the HEI. The purposes of curriculum design from the external point of view were to implement knowledge-intensive education, to produce competent professionals for the employment market and society, and to enable individuals' career success. The curriculum design was secondarily driven from the internal intentions of the discipline where the purposes of curriculum were seen as representations of the disciplinary knowledge, as supporting the growth of academic expertise, and as giving contribution to identity formation processes.

In this paper, our intention is to bring to the fore a variety of the purposes and endeavours of curriculum development as it has a crucial role as an interpreter and implementer of the universities' internal tasks, likewise those imposed from outside.

Analytical framework

The research was conducted in a multi-faculty RU and a UAS, i.e. vocational HE and carried out in the form of semi-structured interviews during autumn 2009. The data informed in this article is interview transcripts of the academic teachers from RU (N=27) and UAS (N= 18) representing various departments. All academics were involved in curriculum design and teaching. On average the interviewees had 13 years of working experience in HE (range 3–30 years). Interview themes concerned practices, processes and reforms in curricular work.

The strategy for organizing and making sense of the data was based on qualitative content analysis. The aim of the analysis was to reveal not just a set of various meanings of curriculum, but to identify the intentions and relationships of the meanings, and to find a logically inclusive structure reflecting the responses of the interviewees. Through the content analysis it was possible to articulate variations in the interviewees' ways of experiencing the curriculum design (cf. Krippendorff 2004; Kondracki et al. 2002).
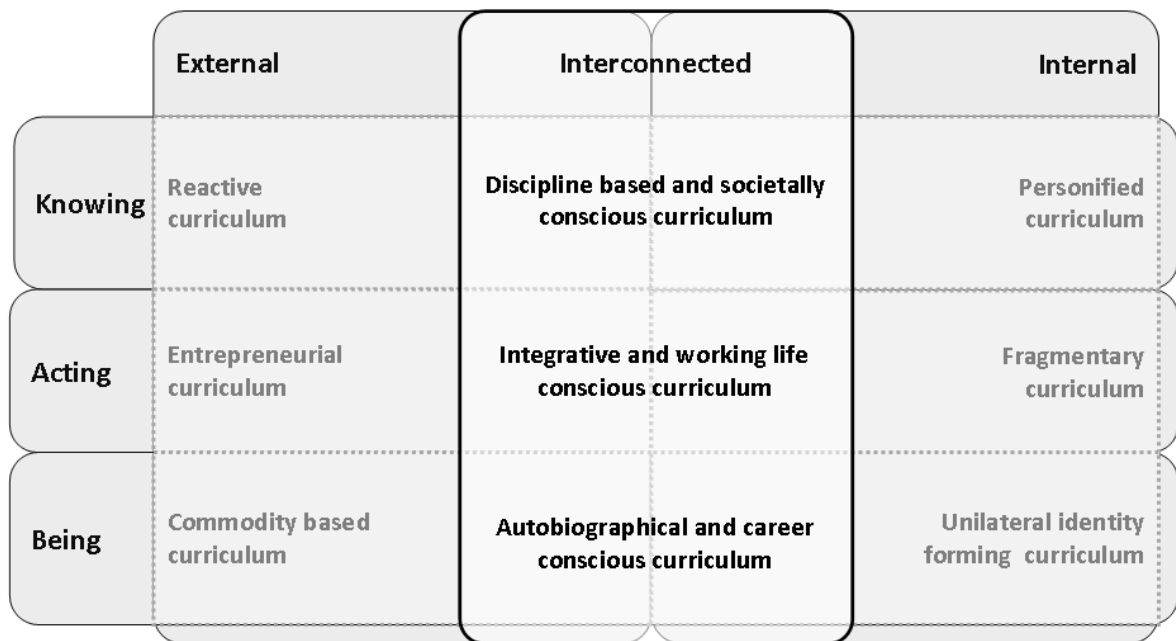
There were four main stages in the analysis process: close reading, categorising and reducing data, developing the conceptual framework and summarising. In the close reading, the transcripts were examined as a whole, with note taking of free associations. In the second stage, we used the open coding procedure to categorise the data. The basic unit of analysis was the notional expressions and the themes of ideas. The views and themes emerging from the data were reduced to ten categories which were named in such a way that they encapsulated as concisely as possible the features of the themes situated along the coding scheme. The categories were as follows: knowledge, discipline, work, profession, expertise, effectiveness, benefit, change, identity and life. At this step of the analysis ATLAS.ti software was used. The coding consistency was assessed by rechecking the basic units and transcribed excerpts in their original contexts in the data.

In the third stage, we approached the meanings behind curriculum through a conceptual framework with two dimensions. First we applied a schema developed by Barnett and Coate (2005) where three curricular domains are proposed, namely *knowing*, *acting* and *being*. The domain of 'knowing' refers to the core knowledge of the discipline. 'Acting' emphasizes skills and actions that students are expected to acquire and refers to how a student's expertise grows and develops through activity. The domain of 'being' denotes the formation of student's personality and identity. (Barnett & Coate 2005.) In this paper, we qualified knowing, acting and being according to our data, that is, what kind of qualities were emphasized in curriculum design.

The other dimension of our framework rested on Bernstein's (1996) conceptions of *introjection* and *projection* which have been used in describing the starting points of HE curriculum design (e.g. Clegg & Bradley 2006; Moore 2001). By introjection Bernstein (1996) refers to the construction of curriculum on the basis of internal disciplinary interests, curriculum taking shape according to the subject taught. By projection Bernstein (1996) describes the curriculum development on the basis of external demands, for example, on the competence demands of working life. According to Bernstein (1996), some disciplines have stronger inner boundaries than others. In this paper, we use a more straightforward approach setting aside diverse disciplines, one focusing on a comprehensive view of curriculum.

In the summarising stage, the data were scrutinised alongside the research objectives, the conceptual framework and in close reading with the noted themes. The emerging interpretations evolved towards a comprehensive framework of curriculum which took the form of nine blocks (Figure 1). Each of them reflects distinguishing domains which communicate and conceptualise the meanings of HE curriculum development. In the following paragraphs, each of these will be addressed separately. The interview quotes substantiating the findings are numbered and coded in such a way that the quotes disclose the speaker's organization (UAS or RU) and gender (male M or female F).

Figure 1. Comprehensive curriculum framework

	External	Interconnected	Internal
Knowing	Reactive curriculum	Discipline based and societally conscious curriculum	Personified curriculum
Acting	Entrepreneurial curriculum	Integrative and working life conscious curriculum	Fragmentary curriculum
Being	Commodity based curriculum	Autobiographical and career conscious curriculum	Unilateral identity forming curriculum

Curriculum in service of external purposes

First we interpret the meanings given to curriculum development on the utmost forms of external purposes (Figure 1). The reactive curriculum reflected the extreme perspectives on 'knowing' and the knowledge-intensive HE services for society, whereas the entrepreneurial curriculum emerged from the extreme 'acting' point of view. The purposes regarding the domain of 'being' were expressed in commodified curriculum.

Reactive curriculum

With reactive curriculum, we refer to those arguments where academics linked curriculum development to the knowledge-intensive economy requirements, but, in spite of critical arguments, they seldom evinced any solutions or alternative models to the problems noted. The attitude towards curriculum emerged in a somewhat compulsive adaptation with minimum effort, where curriculum development was placed marginally, as follows: "All we really do is holding the mandatory meetings which the faculty requires" (RU14F).

The interviewees were quite aware of the European Commission's economist focus on HE policy (COM 2008; EU 2009a; 2009b). Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis aims for universities concerning the creation of the 'knowledge triangle', i.e. the linkages between education, research and innovation (EU 2009a; 2010b), were often ignored or faced with criticism, especially in RU. Several academics refused to conceptualise the curriculum development through the 'knowledge triangle' agenda, as follows: "in our department we take the view that is quartal economy talk and we don't like the term, competence objective that comes from commercial something (laughter) productivity speak" (RU5F).

The external forces were seen as a threat to the university's autonomous position of the research-led knowledge generator. Therefore, the academic staff did not sympathise with the mission of EU (2010a; 2010b) according to which the universities should be more relevant to the needs of the society. This perception is consistent with Naidoo's (2005) notion that academics are portrayed as resisting such efforts and protecting their own interests against those of the stakeholders.

These statements reflect what Barnett and Coate (2005) call the reproductive function of HE. According to this, the mission of education and the role of curriculum are the maintenance and consolidation of the prevailing settings within the HEI and in the society as a whole. Then the curriculum is not perceived to be a meaningful tool in the further development of students' learning, HE nor society.

Entrepreneurial curriculum

According to the academics, the curriculum development was firmly linked to uncertainty and the unpredictable dwindling of economic resources. Competition for students and between HEIs emerged in both universities:

> *This unit is quite small enough even after the merger, when we think within the EU, this fight for survival (laughter). But, yes indeed, curriculum should be such that we can get these things into sellable articles. So I do think that Finland should make education such an item for sale.* (UAS2M.)

With this notion an academic teacher defined HE curriculum as a product whose viability is contingent upon the competence objectives inscribed in curriculum. This kind of high attention to the market mechanisms may lead to a situation in which HEI becomes a production plant sensitive to market forces. We call such extreme forms as entrepreneurial curriculum in which the traditional values of HE – disciplinary knowledge, research and cultivation – are replaced by the values of economic life. Especially in UAS effort was made to satisfy the needs of the customers from the perspective of the students' expectations as well as of the competence objectives concerning employment market. Still confusion was caused by the contradictory nature of the expectations:

> *Are we to produce all-round engineers who do alright in some jobs but then they don't cope so well in those professional tasks or are we to produce specialists, when the danger exists that that we'll make the wrong prognoses and the job placements won't work out* (UAS11M).

Rationales for the entrepreneurial approach on curriculum development have been linked to the pressure on universities to become responsive to external demands, to the international mobility of employees, and to the significance of the economically productive innovations (cf. Garraway 2006; Naidoo 2005). Herewith the yardstick of curricular quality is the employment and success rates in global markets.

Commodified curriculum

The academics had observed that many students were not keen on rhetoric of slow growth but had already taken on board the ideology of effectiveness before arriving in the HE. This extreme curricular view was named as commodified curriculum. Many interviewees pointed out that many students perceive HE as an investment for the future and regard the degree as a key to the job market (cf. Brown 2003; Parker 2003). The

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danger in this point of view is that students are encouraged to make use of curricula just for the worth of their own interests, as one RU teacher describes: "Make a product packet of yourself" (RU9M). The students were encouraged to invest time and effort to getting qualified which would pay off in terms of a personal capital forming, good jobs and high incomes.

In this case the student's personal development planning (PDP) was seen as a separate one-off paper or a career planning draft introduced by the teaching staff (cf. Clegg & Bradley 2006). UAS teachers especially pointed out the tendency to support students' activities in creating the career and social status. The RU teachers appeared to be more confused than the UAS teachers regarding the time and success objectives of today's students (cf. Clegg & Bufton 2008). They had observed that at the same time as students seek courses which are useful to them and promote success, they are wary of anyone exploiting them. This gives rise to contradictions, if new solutions, for example, research-based and tutored strategies (cf. Healey 2005) were sought for engaging students within research activities across the curriculum. According to one interviewee, this was turned down by the student association: "We won't do a stroke of unpaid work for you, so do your research yourselves" (RU25M).

Brown (2003) calls such views acquisitive learning indicating students' focus on the learning they need to pass examinations and get a diploma. It is based on a rational calculation where the moral foundations of HE are lost (Lawn 2001).The means to passing through may turn out questionable, like plagiarism, which did not appear in this study, but has been discussed alongside with instrumentalism (Brady & Kennell 2010) and commodification (Parker 2003) in conceptualising the curriculum.

Curriculum in service of internal intentions

Next we interpret the meanings given to curriculum development from the perspective of the extreme forms of internal intentions (Figure 1). The intentions concerning 'knowing' turned out as personified curriculum, whereas the domain of 'acting' manifested itself as fragmentary curriculum. The intentions concerning the domain of 'being' found expression in unilateral identity forming curriculum.

Personified curriculum

The present data showed that the RU teachers in particular devoted a great deal of time to considering how the most essential in their respective specific knowledge was conveyed to students. These findings are indicative of a hidden curriculum in which the core of the discipline or degree programme could be found in the academics' personal strengths. In this view, curriculum is traditionally understood as a part of private pedagogic transactions between academics and students (Coate 2009). It has been justified through the autonomy of HE and by the possession of the highest knowledge. The personalising nature of knowledge in curriculum design is illustrated in the following statement: "When people retire, begins discussions whether such (content) is still needed in curriculum, as it is an everlasting old relic" (RU20F).

Such a perspective is paradoxical in the HE environment where knowledge is otherwise subject to constant reform and assessment. Barnett and Coate (2005) argue that the members of a scholarly community are rather reluctant to engage in critical evaluation of the curriculum design from within. The rationale behind it may lie in understanding HE as research-led teaching, meaning that curriculum is structured around subject and the content selected is based on special research interests of teaching staff (cf. Griffiths 2004; Healey 2005). This may lead, firstly, to a deep but narrow focus into certain

themes which may not be relevant when thinking about curriculum as an entity, and secondly, to a situation in which knowledge is held to be of intrinsic value and infallible when it is actually haphazard.

This kind of approach projects Vallance's (1986) concept of academic rationalism. The purpose of HE is then to ensure that students assimilate knowledge structures pertaining to a certain academic tradition and to conserve, added to that, the prevailing social hierarchies. Then curriculum again manifests itself as a function of reproductive curriculum, this time from within the disciplinary cultures (cf. Barnett & Coate 2005).

Fragmentary curriculum

Fragmentary curriculum refers to the splintered nature of the content of studies, but also to the isolation of HE from society and labour market. The changes in the life of work were usually recognized as pressure, as something which should be taken into account: "The life of work had changed, but higher education had not" (RU7F). Yet in RU the cooperation with the stakeholders was rare in the curriculum development. The need to consider the acting skills for working life was often solved in line with the goal-oriented (cf. Tyler 1949) and, as we call it, fragmentary curricular thinking: as a separate course module. Consequently, predicting the required competencies and the supply in the curriculum did not always seem to match.

The interviewees had recognized that students with an eye for societal changes and the life of work look for a basis for why it is worthwhile studying something, taking into account what it especially brings forth. This appeared for example in the extending of the degree in such a way that it would ensure the individual's employability, as in the following:

> *I have many students that are going too broad, in a way trying to specialize in everything, and they talk about lifelines. I can well understand that in order to ensure a placement somewhere in the life of work they try to find competencies that would fill every box there could be – situations vacant.* (RU7F.)

Following Jaspers (1960/2009), this kind of fragmentation curricular thinking may turn HEIs and their curricula into intellectual department stores. Such fragmentariness serves to increase emphasis on the isolation of knowing and acting from their contexts (cf. Young 2010). Then the studies may appear to the students as a very uncontrolled and inconsistent process.

Unilateral identity forming curriculum

The notion of studies serving to develop one-sided or narrow identities emerged in both universities. In this notion the curriculum design does not pay attention to the studies as an entity and has inflexible views of students' life course. Some academics made connections between subject matter and identity, such as "I can imagine that people build identity according to the major subject in university degrees, that I am a student of that and that subject" (RU17M), whereas in UAS interviews identity was spoken of mostly in connection with the professional identity. It was frequently considered that professional identity only takes shape in the life of work, as the next interviewee puts it: "Well of course professional identity develops here to some extent, but, certainly more in working life" (UAS17M).

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This kind of unilateral identity forming curriculum is problematic from the perspective of the students' disciplinary and generic skills as well as their workplace experiences and future careers. Barnett and Coate (2005) suggest that curricula are educational vehicles for developing the student as a person. Yet the means for forming and encountering personal identities are not necessarily present in HE. For instance, Kunttu and Huttunen (2009) has reported that as many as 25 per cent of Finnish students in HE do not find their studies meaningful. Therefore studying should not be seen merely as mastery of the content of a certain subject or as a process of creating a CV for employment, but rather as a qualitative process building personal meanings (cf. Barnett 2009).

Comprehensive curriculum framework

Between the previously examined uttermost polarities, an interconnected perspective (Figure 1) was revealed on curriculum development. In the implementation of the features of this comprehensive schema, both the external and internal purposes and the engagement domains – knowing, acting and being – were interconnected and overlapped. Next, we present these three twofold features of interconnected curriculum.

Discipline based and societally conscious curriculum

Some academics stressed that the curriculum could be understood as a proactive instrument to influence the society. This kind of discipline based and societally conscious curricular thinking reflected an awareness of the contradictions which were not perceived to be conflicts but productive tensions. The EU and ministerial guidelines were taken as an opportunity to develop as HEIs and as curriculum redesigners. The strength of such views was awareness of societal forces with externally imposed pressures for change jumpstarting proactive curricular reforms. This requires the evaluation of the contemporary knowledge-base in curriculum, as one interviewee described it:

> *Too many things have been the same for too long, we were responding only poorly to what was apparently relevant or how research has progressed in this discipline. It was a common resource pressure that finally got us moving, but many of us were not sorry that we had to make a move.* (RU7F.)

Influences coming from outside the universities were brought to the fore and reflected in relation to disciplines and research as a basis of the curriculum development. The societal consciousness appeared as a need to implement changes in the spirit of modernising the HE knowledge base, and to reposition the HE towards democracy and active citizenship (cf. Walker & Nixon 2004). The academics stressed the efforts to take account of the challenges of the present society by reflecting nexus of actual societal issues, teaching and curriculum design. HE curriculum was seen as a vehicle making it possible to take a stand on what the core body of disciplinary knowledge as an entity is (cf. Parker 2003).

Accordingly, the attempts for the reanalysis of the body of knowledge came to those discourses in which the academics focus was on phenomena, key themes or threshold concepts as opposed to the subject areas or contents taught. This emerged especially when the discussion turned to merging of subjects taught or interdisciplinary collaboration, exemplified in the following quotation:

We had to consider how two separate subjects can be merged into one discipline, and what that discipline ultimately is. And how such extensive matter could be taught in a meaningful and comprehensible manner. Here we set out so that we take certain phenomena for scrutiny. And we put the phenomenon on the table, then we set about delving deeper to see what can be found when we set about looking into the background. (RU16M.)

The interviews confirmed that multi-disciplinarity had become a core theme in curriculum design (cf. DeZure et al. 2002). Such kind of disciplinary discourses opens up a vista for students' engagement with knowledge generation and inquiry. Teaching could be more student-focused, if the intention of teaching is on developing and chancing students' conceptions (cf. Trigwell & Prosser 2009). In all, this approach gave room to the traditions of disciplines – without the personified feature – but took into account the changes in the society and the world, and was aware of the external demands when developing curriculum – not in reactive, but in a proactive and reflective way.

Integrative and working life conscious curriculum

The second interconnected approach, namely the integrative and working life conscious curriculum, was proposed to bridge the gap between market-oriented competencies and fragmentary curricular thinking. 'Acting' was characterised by domain-specific and generic competencies, as in the following:

Knowledge in itself, there needs to be a great deal of it, expertise is the basis of everything, but actual competence subsumes so many other things so that in order to be able to use that knowledge you need to be able to do so many other things (RU18F).

Highlighting the competence objectives is not to diminish the inherent value of knowledge and research, but rather a new kind of curriculum thinking in which knowing, acting and context-dependent generic skills are perceived as a part of competency and domain-dependent knowledge (cf. Aamodt & Plaza 1994; Crawford et al. 2006). The academics argued that HE should find a way to define and accomplish the competence objectives widely enough, as the following quotation shows:

As I see it really the only thing you can do for the students are to encourage them to respond to challenges and so that they learn in such a way that they understand that the learning is for them. In a way this notion that "I am transferring something into your head and then you can go out", well that's long gone, because if we talk about IT, for example, in two years after you've taught some things they are out of date. (UAS12F.)

The citation possesses two significant points. First, work cannot offer a universal category with which to develop HE curricula (cf. Barnett & Coate 2005), because it is impossible to anticipate that which has not yet been invented or innovated. The expertise and know-how produced by curriculum must be scrutinised in a wider frame of reference than the present needs in working life, because it is difficult to know what the working life or society will be like when the student graduates. Employment of graduates is usually reflected as one of the most important factors for the quality of HE, but it can only be a weak indicator of programme quality (cf. Barnett & Coate 2005; Parker 2003). The employability agenda has turned out to be too narrow and

problematic for example in the UK, where academics discuss the oversupply of graduates and on-going changes in the labour market and society in general (e.g. Brady & Kennell 2010; Tomlinson 2008).

Second, the teaching and learning processes should be taken into account in curriculum design. It is challenging to interconnect them, but in our data we had some examples of integration of the specific and the generic, in curriculum design and its implementation, like the following:

> *In the group exam the students made it clearer to themselves how their knowledge is constructed, not in relation to me, the person in charge of the studies, but in relation to other students. (--) they had to defend their own stances and views, which is one kind of core skill. One as it were main competency in working life.* (RU20F.)

This refers to how Barnett and Coate (2005) view acting: as invisible, like the personal mastery of discipline and visible, like the engineer's or journalist's knowing how and knowing why. The transferable and generic skills were characterised to be one of the most important work-related competence objectives within various disciplines, but seldom openly declared in curricula (cf. Bennet et al. 2000). By integrating and explicitly articulating the skills that are based within subject-specific areas, the skills that are intended to be transferable and the employment-related capabilities in the curriculum, students could be facilitated to cope in different contexts (Barnett & Coate 2005).

Integrative and working life conscious curriculum seeks to respond to knowledge and competency needs expected by job markets, but positioning them into the academic teaching practises and curricular intentions. The possible direction here is that education transcends the dualism between thinking and doing – the disciplinary and the generic practice.

Autobiographical and career-conscious curriculum

The interviews raised the question of the relation of knowing and acting to the student's own meaning making, life course and identity building. The third interconnected feature of the comprehensive curriculum could be illustrated in terms of autobiographical and career conscious curriculum. The view motivates students to understand, and to be aware of the connections between studies, growth of expertise, working life and their own life course. These were even seen to be rewarding and proof of the success of the academic teacher's work:

> *Somebody comes along and tells you that their career has got off to a great start – what they've done in their life, there are absolutely fantastic success stories. And I think that's what sustains us, in the best possible manner, if we get good feedback from working life, that's another.* (UAS12F.)

When the objective of studying is clearly in mind, studies will likely progress well, also promoting the productivity targets set for the HEIs. The view is suggestive with Vallance's (1986) description of personal success and the curriculum concept stressing self-fulfillment. Still many students are in a life situation in which they are actively seeking their subjectivity and place in society, because "they don't really know what they are about" (RU9M). The challenge is how to surpass the lack of engagement (cf. Clegg & Bufton 2008). Students unsure of their fields of study and future objectives

may drop out of success-oriented HE, especially if curriculum as lived text is ignored. A university teacher describes this dilemma as follows:

> *The students may zigzag, of course, according to their life situations, in a different way from what has been predicted in the curriculum. So how do we get them together in such a way that the student achieves on the one hand a meaningful study experience with an eye to the future, an entity that makes sense?* (RU24M.)

The citation refers to a need to reflect the curriculum design from the point of view of autobiographical curriculum (cf. Pinar 1994). The view is interesting in a sense that although HE should promote the ability to cope with the demands of the future, the starting points for learning are in the lived and the present moment. Autobiographical curriculum is reminiscent of the cyclical process of learning in which the student's experiences of his/her own past and visions of the future dovetail into each other. Together they help students to attach themselves to study processes and to position themselves in their post-education life trajectories. PDP could be a way for students meaning making, but the most viable when integrated into the curriculum (e.g. Annala 2007) and entailing temporal views to past, present and future (cf. Clegg & Bufton 2008).

The interconnected autobiographical and career conscious approach in curriculum can be perceived as opposition to the narrowly focused processes of socialization and the identity building in commodified or unilateral curriculum. Instead, students could benefit from situational and participatory learning processes (e.g. Lave & Wenger 1993) designed in curriculum, enabling a student to gain membership of an academic community with the status of junior colleague - not just a customer or consumer. This approach could make room for a personal commitment (Vallance 1986) and personal relation to knowledge and knowing (Barnett & Coate 2005), as well as promote the idea of inquiry-based and lifelong learning in the changing world (cf. Hodge et al. 2008).

Discussion

The present study brought to the fore curriculum in a comprehensive framework. The meanings behind curriculum development varied within nine complementary domains, composed of polarities and interconnected views. Regardless of the disparate legally instituted profiles and HE offered by RU and UAS, against expectations, there were very few differences in the talk of the institutions. Instead, disciplines and professional fields have their complex backgrounds, history, nature and research areas, which emerged in diverse curricular cultures (cf. Becher & Trowler 2001; Jaspers 1960/2009).

According to the results, the three extreme perspectives that raised the issue of curriculum in service of external purposes reflected the various attitudes towards the neo-liberal influences in HE policy. Several authors have argued about the effects of increase in market-driven principles in HE (cf. Evans 2004; Coate 2009; Naidoo 2005; Smith 2003). These perceptions may arise from the view on curriculum development as an ambivalent requirement: it is by law the task of the HEI, but autonomy in its implementation is provided for.

From the uppermost internal point of view, the findings suggest that it was difficult for the academics to conceive of what is relevant knowledge in HE and the nature of its connection to the knowledge society needs. In all, the danger in strong views is that they did not position the HEI as a proactive driver of societal debate, reform and interaction between academics, representatives of working life and other stakeholders.

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Moreover, the problem is that obscure criticism in the staff serves to distance the students and curricular work as invisible objects.

The interconnected features in curriculum development pursue proactive HE from within by asking what kind of working life and society HE seeks to produce, and what kind of capabilities HE curriculum development reaches for. The results propose that by curriculum redesign it could be possible to take a stand on the core of a given discipline, learning environment and changes in the world as an interactive process. Thus, learning concerns not only the students but also the academic community (cf. Wenger 2003). The theory of expansive learning stresses communities as learners and learning as a transformation and creation of a new culture (Engeström & Sannino 2010; cf. Parker 2003). Barnett and Coate (2005) also support the transformation principle challenging curricular hierarchies, setups perpetuating and resulting in inequality towards reform of the teaching.

Furthermore, the interconnected perspective on curriculum seems to be fruitful in understanding the processes of integration between research and teaching as well as between students' academic engagement. The findings indicate that curriculum based on research-led teaching, when manifested in a personified or fragmentary way, should be extended towards research-based, research-oriented and research-tutored curriculum design and inquiry-based learning (Healey 2005). This could also turn student's focus from acquisitive learning towards inquisitive learning, which is not consumer driven but involves an intrinsic interest in knowledge and learning for its own sake, personal growth and development (Brown 2003).

In the processes of knowing, acting and being the most fundamental question is how the student finds a personal relation to knowledge (Barnett 2009). On the basis of the present data, we suggest that it is a continually changing process in which the student builds his/her identity and conception of 'self' and the relation to others and the world. Dewey (1902/1956) defined a scientific attitude as the ability to enjoy uncertainty. The main issue in autobiographical curriculum design is to pay attention on what a student has actually learned or what kind of expertise acquired during his/her studies. These facts do not appear in the most exclusive CV or on the speed whereby studies have been completed. The strength of career-conscious and autobiographical view is its initial interest in the well-being of the students, the future and place in society. In curriculum design, it serves to ensure that the HEI is a place where knowing, acting, being and the world meets.

The findings are in line with the so-called 'emancipatory' curriculum proposed by Fraser and Bosanquet (2006) and with the comprehensive perspective on curriculum emphasised by Pinar et al. (1995). Therefore, curriculum design could be understood as a process of change and development which consists of a series of social interaction, reflective examination of discipline and personal life histories within complex institutional contexts. The results suggest placing particular emphasis on developing partnership with university staff, students and practitioners in discipline-specific contexts as proposed by other researchers (e.g. Aamodt & Plaza 1994; Barnett & Coate 2005; Crawford et al. 2006). Therefore, the developed framework could serve as a reflective tool for evaluating the prevailing meanings of curriculum within different degree programmes and HEIs in their contexts. The research will advance in the future by scrutinising difference between disciplines and reflecting meanings of curriculum against various scientific cultures. Next we will analyse interpretations of curriculum and its significance generated by students.

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