Co-constructing ‘good’ education: towards a Connected Curriculum

Prof Dilly Fung
Professor of Higher Education Development
UCL
D.Fung@ucl.ac.uk  @DevonDilly

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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, practice, 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 creative being’.

(Fung, forthcoming)
Theoretical framing (2)

In William Pinar’s ‘curriculum’, teachers are ‘communicants in a complicated conversation.’ (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)
STUDENTS ARE PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPHASIS ON RESEARCH CONTENT</th>
<th>STUDENTS FREQUENTLY ARE AN AUDIENCE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research-tutored</td>
<td>Engaging in research discussions</td>
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<td>Learning about current</td>
<td>Undertaking research and inquiry</td>
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<td>research in the discipline</td>
<td>Developing research and inquiry</td>
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<td>Research-led</td>
<td>skills and techniques</td>
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<td>Research-orientated</td>
<td>Research-oriented</td>
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(based on Healey, 2005, 70)
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

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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research connected</th>
<th>Students develop through gathering and interrogating evidence and through engaging with research and researchers.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptually connected</td>
<td>Students build explicit conceptual connections, making critical and creative connections 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 develop their personal identity and voice, as well as developing their public identity 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


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

01 Students connect with staff and their world-leading research
02 A throughline of research activity is built into each programme
03 Students make connections across subjects and out to the world
04 Students connect academic learning with workplace learning
05 Students learn to produce outputs – assessments directed at an audience
06 Students connect with each other, across phases and with alumni

Learning through research & enquiry
Fung 2015
Connected Curriculum

- 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 dimension 1

- 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?
Connected Curriculum dimension 2

- 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 dimension 3

- 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 dimension 4

• 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 dimension 5

• 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 dimension 6

• 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
Two major enablers

UCL ChangeMakers: students as leaders and agents of change

UCL Arena: a space for staff to share ideas and develop new practices
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, 13)
Higher education is not a solo sport. Neither is life.

Good education, like good scholarship, is a team game. We need to empower students and scholars to make connections, both intellectually and personally, so that they can connect with and speak to the world.

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

Contact details:
Prof Dilly Fung
D.Fung@ucl.ac.uk
@DevonDilly
@UCLConnectedC
References


https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/developingundergraduate_final.pdf
