

## Sharing and building the higher education curriculum: course design in an open and collegial context

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## Sharing and building the higher education curriculum: course design in an open and collegial context

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the characteristics of the teaching practices that are shaped by the educational beliefs and values that academics bring to curriculum design in higher education (HE). It presents the results of a case study of a 2012 curriculum-sharing project, involving ten UK universities, in which academics from the social science disciplines, Sociology, Anthropology, and Politics, came together to exchange course designs and materials. Drawing on realist epistemology, the study applies Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device to examine the basis of recontextualisation and the underlying epistemic insights evident when HE courses are made ready to be shared and used by others. This is made possible by enacting Legitimation Code Theory (Maton, 2014). A conceptual model of curriculum making is developed that can reveal how academics interpret and respond to the 'opening-up' process of reproducing the curriculum, and how their curriculum-making work is legitimated. Expertise in designing and approving the curriculum, as the basis of curricular authority, is seen to be discipline-based. Importantly, this analysis makes visible the factors necessary in order for academics to realise new forms of the curriculum.

**Keywords:** curriculum, course design, collegiality, teaching

### **Introduction**

This paper addresses the characteristics of the teaching practices that are shaped by the educational beliefs and values that academics bring to curriculum design in higher education (HE). It presents the results of a case study of a 2012 curriculum-sharing project, funded by the Higher Education Academy, as part of the second phase of the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) UK Open Educational Resources (OER) programme, with funds provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This funding enabled UK-based Higher Education Institutions to explore cultural, technical and pedagogical issues involved in OER development, discovery and use (JISC, 2008). The one-year project involved 12 academics from ten UK universities, from the social science disciplines, Sociology, Anthropology, and Politics, who came together to exchange course designs and materials. The study examines how the curriculum is shared, including the practices of curriculum design; how teaching is perceived as expertise in practice, including the influence of the discipline and academic development; and how the curriculum is described, including forms of collegiality that make this possible. The practice of curriculum design is theorised using a language of legitimation (Maton, 2014).

This project took place in the context of the 'open education movement' and open educational resources (OER) (Atkins et al., 2007; Conole, 2013). The concept of openness is set out by the 'Cape Town Open Education Declaration' (2007):

*'We call on educators, authors, publishers and institutions to release their resources openly. These open educational resources should be freely shared through open licences which facilitate use, revision, translation, improvement and sharing by anyone'. (Cape Town Declaration, 2007)<sup>i</sup>*

This was the spirit in which the learning and teaching materials, collected and collated by participants (see below), were described, peer-reviewed, and examined. This took place in the light of issues pertinent to OER and the ways in which teaching materials could be made open and shareable. These reflexive discussions in turn informed thinking on creating a 'mapping' framework aimed at revealing pedagogical decisions about the creation and potential for (re-)using the materials, including how the barriers to re-use can be overcome (Conole, 2013). Following these discussions about the materials, and any interventions owing to copyright and formatting, the materials were released into online repositories<sup>ii</sup> alongside pedagogical descriptions of these materials, under a Creative Commons Licence<sup>iii</sup>.

This paper adopts the definition of OER offered in the context of the programme, where they have been described as:

*...teaching and learning materials (...) freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student or self-learner (...) [these] resources [are] contained in digital media collections from around the world (JISC/HEA, 2009).*

The key element of OER is the fact that they encompass a variety of teaching resources which are free at the point of access and that they can be re-used by anyone regardless of whether they are affiliated with a formal educational institution or not. Importantly, OER are highly customisable and allow for re-use and sharing with few copyright restrictions given that they either reside in the public domain or have been released under a license (most commonly a Creative Commons license) that permits their free use or repurposing by others (Atkins et al., 2007). Mackintosh (2011) has broadened this broad definition to incorporate three interrelated dimensions: educational values (in terms of barrier-free access to the resources), pedagogical utility (anyone accessing OER should be able to reuse, revise, remix and redistribute the resources) and technology enablers (i.e. OER should be in a format which ensures that they are 'meaningfully' editable). This means that potential (re)users of OER are positioned not as mere consumers but as active participants in the process of creating and sharing the resources (Tosato and Bodi, 2012). Existing research on OER in the UK context engages mostly on issues of relevance to the higher education sector, with a number of studies examining the use of OER and their impact on academic practice

as well as barriers and enablers to OER uptake (Browne et al., 2010; Nikoi et al., 2011; Rolfe, 2012).

This research involved 12 participants from 10 UK HEI. Table 1 shows details of the 10, mostly urban, universities in the study, the year established, location, the number of students overall, the university group it belongs to, and its UK ranking (based on 2014 positions in the university league tables – shown as decile range). This sample is reasonably representative with perhaps an emphasis on newer universities and a possible lean towards universities that want to be known for teaching rather than research. The course approval processes in all 10 universities were remarkably similar.

Table 1: Institutions' locations, size, university group and UK ranking

Code	Created	Location	Students	University Group	UK Ranking*
I1	1966	West Midlands	9000	ACU	21-30
I2	1984	London	4000	(university college)	81-90
I3	1968	N. Ireland	26000	Universities UK	61-70
I4	1992	Lancashire	33000	University Alliance	71-80
I5	2007	Devon	5000	Universities UK	91-100
I6	1962	Staffordshire	10000	ACU	31-40
I7	1992	Teesside	28000	University Alliance	81-90
I8	2009	Lancashire	16000	(university college)	91-100
I9	1883	South Wales	30000	Russell Group	21-30
I10	1884	North Wales	17000	EUA	51-60

\*UK Ranking based on 2014 positions (shown as decile range)

The 12 participants were experienced teachers recognised for their commitment to and engagement with the development of Social Science teaching and learning in their home institutions. They were given time by their institutions to work on the project and to make their course designs and materials available to others. The 24 modules shared by the group comprised an 'Open Course in Social Science' equivalent to the first two years of a general undergraduate degree in Social Science, or elements of levels 4 or 5 of an undergraduate course in a specific Social Science discipline (see sample of 12 in Table 2). The modules illustrate a number of key curriculum issues prevalent at the time of the study – e.g. Internationalisation (module 10) and Employability (module 12). All 24 modules were pre-existing and had been developed iteratively, over time, through the standard process of review and student evaluation.

The data included the curriculum documents and descriptions, interviews, focus groups and observations of peer review discussions. The analysis yielded seven coding categories: *context*, *curriculum*, *teaching*, *discipline*, *exchange*, *knowing* and *description*. These themes are cross-threads and will be highlighted and woven into the narrative of this case study and illustrated with sample data. The meta-analysis of these themes towards

the external language of description (Bernstein, 2000) of this study will be discussed below.

Table 2: Details of 12 (of 24) shared modules showing pedagogical structure

<b>Module/ Type of material</b>	<b>Pedagogical Units</b>	<b>Pedagogical Activity</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>01: Visual Anthropology</b> (20 credits) [module handbook, lecture slides, video]	12 units (2 hours each)	lectures; learning activities; tutorials; exercises; readings	2 tasks: Essay (50%), Examination (50%)
<b>02: Sociology of Health and Illness</b> (10 credits) [module outline, lecture slides]	8 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; guided discussion; readings	1 task: Essay (100%)
<b>03: Sociology of Human Reproduction</b> (10 credits) [module outline, lecture slides]	9 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; guided discussion; readings	1 task: Examination (100%)
<b>04: Gender and Society</b> (10 credits) [module outline, lecture slides, reflection sheet]	9 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; guided discussion; readings	3 tasks: Learning diary (60%), Essay (10%), Essay (30%)
<b>05: Comparative Sociology</b> (10 credits) [module outline, lecture slides]	9 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; guided discussion; readings	1 task: Examination (100%)
<b>06: Embodiment and Feminist Theory</b> (10 credits) [module outline, lecture slides, class paper]	9 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; guided discussion; readings	1 task: Examination (100%)
<b>07: Ethnicity and 'Race'</b> (10 credits) [module outline, lecture slides]	9 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; guided discussion; readings	1 task: Coursework (100%)
<b>08: Mass media in America</b> (30 credits) [module handbook, portfolio document]	9 units (2 hours each)	Lectures; workshops; group activities	2 tasks: Portfolio (40%), Examination (60%)
<b>09: Crime and Violence</b> (20 credits) [module handbook+ lecture slides]	15 units (3 hours each)	Lectures; seminars; readings	2 tasks: Group project (50%); Group presentation (50%)
<b>10: International E-communication exchange</b> (10 credits) [student handbook, FAQ, topics, weekly work, guidelines for reflective essay, lecture slides]	4 units (3 hours each)	Lectures; seminars; readings	2 tasks: Group project (50%); Essay (50%)
<b>11: Gender, Crime and Justice</b> (20 credits) [online handbook, lecture slides]	12 units (1 hour each)	Lectures; seminars; readings	2 tasks: Group project (50%); examination (50%)
<b>12: Learning and Employability</b> (20 credits) [contents, examples of exercises, reading list, teaching schedule, student handbook, classroom activities]	5 units (1 hour each)	Lectures; seminars; handouts; Web links; readings	3 Tasks: Open-book test (50%); group project (30%); Self-assessment (20%)

## **Sharing the curriculum**

The participants set out with the intention of mapping their curriculum and to share this in the form of module descriptions and the associated materials. The materials, including course documentation, were peer reviewed, and the pedagogical implications were discussed in groups, and individual reflections were shared in interview. Following this process and activity the 'completed' designs were uploaded to an online open repository for others to use in their own teaching.

Making their practices visible provided an opportunity to bring together the insights that are otherwise kept private or at best shared with close colleagues in one's own department or other universities (Marsh and Pountney, 2009). The participants themselves, in setting out to explore this, recognised, early on, the need to address the tacit nature of their practice:

*'... whilst we will be examining existing [curriculum] material, we will not be examining it for what it offers in itself, but for what it tells us about the assumptions which guided its production. This is but one example of a much larger tacit process'* (Group Discussion).

Discussion provoked curiosity that, whilst academics share knowledge and insights from research through publication, there is no similar mechanism to research pedagogic practice:

*'Indeed, there does not seem to be a language or even a set of assumptions with which we discuss the creation, significance and effects (on our students and ourselves) of [curricular designs] ... a way of speaking about and reflecting on one of our key activities as lecturers'* (Group Discussion).

It was this lack of an existing language and a collective process, they thought, that prevented materials, including their course designs, being actively shared. The contrast between the 'closed and unwritten' practice of teaching and the 'open and published' collective endeavour in research and data generation was noted including the means by which its quality could be established. While this possibly masks the competitive nature of research cultures it is worthy of note as an indication of understandings of collaborative approaches to the curriculum.

## **The practice of designing the curriculum**

In sharing their curriculum in the form of modules and their descriptions, participants brought with them their own practice histories (Cleaver, 2002). They were all experienced teaching academics, with at least 10 years in HE, having taught and led modules and courses. The modules of study offered for sharing had been through a process of 'quality control' in their own institutions, regulated by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

The approval processes of all the institutions in this study were typical of the processes, actors and timescales of approval at the time of the study.

Participants began by articulating what was common about the curriculum as a set of 'givens', or starting 'propositions':

- Courses are designed as 'sets' of modules (i.e. they have been modularised)
- Modules (in line with HE convention and practice) are aligned with learning outcomes, and a form of assessment
- Modules, in practice and delivery, are contextualised and local
- The contextualisation of modules involves intent that is often implicit/tacit/invisible – and constructing them to be shared requires this intent to be re-examined by a) the originator b) future user(s)
- The re-use of modules that require strong context might afford (cultural) reproduction rather than a (re)design for learning
- Stripping away contextual information in modules in order that they might be re-used is problematic in that insufficient structure may remain for others to interpret and use

Participants shared the view that the organisational structure of the curriculum, for example into modules, while advantageous to the process of sharing, was 'a given' that they were unable to modify or change. This included the structure that both constrains and forms the context for teaching. A further outcome of these early discussions was an identification of approaches towards making and developing the curriculum taking place in their own institutions. These were:

- curriculum as a process for engaging staff;
- curriculum as an object or commodity to be consumed;
- curriculum as a translation, responding to the needs of a disparate and disperse constituency of learners.

However, in the initial conversations about the modules it soon became clear that the official descriptions (those officially recorded in their institutions as part of the programme specification), along with the materials they had developed, were insufficient for their effective use by others and were 'deficient' in the following respects:

- they were written in a language that was not easy to translate into practice;
- they were condensed and abstract and needed to be unpacked;
- they described the arrangements for the assessment of a module but not the way it could be taught or learnt;
- materials were heavily contextualised with 'local' detail.

To put this concisely, participants found that their understandings of (their own) good practice to be challenged when it was exposed to the scrutiny of peers (Goodlad *et al.*, 1979). One perceived reason for this pedagogic

shortfall was the effect of the institution's imprint on pedagogical models as well as structure. This is indicated, perhaps, by the fact that almost all of the module descriptions followed a 'weekly-lecture-followed-by-seminar-with-reading' structure (see Table 2 for a breakdown of the modules showing their pedagogic structure). The joke shared within the groups was:

*What do you get when you take a tutor out of a classroom? PowerPoint and a timetable!*

Some group members attempted to counteract what they saw as a reduction of their pedagogy to presentation with PowerPoint, dominated by an institutional timetable. It was clear that participants saw teaching as embedded in a place and space in that learning activities (including presentation from the front or in lectures, and the kinds of group activities that are permitted by space or by the layout of the room) are designed around the physical space that is available.

### **Tensions between the intended and the lived curriculum**

The participants identified two 'rubrics' that were seen to operate in relation to the modules they were sharing – the 'official' and the 'lived'. The 'official rubric' is that applied under quality processes in HE institutions, as regulated by the QAA Code of Conduct (QAA, 2006). To meet these requirements the modules shared by participants have been previously 'approved' by a system created by the participant's home institution to set, oversee and maintain these standards. QAA sets out the standards HEI are required to meet, stipulating that HE providers should have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes (QAA, 2011).

The term 'lived rubric' was used to denote the criteria that surrounds the teacher's practice, in how the module and course is developed and iterated, the lessons learned from pedagogical activity, and the effects of interaction with students (the experience of teaching it). This rubric is shaped by institutional processes, covered by the 'official' rubric, such as module review and the comments of external examiners that attend the course and validate its assessment and who write a report. To this end an examination of the curriculum as practice looks at the rules and organising principles that apply and are applied. It does not evaluate the quality of the modules, but it is worth pointing out that their implicit 'value' is high owing to a number of factors: they have been taught and iterated over a period of time; they are authored by teachers with high status, in that they represent their institutions, departments and disciplines (and themselves) at a national subject centre; and that they have been chosen to be shared by teachers who are regarded as experts in their subject field (and subject to 'expert' pedagogical judgement). In other words, the curriculum is representative in this context of one form of *expertise* and *authority*.



Participants talked in interview about their experiences of curriculum development in their own institutions, including the adoption of modules made open by others. They felt that the descriptions permitted in 'official' module descriptions are 'too rigid' and that they were 'lengthy and bureaucratic'. They felt that the documentation for course approval is increasing (e.g. 230 pages for a foundation degree, describing 13 modules) and that this lack of flexibility and the dominance of the 'bureaucratic over the pedagogical' to be one factor in constraining the potential for open approaches. Illustrative of this was Jonah's report of the experiences of curriculum approval at his institution, and that having to balance between pedagogic and bureaucratic demands on course planners was 'typical' in HE. Participants talked about their own conceptions of the curriculum. Seeing the curriculum as product was somewhat alarming for some:

*'Once something is produced, finalised, packaged, presented, given, put in a repository for all to see, it all comes down to who has the power to decide what gets given to whom and when. ... who has most power, and who benefits from this process' (Angela).*

A discussion arose about the control of (what is in) the curriculum, and its purpose. At the same time, individuals saw no difficulty in employing disciplinary arguments to make the case for the inclusion of a specific topic or theorist, indicating perhaps that the basis of what counts as valid curriculum knowledge is unclear. It also highlights how the knowledge structure of the discipline affects the discourse of the curriculum, as an ideology of justification (Schiff, 2009).

### **Regulating the curriculum through its structure**

One response to the need for richer descriptions of practice to enable sharing was an attempt to identify 'units of pedagogical structure' that would allow the modules to be taught by others (or used by students independently). The discussion centred on the question '*what is the basic unit of pedagogy?*' An analysis of the 24 modules shared indicates the dominance of the 'lecture/seminar/PowerPoint model' in the articulation of practice suggesting that the basis of structure is more organisational rather than pedagogical. Paula's account is typical:

*'The module is typically delivered over two hours per week to approximately 60 students. The format was written for a one-hour lecture, one-hour seminar per week' (Paula).*

In other words, the over-riding 'imprint' was that of the institution/organisation rather than the pedagogical motives of the teacher. This is reinforced by an examination of the pedagogic rationales (the 'teaching philosophy' and 'what you would say to future users of your material'). For example, some described the pedagogic 'indicators' by setting out the teaching format (the times and number of sessions), adding 'please note that attendance is required' and warning of the sanctions for

non-attendance. This is a dominance of the organisational over the instructional and can be seen to emphasise the regulative aspects of pedagogy and its discourse in social science education, thus integrating and subsuming the pedagogic discourse within it (Bernstein, 2000).

An examination of the module descriptions that participants made 'public' reveals an affinity with the standard renderings of practice that might be found in 'official' quality documents in any of the 10 institutions involved in this study. A surface analysis of the module descriptions examined above would indicate, for example, relatively strong(er) classification of boundaries (between topics and sessions) and strong(er) framing of control (over the classroom activities) in this curriculum (Bernstein, 1990). The groups were aware of this tension in how their materials might be 'read', reassuring themselves that the released materials were 'approximations of practice only'. Joshua referred to this as 'stripping the car for parts' and Daniel called it 'surgically removing the teacher'. This emotive link between the teacher and practice is echoed by Peter, who doubted that colleagues new to teaching would easily handle the comparison of their practice with that of expert others.

### **Examining expertise through exchange**

A number of participants talked about the sense they had of teaching as practice that was 'borrowed' from others and that this went beyond mere imitation. The issue of ownership came up, in relation to how teachers develop practice and how students view this. Angela is explicit about this in the advice that she gives advocating this exchange as an 'honourable one' without the need for payment or obligation, involving a kind of 'bricolage':

*'I would say that pedagogic work is made through a lot of borrowing and informal use of other people's work, with not much acknowledgement; it is a creative process of putting lots of things together' (Angela).*

Part of this embedded context is the 'intention to teach' as an expression of 'hope' for its future enactment. This is examined in the question that arose from within the group: 'how would we like our modules to be taught?' One response to this involves the expectation that there is a common and shared 'disciplinary understanding of the curriculum'. The exchange of practice, as a form of expertise, is therefore seen in these accounts to encompass a conception of an exchange gradient between teacher and student, and reciprocity between colleagues based on the tacit understanding of the value and rules of this exchange. This can be viewed as knowing in and as practice (Schön, 1983), in which dispositions to the curriculum and its context come into play (Bourdieu, 1986).

Exchange could also take the form of a translation, and this was literal in the case of David who had developed a national online portal for Welsh medium HE. He referred to this as his living gateway (*Y porth byw*) through which English was translated into Welsh within a cultural struggle.

Here the translation into Welsh represented a form of exchange that involved students and teachers in 'a dynamic, emergent and collaborative process of learning (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006, p. 272). The discussion of how this could be achieved embraced a definition of 'negotiated curriculum' (Lovat and Smith, (1995, p. 23). The importance of involving students was acknowledged by the participants including how students are perceived as learners. However, the involvement of students was doubted as potentially problematic and time-consuming:

*'To start with, students do not really have the right levels of pedagogic literacy to be able to evaluate the [course design]; furthermore, it will be very difficult to get the students to evaluate [course design] out of the context of the module' (Group Discussion).*

How students are perceived is also indicated by the pedagogy that is designed for them that is often based around a particular type of engagement with students and a particular concept of the student as learner. The idea of student as 'autonomous learner', for example, figures in the way that the groups imagined participants would want to be involved in the curriculum if it was made available to them – i.e. that students would want to be involved but would also want to be left to get on with it. The prevalent notion of student as 'co-creator of knowledge' (Neary and Winn, 2009) was seen by the groups as somehow contradictory of their own hopes for their teaching designs. How could it be possible that teachers would lead the development of their own course designs while consulting students on what this would be? This was likened to a doctor asking patients to diagnose themselves. However, where these designs were not rigidly grounded in learning outcomes or tied specifically to assessment the consensus was that students would show little interest, indicating a student preference for the authority of the teacher's direct input. At stake here appears to be teachers' authority and expertise and how this is perceived by students.

The general findings indicate that the groups doubted that students would welcome an open curriculum and would perceive it as extracurricular and external to their learning. This echoes findings of a large-scale survey of UK Social Science academics (Marsh and Pountney, 2009). The reasons for this 'unfulfilled' promise of open education to bring about the 'negotiated curriculum' in which teacher and student act 'as co-constructors of knowledge' (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006, p. 275) remain unclear, and are in need of further analysis.

### **The discipline as the language of practice**

Sharing as a methodology for developing the curriculum was enabled, to some extent, by the fact that those involved were from a similar discipline, with shared implicit disciplinary knowledge and shared understanding of pedagogy. The value of the designs exchanged, in the context of the discipline, is referred to as taking place between 'like-minded people', as the application of 'taste' as 'a sort of social orientation' (Bourdieu, 1984:

466), involving being exposed to other people's practice, and learning from this. There was recognition in both groups that a language to talk about practice of teaching was needed. The groups agreed that the discipline was an existing shared language with which practice could be discussed in relation to knowledge:

*'When we write and publish our research, we do not necessarily explain the whole background. We assume that the reader will be able to draw on the implicit disciplinary knowledge and will take responsibility themselves for any 'gaps'.'* (Paula in conversation with Heidi).

Participants compared the need for a specialist language to describe practice, with the specialist and shared language that researchers use, and questioned whether there was the same motivation:

*'With a research repository, staff will put their publications up because that is where the data will be drawn from for the REF, promotions etc., etc. What would encourage academics to upload their teaching materials?'* (Carina in conversation with Joshua).

This language of practice bound and delimited the means by which the practice of teaching could be talked about, and how the 'packaging' of teaching shaped pedagogy:

*'Interestingly, many colleagues I know admit that it is not always a very effective way to explain what is going on to students — complaints that students do not read module guides are very common, and I don't know many that read learning outcomes or assessment rubrics either'* (Joshua).

This was found to be easier when the language of the discipline could be put to work to present pedagogical positions (or world views), drawing on, for example, an anthropological perspective to make sense of practice. Or in the discussion of resources with regard to criminology, for instance. Also, not surprisingly perhaps, disciplines and disciplinary perspectives are realised in approaches to learning activities and assessments, as a kind of disciplinary pedagogic mode, or signature pedagogy, (Shulman, 2005), as a form of cultural translation, in for example how visual images are used in anthropology:

*'It is very important ... that pictures are not used to exoticise other/own cultures, peoples, beliefs, practices. I think my preoccupation with pictures would be that they are treated unethically and that the visual system where they come from is objectified, commoditised and lost'* (Angela).

This suggests that the participants used the language of the discipline to talk about and make sense of the discipline. It also indicates that the system of values and beliefs operating were influenced by disciplinary understandings.

### **The language of academic development**

One established language readily accessible to participants was that of 'academic development', as 'a project committed to improvement and innovation' (Clegg, 2009, p. 409). This was neglected or ignored by the majority of the group and openly opposed by some in the form of a 'critical approach' to the understanding of curriculum and pedagogy:

*'I think we should start with practice, in all its contradictory messiness. (...) I think we all have perfectly good resources to describe and reflect in the subject disciplines that we all practise. We use terms like ideology, power/knowledge couplets, discourses and the like to discuss the practices of policemen, politicians, media folk and the like – why exempt ourselves?'* (Daniel).

Resistance to the notion of academic development is indicative of a general disposition by academics to the idea of having academic development 'done to them' (Clegg, 2009). Paula pointed to the discourse of Learning Teaching and Assessment (LTA):

*'... LTA people in the institution have learned to 'speak jargon that people don't understand ... my preference is for pedagogical rationale rather than applying any 'out there' pedagogical framework'* (Paula).

While it is not unusual for academics to criticise the system within which they work, the social sciences are distinguished perhaps by the fact that they use the language of the discipline to do it. This critique of academic development in the form of an 'imposed' educational philosophy is a theme that plays around and within the groups, as a lightning rod in which they draw down disciplinary understandings:

*'We would certainly want to use good sociological common sense to question the view that 'high level pedagogy' is simply the result of 'the concrete instantiation of philosophical positions', which is naive idealism, seeing practice as the outpourings of some individual consciousness. We might continue to question what exactly it is that 'constructivism' seems to offer the modern educational professional...'* (Daniel)

Joshua compared attempts to make statements about beliefs underlying an approach to teaching to the practice of providing teaching statements to secure academic tenure in the USA. He contributed an article, *'Teaching Statements are Bunk'* (Heggarty, 2010), an opinion piece disparaging 'teaching philosophies' for their emptiness and platitude and because they are poorly suited to evaluate classroom ability. The headline makes his point, but it may miss the message that Heggarty offers in closing: 'My hope is that we can reduce one such aggravation by transforming the empty 'teaching philosophy' ritual into an evolving set of useful, nitty-gritty reflections on how to best teach university students' (Heggarty, 2010).

Angela and Paula reflect on this: *'We wonder if people derive beliefs from scratch, or if not (and we recognise a lot of practice starts as 'borrowed') then where does this begin? There is an issue that teaching statements might become formulaic. Beliefs often emerge in conversation and discussion, not in institutional mandates'*

This became an 'emancipatory device' to explore the concept of 'openness' as well as pedagogical issues around student engagement and in particular innovative assessment. It draws on a notion of teaching as 'subversion' (Postman and Weingartner, 1969). Implicit here, perhaps, is that the struggle for status and resources for the curriculum is conditioned by a sense of what teachers bring with them, as embodied practice, and the need to reconcile this with dispositions to practice.

### **Describing and generating the curriculum**

The group regarded the process of making the curriculum open through description and exchange valuable for the development of pedagogy in that it 'opened up' the module to development by others. This sense of a 'generative' format for their module designs was seen as a benefit. However, while this was demonstrated in the exchanges that took place in peer review, the sense of how this might happen beyond the group was unclear. There was uncertainty about who the recipients, or end users were and what they knew about the module, the discipline and about teaching itself. Carina wondered if this exchange implied a 'knowledge gradient' from the experienced tutor to the less experienced. There was also a fear that the modules would 'disintegrate'. Implicit here is the idea that practice is an aggregation of small actions and that making it available for others is a disaggregation. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the final version of the modules including the pedagogical structure, assessment and the use of materials. Creating these descriptions involved participants in overcoming difficulties that are embedded in the process of describing practice in order that it can become 'open'. These were seen to involve the triple problems of *description, context, and ownership*.

### **The problem of how to describe practice**

In considering the issue of describing practices two questions emerged: 1) describing the 'what'? And 2) describing the 'how'? Participants decided to provide a commentary with the module descriptions that others would find useful. The participants voiced this directly to the 'other' teacher explaining the order in which to look at things. Angela, for example, offered advice to potential future users of her module designs by 'speaking to the other'. Some, however, doubted the usefulness of providing descriptions that guided the practice of others:

*'The pedagogy is a composite of a number of pedagogical turns and moves - the pattern in the patchwork quilt will be difficult to see'* (Carina).

The difficulty of describing practice arose partly from its tacit and fragmented nature, including the conditions under which the original teaching was developed. It was felt that sharing and exposing the story of that process would be useful to others in allowing contextual and local materials and designs to be re-contextualised. The tacitness issue was also heightened in the recognition that practice is dynamic (i.e. it changes every time something is taught) and that institutional contexts were one condition for this.

In examining the descriptions of their practice through peer review the groups identified embedded practices that were invisible or below the surface and that were 'laden' with meaning beyond the official 'intended' outcomes. There were many examples of modules 'carrying meanings' to students that are not prescribed in learning outcomes or in the aims and objectives of the module, including assessment designed to regulate learning or behaviour rather than to examine learning itself.

Angela pointed to the difficulty inherent in any form of recontextualisation, that in effect much of what we do in constructing materials and teaching is borrowed practice, adapted and assimilated through tacit and explicit choices:

*'What we are doing here is re-interpreting, from context. In doing so, our task, I feel, is to provide a sense of 'aid' in translating the way in which the context and the meaning was a kind of 'thick learning experience' as opposed at looking at the materials and interactions in a vacuum, as 'objects' (fetishised objects maybe), as pieces that have been taken out of context, re-used, dis-integrated' (Angela).*

Sharing, therefore, became a focus on the original context of the curriculum and how this could be moved (translation) and whether this would involve the materials changing (transformation).

### **Ownership of the curriculum and how it affects exchange**

Practice as habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) is evident in participant's accounts of practice, alongside the concerns of ceding ownership and intellectual property. The connection between translating practice and owning it was noted often by participants, in their own practice and reported to them by colleagues in their institutions:

*'I've got stuff now from when I taught in [university X], which was given to me by a colleague... but something about it being available to anybody, anywhere, is quite strange. You have put quite a lot of time and energy into thinking about how you might deliver and share those resources with students. I don't know how I would feel about sharing them' (Joshua).*

Participants saw their teaching practice as a form of a repertoire that they had developed over a period of time, in which they had accumulated status and a number of strategies, routines and materials as a sort of

*accumulated history* in which they, as authors, have personal and professional investment. The act of making visible can be considered here to be an exchange, in which practice becomes visible to others, through a process of sharing, explaining, justifying, and rationalising. The experience of sharing led several to identify peer review as an important means of explaining and describing practice.

*'If you've got a lovely course, well thought out, and the reading list is there... I think it's a bit barmy, to be honest, to give it away. It's more about it being copied by other institutions – I think that's the more dangerous thing. You want to differentiate yourself in the market. How do you defend that? I don't know'* (Mary).

The idea of ownership of the curricular materials suggests an intimacy in the relationship between teachers and their practice, the result of a 'craft' that is challenged, or under threat in being made open. The 'letting go' of pedagogical resources is thus seen as a struggle. Carina, on the other hand, was also concerned that her modules would be seen to be *'mundane, boring, lacking in innovation etc.'* While the collegial support of others can reassure, these responses indicate a level of anxiety around the risk of being plagiarised, having intellectual property stolen and/or losing competitive edge. It also emphasises a strong personal investment in the materials.

There appears to be a conflict of interest here between sharing the curriculum and the personal interests and concerns that teachers indicate in their practice. While I would avoid a conception of the behavioural and psychological aspects of 'dissonance' in this practice (Festinger, 1985) an examination of making the curriculum open as a social relation within a system of exchange suggests itself at this point. The next section examines the accounts of participants with regard to sharing their practice as an 'exchange'.

### **Mutuality and reciprocation**

The notion of 'trust', in relation to the 'trustworthiness' of the curriculum, and what signified this, was raised by the group as an expectation that was seen to be bi-directional. Paula articulates this: *'we have to trust users of our material to use it responsibly'*. This indicates, perhaps, a concern for what happens once it is 'out of our hands'. The comparison between the trustworthiness of teaching material and that of research was raised again in the peer review activity.

*'... after all, when research is published, authors do not have a lot of say about how people will use their material. Lecturers should have the ability to judge decide for themselves if partners' [curricular materials] will be reusable for them'* (Joshua)

The group discussed this as a process of translation and relocation rather than literal reproduction of practice, in what became the 'generative'



principle in the development of a toolkit for describing and sharing practice. This included the importance of the 'what' in exchange, raised in connection with 'sensitive' issues in the lived curriculum. Participants were aware, for example, of the problems in the exchange of some disturbing issues embedded in modules and materials:

*'Images of Abu-Ghraib, Guantanamo, pictures of prisoners who have been tortured ... raises many moral and ethical points of discussion within the class'* (Carina).

Heidi offered the users of her module a health warning:

*'Issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, race hate, homophobia and violence against the elderly often elicit strong emotions... I have yet to teach this topic without being approached by at least one student wanting to disclose personal issues – so be prepared!'* (Heidi).

Furthermore, while some were concerned with the 'potential for exchange' others encountered the practicalities and realities of exchange, including institutional processes. Delilah experienced problems when her institution insisted the module, which had been officially validated elsewhere, should be reapproved. Institutional constraints on the process of curriculum design and delivery were also exposed when participants attempted to relocate materials and modules to their home institutions. This illustrates ways in which institutional constraints clash with the vision of an open curriculum where learners have the flexibility to select a range of individual units or courses to suit their personal needs for the development of expertise.

### **The value of curricular 'goods'**

The group was sensitised to the conditions and rules of exchange, predicated by the use and re-use of things being produced and given, including asking 'who benefits'? This includes the conditions for ownership, including entitlement and a 'struggle with meaning' in which to own something 'you need to act as though you had made it from new' (Heidi) and in which materials are exchanged but ownership remains with the author and the exchange is 'dissolution' of context and practice, as a 're-making':

*'Do our imagined future users actually feel they 'own' what it is that we create here? Or will they ever feel, like I did with the 'handed down teaching materials from previous lecturers' not quite at ease with using it and owning it?'* (Angela).

Angela talked about how she invested cultural meanings in her practice citing the example of a string bag, or 'bilum', which she used with students and that she felt represented the way she carried her practice around with her:

*'I chose the bilum for two reasons, one sentimental, as my supervisor had done her fieldwork in Papua New Guinea ... and had passed it to me, for me to carry, Bilum-like, all those things that I could carry with me, children, piglets, books, taros, all the many material and symbolic materials in my academic life' (Angela)*

In addition, participants felt that 'lived', everyday practice was 'messy' and 'untidy' and that open curricular materials needed to be 'cleaned-up'. This included the habituated transgression of copyright and intellectual ownership that participants were forced to 'own-up to' when preparing their materials to be become open and 'official'.

The examples above represent a relocation of practice from one space to another as a recontextualisation (Bernstein, 2000, p. 77). In Bernstein's terms, making the curriculum open through sharing is a weakening of the collective base of the 'centralised sacred' which destabilises pedagogic identities, as indicated by the tensions and conflicts apparent in participants' accounts. The perceived value of the course design and materials that are exchanged suggests a shift here towards a 'market driven official pedagogic discourse, practice and context' (ibid., p. 78). Participants resisted a view of their materials and course designs as 'goods' and their contributions as being made to a 'market'. However, playing out here is the idea of symbolic exchange, in which teachers 'break a covenant' of inner dedication to one's own practice, in which there is a new concept of the knowledge of practice in which:

*'Knowledge should flow like money to wherever it can create advantage and profit. Indeed, knowledge is not like money, it is money. Knowledge is divorced from persons, their commitments, their personal dedications. These become impediments, restrictions on the flow of knowledge, and introduce deformations in the working of the symbolic market' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 86, original emphasis).*

This highlights the inherent contradiction operating in what teachers see as the purposes and value of their practice and the view held by the institution, or arena, in which the practice takes place.

### **Discussion: characterisation of curriculum design in a collegial context**

This paper has addressed the research question: What are the characteristics of the teaching practices that have helped to shape the educational beliefs and values that academics bring to curriculum design in higher education? The context for teachers' activity as a 'collegially focused' field position as embodied by teachers' experiences in the 'lived' curriculum has been discussed **in relation to OER. The 'opening up' process** has brought the HE curriculum into focus, as the object of study, by enabling the identification and examination of the issues and concerns that participants shared. The characteristics that have emerged from the analysis of the data are now summarised.

### The curriculum strongly bound in the educational context

The curriculum is seen to be inscribed by the context in which it is set, especially the imprint of the institution. It is contextualised with 'housekeeping' including regulations that govern the everyday practices involved. Teachers' understanding of the curriculum is closely associated with the use of curricular resources and texts, to the extent that practice is objectified materially (Corradi *et al.*, 2010). The relationship with these objects lies somewhere between a possession and what might be regarded to be a commodity in which the curriculum is an external realisation of internal interests. These resources constitute a design for learning that acts as a 'carrier' for pedagogy, in which materials are not pedagogically neutral but can be (potentially) pedagogically 'inert' or 'inactive'. Applying these curricular resources involves expertise that is informed by dispositions towards learning and teaching and this (in the case of social sciences) is informed by the discipline (Trowler and Cooper, 2002).

Descriptions of the curriculum are evaluated by participants according to two 'rubrics' of practice: the 'official' (intended) and the 'lived' (Porter and Smithson, 2001). Experiences of the official quality processes have shaped conceptions of the curriculum (Jackson, 2000) and this conforms, in the main, to the model of description that is prevalent in UK HE by QAA. In addition to these internal influences, external drivers such as employability and internationalisation of the curriculum are affecting how the curriculum is arranged and composed (Lester and Costley, 2010), and participants rationalise this as empowerment of the individual using the language of the discipline. This has led to conflicting views of the purpose of the curriculum as either process or product (Knight, 2001).

### The curriculum individualised and interactional

Participants' accounts describe how they perceive knowers (e.g. as autonomous, or independent, and as a 'graduate') and this perception is mediated through pedagogic interaction (i.e. by classroom activities, assignments and assessment) as interactional and individualised (Parker, 2003). This perception is influenced by the use of curricular resources and texts, involving a relationship with knowledge and how it is acquired. Acquisition of knowledge is a social process involving the knower's social relation with the teacher (or with the teacher's relationship with knowledge). The sense of the 'negotiated curriculum' is a shift in control of the curriculum that requires the student to have a sense of the original intended purpose of pedagogic materials and the rationale for its production (Lovat and Smith, 1995). The basis of this is unclear to teachers and knowers (Bovill *et al.*, 2009) and has become a form of 'filling in the blanks' in which 'not knowing the rules of the game' has implications for both teacher and student.

Exchange is identified as a key characteristic of curriculum design in collegial settings (Horsbrough, 2000) arising from understandings of describing the curriculum and making it open (Oliver, 2003). Exchange is seen as the outcome of practice, for example in how teaching develops over time, and as an outcome of practice in itself, shaped by the metaphor of 'goods in transit'. Transfer of practice as an exchange is seen to involve bi-directional trust, and to involve a disintegration/reintegration as a 're-making'. Exchange, in this context, is reflexive and developmental, in which reciprocal understandings are exchanged, actually or potentially. As an 'actuality' exchange takes the form of insight into one's own practice; as a 'potential' it involves the transfer of symbolic capital (status and reputation), or as anticipation of the 'gift' being reciprocated in the form of similar goods or of improvement of the original.

#### The discipline acting as (proxy for) pedagogy

Participants see the discipline as a shared language, and a (re)source for meaning making that is useful in relation to the act of teaching itself and to form a meta-narrative of explanation, including a disposition to academic development (Clegg, 2009). The discipline informs pedagogy and is itself a pedagogic mode (Fanghanel, 2009) and to a degree is a proxy for pedagogy. In other words, the discipline not only substitutes for pedagogy it *authorises* itself to do this. This can be seen in the way that participants talk about, explain and justify their practice using the language of the discipline in preference to that of academic development. In the context of the discipline the exchange of curricular materials, including designs, is referred to as taking place between 'like-minded people', as the application of 'taste' as 'a sort of social orientation' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466). This can be seen to be a code shift from a knowledge code to a knower code (Maton, 2014). Curricular engagement for example was considered to involve a range of scenarios for both teacher and learner in which conventional definitions of interactivity missed an important distinction between that designed to round out the tutor's own agenda and something more syllabus dependent.

The teacher's relationship with knowers is seen to be formed around pedagogic interactions that are also shaped by the discipline (Stark, 2000). The notion of *pedagogic framework* for teaching was adopted pragmatically as 'what works for us' in the selection, sequencing, and pacing of content rather than conforming to any pedagogic theory (Oliver, 2003). Analysis of the module descriptions indicates relatively strong(er) classification of boundaries (between topics and sessions) and strong(er) framing of control (over the classroom activities) in this curriculum. Initial analysis of this suggests a 'collection code' (e.g. 'I teach sociology') as opposed to an 'integrated code' (e.g. 'I teach students') (Bernstein, 1977). Participants found this a surprising analysis and difficult to rationalise within their own schema. It echoes, however, other studies that have examined knowledge and knower codes in sociology (Luckett, 2009).

Curriculum development knowledge weakly framed and strongly classified

Module and course mapping in this phase of the research is seen as iteration towards more focused and greater specificity of curricular description rather than increased coherence. These descriptions are inscribed by the institution as a 'power relay' of the academy and government policy. Participants found description difficult owing to its intrinsic tacitness of practice, and because of the 'baggage' that has accreted in practice over time (including 'housekeeping'). This is also affected by a sense of 'ownership' and a relationship with practice as 'borrowings'. The tacitness of knowledge was also identified as a difficulty that had to be overcome. Making the curriculum more open in a collegial context carries with it a number of constraints, including how practice is personalised, tacit and idiosyncratic at the various levels of institution, department, course, cohort and the individual teacher.

Curriculum design is subject to the bureaucratic requirements of the curriculum (its official rubric) and influenced by external factors such as institutional context, drivers such as employability, and a shared disciplinary understanding of practice as a form of consensus. This involved a *scrutiny of product* that was subject to peer review, collective decision making and a degree of autonomy in that this was carried out by the group themselves. This meets the four tenets of the collegial principle (Waters, 1989, p. 955) indicating, however, a *predominately collegiate* organisation rather than an *exclusively collegiate* one (Waters, 1989) underpinned by the QA processes in HE. This suggests that the curriculum design process in this context is governed by academics according to principles derived from the institutional field and beyond (i.e. economic and political). Furthermore, the criteria for success can be seen to derive from a competence-based model that is present-oriented (developing) while being future-referenced (becoming) (Bernstein, 2000).

### Summary

This case study demonstrates how participants, in the context of an open curriculum, are able to explain their practices, and use and develop conceptual language for themselves in order that practice can be examined and described. This is a search for structure and coherence in the social science curriculum (Berheide, 2005) that characterises the curriculum development work exemplified by participants – the means by which the curriculum can be understood and enacted, and how this is legitimated, echoing other studies (Maton, 2014, Luckett, 2009).

Orientations to practice that are *collegially focused* clearly involve teachers working together, in which elements of reciprocity (exchange) and mutuality of practice (Little, 1990) exist. There are also a number of aspects of collaboration to be seen here as joint undertakings informed by professional ideals (Fielding, 1999), exemplified in group members' accounts and this is strengthened by mutual recognition of professional expertise, based on an authority derived from the discipline. This authority is seen to be furthered by peer review that is characterised by its

'horizontal' nature. However, the focus is mainly on intended gains (as the product of design, and as 'publication' of courses) indicating that this is possibly instrumental, and contrived (Hargreaves and Dawes, 1990).

However, as noted above, there are a number of instances where the basis of legitimation of the curriculum, the underlying principles by which things come into being or are possible, is unclear. The groups' search for a 'language for practice' indicates the potential of open curriculum practice to build on its insights – its potential for cumulative knowledge building (Maton, 2014). However, the group were unable to identify the *generative* form of exchange, as the means by which new instances of their module descriptions could be realised. This problematises cumulative knowledge building in the curriculum with respect to how the curriculum develops over time, and how new pedagogical ideas are subsumed and integrated hierarchically, rather than segmentally within it. Accommodating this is possible through a rethinking of the curriculum as a (new kind of) disciplinary practice, but the implications of this are for the curriculum itself, both in the struggle between everyday and theoretical knowledge, and in the way that the curriculum is differentiated.

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<sup>i</sup> On September 14-15, 2007, the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Shuttleworth Foundation convened a meeting in Cape Town to gather leading proponents of open education to seek ways for these initiatives to deepen and accelerate their efforts through collaboration. The meeting released a declaration of shared vision and common strategies as a concrete first step towards this kind of collaboration.

<sup>ii</sup> Online repositories such as JorumOpen ([www.jorum.ac.uk](http://www.jorum.ac.uk)) and MERLOT (<http://taste.merlot.org/>) provide access to free learning and teaching resources, created and contributed by staff from UK further and higher education institutions. Jorum is a JISC-funded service, run by the two national data centres Mimas and EDINA, and collects and shares learning and teaching materials, allowing their re-use and repurposing.

<sup>iii</sup> Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org/>) is a non-profit organization that enables the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools. They provide a free, copyright licences as a standardized way to give public permission to share and use creative work.

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