

Describing what? The articulation of curriculum in the context of course planning, design and approval in Higher Education [abstract only]

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Describing what? The articulation of curriculum in the context of course planning, design and approval in Higher Education

This seminar reports doctoral research based on a qualitative case study of curriculum development in Higher Education (HE). It focuses on the characteristics of the practices that shape, and are shaped by, the educational beliefs and values that university teachers bring to course design and planning (Barnett, 2005; Barnett and Coate, 2005; McClean 2006). It explores the experiences of 12 teachers, from ten HE institutions, preparing to make their course practices 'open' to others 'collegially'; alongside the accounts and texts of 26 teachers, in one institution, seeking 'official approval' for their courses in the form of institutional 'validation', or who are responsible for 'developing' and 'approving' these statements of 'course design'.

Drawing on social realism (Moore and Maton, 2001), it combines Bourdieu's (1992) conception of higher education as a field, with Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notions of pedagogical discourse and knowledge codes to offer an analytical framework capable of examining the descriptions that teachers make of their practice, and the means by which this can be differentiated (Shay 2012). One aspect of this, employability, is considered with regard to aspects of relational and positional autonomy of teachers (Maton, 2005) from which an explanatory language of description can be derived. This analysis is offered in the context of the debate around how the curriculum in HE is being 'hybridised' (Young and Muller, 2007; Wheelahan, 2010) and the potential implications of a discursive gap (Bernstein, 2000) as the space between what teachers do and what they are able to say about their teaching. Drawing on the findings of the study the seminar will discuss how the importance of knowledge is legitimated in the conception of the curriculum in Higher Education (Maton, 2007; Lockett 2012) and how we may need to defend theoretical knowledge in the curriculum as 'society's way of having a conversation with itself' (Wheelahan, 2012).

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