Students and staff co-creating curricula: possibilities and practicalities

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Overview

- Background and definitions
- Possible and desirable levels of participation
- Examples of different types of participation
- Challenges
- Key design decisions influencing student engagement
What is the curriculum?

Fraser & Bosanquet’s (2006) curriculum definitions

a) Structure and content of a unit
b) Structure and content of a programme of study
c) The students’ experience of learning
d) A dynamic and interactive process of teaching and learning (p272)
- Students as co-creators/co-producers of their learning (Bovill et al, 2011 & 2009; McCulloch, 2009; Neary, 2010; SFC, 2008)

- Literature calling for student participation in curriculum design from critical pedagogy and popular education (Darder et al, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Fischer, 2005; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 1983; Rogers and Freiberg, 1969)

- Specific student participation in curriculum design
  - Breen & Littlejohn (2000) Language teaching
  - Samson & Scandrett (1999) Environmental justice
  - Fischer (2005); Delpish et al (2010) Education
  - Bovill et al, (2011); Cook-Sather (2010) non-disciplinary specific
Ladder of student participation in curriculum design

- Students in control
- Partnership - a negotiated curriculum
- Student control of some areas of choice
- Students control of prescribed areas
- Wide choice from prescribed choices
- Limited choice from prescribed choices
- Participation claimed, tutor in control
- Dictated curriculum – no interaction

Students control decision-making and have substantial influence

Students have some choice and influence

Tutors control decision-making informed by student feedback

Tutors control decision-making

Students increasingly active in participation
Ladder of student participation in curriculum design

Students as full members of curriculum design team

Students in control

Partnership - a negotiated curriculum

Student control of some areas of choice

Students control of prescribed areas

Wide choice from prescribed choices

Limited choice from prescribed choices

Participation claimed, tutor in control

Dictated curriculum - no interaction

Students designing their own learning outcome(s)

Students have some choice and influence

Tutors control decision-making informed by student feedback

Gathering feedback from students… Depends what you do with the feedback
Words of caution…

Higher up the ladder is not necessarily ‘better’

Beware of chasing the nirvana of total participation and totally equal participation

Different points on the ladder might be possible or desirable in different contexts

The ladder is simply a model to facilitate discussion
1) Do you have any examples of co-created curricula?
2) Where would you place them on the ladder?
Examples of student participation

• students asked to complete course feedback questionnaire
• students choosing the topic for their research project
• students co-designing marking criteria with staff
• students and staff collaborate to choose a course text book
• students influencing the content of the curriculum
• students become full members of a curriculum design team
• students designing the VLE for a programme
• students designing (one of?) their own learning outcomes
Some big questions…

I teach first years and they don’t have 20 years of experience like me to know what needs to be in the content of the first year chemistry curriculum…
Challenges to the co-creation process

- What are the key challenges to you co-creating curricula at the University of Reading?
- Can these challenges be overcome?
Tutors as gatekeepers…

- Which students? *Retrospective, current or future design?*
- Selecting students – if not all students by interview/criteria
- Do you reward your students?
- Course, programme or extra-curricular?
- Students involved in designing curriculum process or content? 

Bovill (forthcoming)