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Raising the Prestige of Educational Expertise: Research-Intensive Curriculum Change

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Abstract: Institution-wide curriculum change in research-intensive institutions is a costly, time-intensive and politically fraught undertaking, and identifies who has responsibility for and ownership of the curriculum. The unbundling of the traditional tri-partite academic role of teaching, research and service can leave a gap of who in those communities is empowered to decide curriculum content and structure. Using discourse analysis of curriculum change documentation, we analyse the experience of departments undergoing a holistic, large-scale curriculum review. Departments engaged in the process to varying degrees, with associated integration of educational and disciplinary perspectives. Landscapes of practice are used to explore the impact of different communities within departments coming together, or not, in the review process. The acknowledgement and appreciation of educational and disciplinary pedagogic expertise alongside disciplinary research-based knowledge is highlighted as a marker for successful adoption of the curriculum review intentions. This contributes to the underdeveloped field of higher education curriculum change.

Paper: Tensions between research and teaching play out in the heart of the student experience—the curriculum. The curriculum can be defined as a process of making choices about educational aims and how to go about realising them (Toohey 1999). Individuals' ideologies and value systems influence their decision-making process in designing and delivering the curriculum (Lattuca & Stark 2009). Tensions in what is valued, by individuals, institutions and disciplines are often bridged through attempts at developing links between research and teaching in the curriculum (Brew, 2006; Fung 2017).

Institution-wide curriculum change is highly contentious and is often used as a vehicle for significant institutional change (Blackmore & Kandiko 2012). Given the importance of teaching quality to the student experience, this paper explores the tensions between teaching and research expertise in shaping departmental responses to an institution-wide curriculum change process.

The higher education curriculum has historically been set by academic staff who research and teach in the relevant disciplines. Research has identified the unbundling of the academic role and an increase in differentiated academic roles (Coates & Goedegebuure 2012). This has led to different

forms of academic prestige as roles become disaggregated and more specialised (Macfarlane 2011). Once holistic tasks involving several aspects of an academic's role, such as designing the curriculum, are now spread across a range of communities, including research, teaching, digital learning, and diversity and inclusion teams.

While traditionally curriculum is developed in single discipline-located communities, these can be limiting and close down learning opportunities between communities and development of professional expertise (Hodson 2020). Recent research has focussed on the value of multiple, overlapping professional communities: 'The 'body of knowledge' of a profession is best understood as a 'landscape of practice' consisting of a complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them' (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner 2015).

In research-intensive institutions, reviewing and redesigning the curriculum increasingly involves working across multiple communities, sometimes beyond institutional structures. Developing expertise across communities, "knowledgeability is a relationship individuals establish with respect to a landscape of practice that makes them recognizable as legitimate actors in complex social systems" (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014, p. 266).

This study is based in mid-size, highly devolved research-intensive institution in the UK several years into a Strategy-led institution-wide curriculum change. Departments aligned modules and credit frameworks, created space for innovative teaching and new pedagogical approaches and enhanced assessment strategies. A discourse analysis approach explored patterns of language use which 'embody shifts in perspectives and values' (Baldwin 1994, 128). Documents include:

1. The Learning and Teaching Strategy;
2. Curriculum Redesign Proposal Forms: institutional quality assurance outputs detailing the process, decision making and outcomes of the review, and
3. Programme Specifications: official external-facing that detail the new curriculum offering for prospective students and function as the contract for what the institution will deliver for a given course.

The Strategy document was first analysed and fed into the development of an evaluation rubric based on its key principles. Discourse analysis explored the extent to which these principles were adopted in the Redesign Forms and Programme Specification documents. A linguistic ethnographic approach was used, which allows for viewing the activities of individuals situated in broader social landscapes (Copland and Creese 2015, 13). This paper focuses on analysis of the questions on 'Expertise', 'Tone', and 'Authorship' from the rubric.

Curriculum change was an opportunity for transformation in some departments and a retrenchment of existing practices and structures in others. Analysis showcased how various forms of teaching- and research-based discipline expertise were being utilised within a status and legitimacy landscape. This can be divided into three levels. The first is disciplinary expertise, based on research experience and external professional practice. When individuals and teams with disciplinary-based expertise recognised the value of pedagogical expertise they were able to implement the Strategy in a disciplinary context. The second is disciplinary pedagogical expertise, seen in those within the discipline but with pedagogic expertise linked with significant teaching responsibilities or being recognised as an experienced teaching practitioner. Working across landscapes of practice in the curriculum review process, they were able to value 'disciplinary expertise' and 'general educational

expertise' and say why those without disciplinary knowledge still have a valid perspective to contribute to curriculum change. The third level was general pedagogical expertise, identified and valued as separate from the discipline and worthy in its own right. The ability to work across landscapes of practice allowed some departments to integrate disciplinary and pedagogical expertise, transforming the curriculum and delivering on the aims of the Strategy.

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