Educating for a Supercomplex World

Ronald Barnett, University College London Institute of Education

IEAA Internationalisation of the Curriculum Network Forum, 3 July 2017, Brisbane

ron.barnett@ucl.ac.uk

www.ioe.ac.uk

Centre for Higher Education Studies

An unforseeable world

- Students in school today – many will be alive in the C22
- What is it to educate for not just an unforseeable world
- But to help to bring on individuals who can live purposefully and fully in a world of cotinuing change and challenge?

Challenges of life – a supercomplex world

- Not just complex - overload, inadequate resources
- But also supercomplex – clash of frameworks
  - A destablized world
    - What is (eg) a doctor?
- The challenges of complexity could, to a large extent and in principle, be met
- The challenges of supercomplexity cannot be so readily dissolved.

What is it that we want?

- A hope that education can help to develop students as future members of society
- As such, neither knowledge nor skills are sufficient
- Human beings are not merely possessors of knowledge or skills but are beings, they have being in the world
- They engage with the world; they have 'being' in the world
- They have dispositions to do so, with their own intentions/ hold on world
- Not simply a technical matter but differences of values and ends ('economy'/ 'public good'/ 'authenticity' – liberty/ justice/ community …)
- Students – as exemplary human beings.

Immediate problem
(in shaping a curriculum)

- Two great (warring) mantras
- Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge
- Skills, skills, skills
- But even together they are inadequate.
- They are inert
- It is persons that have understanding for whom knowledge lives in them (and comes to be a resource)
- It is persons who put skills into action; persons with will

The limited nature of knowledge and skills

- I might have all the K and S in the world but
  - (a) choose not to use them or
  - (b) use them in malign ways or
 - (c) they may have become outdated.

  So we need a different approach – to focus on students as persons.

A curriculum for becoming

- Knowledge - knowing
- Action (not mere skills)
- Being – becoming

- Intertwinedness
- Each has its own demands
- But each can aid the other
- Overlapping circles (next slide)

- At its heart, an unfolding person;
- A taking on of dispositions and qualities

Knowledge

Action   S   Self

Knowing

Acting   Being

Three dimensions of the curriculum
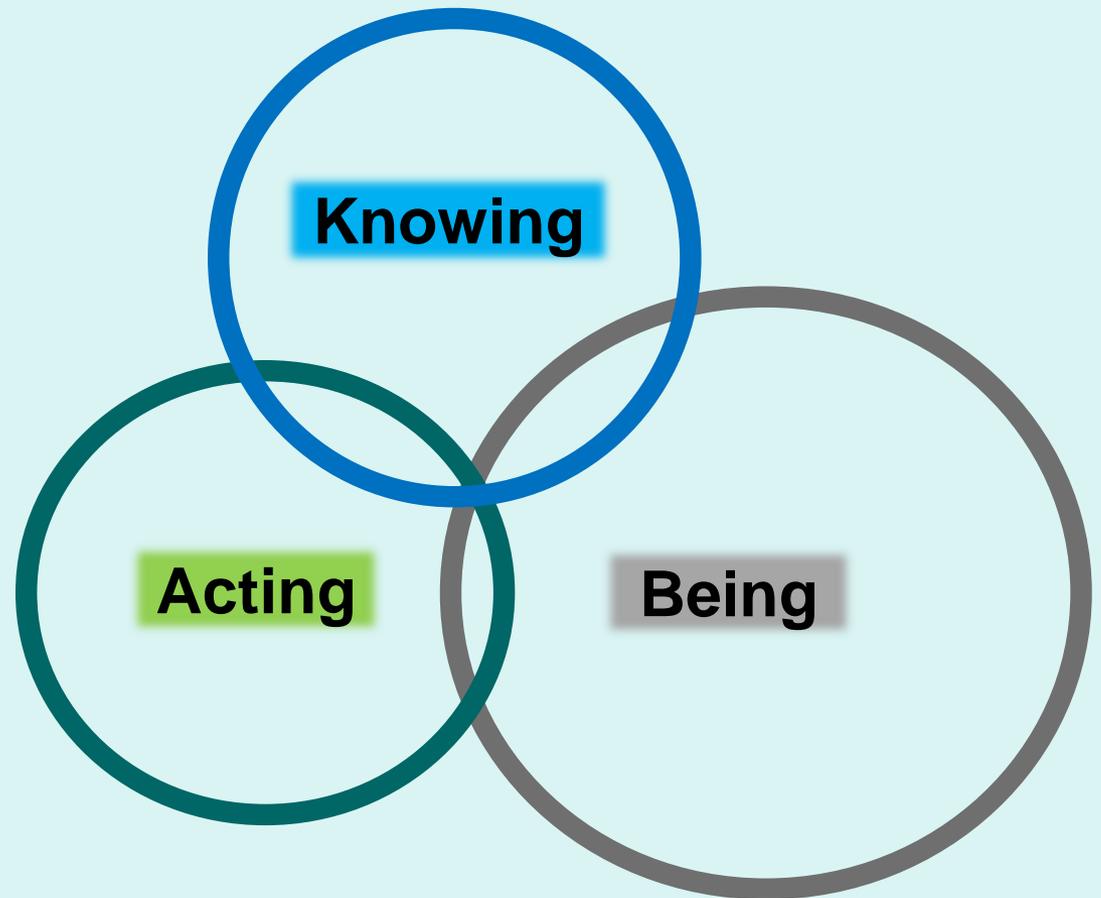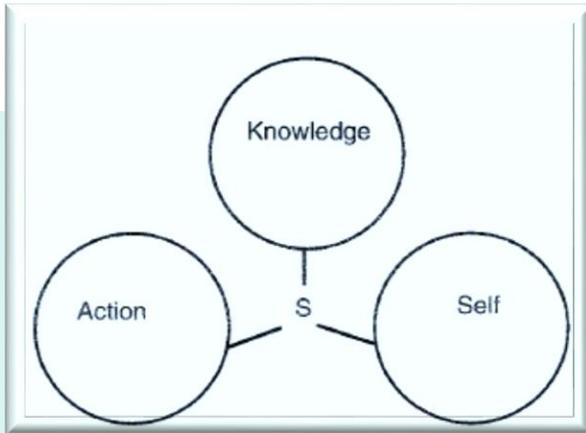
Dispositions for a world of challenge

- A will to learn
- A will to engage
- A preparedness to listen
- A preparedness to explore
- A willingness to hold oneself open to experiences
- A determination to keep going forward.

Qualities – a student becoming her/himself

- Carefulness
- Courage
- Resilience
- Self-discipline
- Integrity
- Restraint
- Respect for others
- Openness
- Criticality (towards the world; towards oneself)
- Imagination; creativity

Dispositions and Qualities compared

- The dispositions are necessary; the qualities have a degree of optionality to them
- The dispositions enable one to go forward – to acquire qualities and voice
- The qualities offer the possibility that a student will come to possess his/her own profile of qualities
- The qualities colour the student's movement forward, give it its own 'character' – literally so, to some degree, in theatre design.

The limitations of curriculum

- The curriculum – a combintion of intentional elements that together form an educational programme
- Crucial
- And calls for hard thinking
- But: insufficient for the Ds and Qs to develop
- We also need to attend to the pedagogy,
- To the teacher-student relationship (the pedagogical relationship)

Encouraging the dispositions

- *I've always had a huge passion for languages. But coming to [x university], I found the French and the Italian departments very different, and I did start to feel a bit bitter towards French. I wasn't enjoying that any more. I loved it at school more than Italian. I found the French department very rigid … I did feel like I was back in school, but not in the sixth form … I didn't feel very free to express myself in the lessons. With the Italian department, we all sit around a big table or chairs without tables in front. There would be a lot more interaction … It was more friendly, just a liberating atmosphere.'*

- Here, French department was witnessing a regression in the student's *dispositions* for learning

On the relationship between C and P

A *curriculum* may allow the teacher choice:
- Over the sequencing of elements, the materials used, even the precise topics

BUT the *pedagogy* may be fixed and rigid and even didactic.

On the other hand, the pedagogy may be open, with the student given much space for determining his/her pedagogical stance (eg in seeking support from tutors) but all held within a rigidly controlled curriculum

So where should choice and openness lie? Which choices are especially important?

Which is the more important – curriculum or pedagogy?

Stretching the student(s)

- In some quarters, there is talk of stretching the student
- But what kind of stretching?
- Cognitive, experiential, emotional, values?
- These are not necessarily entirely separate
- A cognitive stretching can be stretching in other ways besides.

A journey into scariness

'*(beginning the student journey) is [an entry into] a scary, exciting and fascinating world … We need … self-belief to survive and prosper … I remember thinking … this is amazing, exciting, exhilarating and downright terrifying … Working with a complex world is … about … not giving up when you feel overwhelmed …*'

'*… What's fascinating about Alison's courses is the amount of panic, you know, that surrounds the essays and I felt it personally … It was a very, very scary thing to do because … there were no right answers.*'

- coming out of oneself, into a new space …

16

Pedagogical energy

- Pedagogical energy is not fixed,
- Nor located in a place, to be pushed around a classroom
- Or even a school
- Rather, it can be expanded or diminished
- Do we really encourage our students – or unwittingly discourage them?

A pedagogy of risk

- Governments want to control curricula
- Schools want to control curricula
- Teachers want to control curricula
- 'Learning outcomes'
  - ie, even the pedagogy comes to be controlled
- But where is the room for serendipity, authenticity …
- 'Co-production'?
- Implies 'a pedagogy of risk'

Internationalisation – the student as a 'global citizen'

- The idea has an entrepreneurial connotation

- But, at its best, points to human being for the C21/ C22

- Deep understanding and concern

- A giving up of oneself to 'the other'

- But then, again, calls for openness, risk,

The coming of the ecological curriculum

• Horizon of universality – liberty/ equality/ community …

Promotes:
• Being in the world; global horizons
• Sensitive to its interconnectedness
• Not inertia but engagement
          - in its sustainability and even its improvement
• A care for the world
• The student as global citizen;
          -but also a public student; contributing to the public sphere
• An active empathy for the world
• Values – wise judgement

Contains:
• Spaces for reflection; critical self-reflection
• And spaces for engagement, with self, society and the world (problems)
• The internet as a space of public reasoning – injecting the university's critical standards
• Interdisciplinarity
• Social implications of disciplines

Conclusions (or, rather, a summary)

- The world is interconnected
  - Whatever is said about the end of globalisation
- A world of ineradicable challenge
- All bets are off – except perhaps for climate change
- We all have to become ourselves continuously
  - And find ways of connecting with others, with the world
- Education – C and P - has completely to be rethought
- Abandon mantras of knowledge and skills
- And focus on students as persons, always capable of
  continuous flourishing
- Always possible of surprising us and themselves too.

Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL

Tel +44 (0)20 7612 6000
Fax +44 (0)20 7612 6126
Email info@ioe.ac.uk
Web www.ioe.ac.uk