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THE ABOLITION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Dismantling the Curriculum in Higher Education

Richard Hall¹ and Keith Smyth²

¹ De Montfort University, GB
rhall1@dmu.ac.uk

² University of the Highlands and Islands, GB
Corresponding author: Richard Hall

The higher education curriculum in the global North is increasingly co-opted for the production of measurable outcomes, framed by determinist narratives of employability and enterprise. Such co-option is immanent to processes of financialisation and marketisation, which encourage the production of quantifiable curriculum activities and tradable academic services. Yet the university is also affected by global socio-economic and socio-environmental crises, which can be expressed as a function of a broader crisis of social reproduction or sociability. As the labour of academics and students is increasingly driven by a commodity-valuation rooted in the measurement of performance, the ability of academics and students to respond to crises from inside the university is constrained by the market. This article argues that in understanding the relationship between the university and society, and in responding to crises of sociability, revealing the bounded nature of the curriculum is central. One possible way to address crisis is by re-imagining the university through the co-operative practices of groups like the Dismantling the Master's House community and the Social Science Centre. Such an exploration, rooted in the organising principles of the curriculum, asks educators to consider how their curriculum reproduces an on-going colonisation by capital. It is argued that such work enables a re-imagination of higher education that is rooted in a co-operative curriculum, and which might enable activist-educators to build an engaged curriculum, through which students and academics no longer simply learn to internalise, monitor and manage their own alienation.

Introduction

As a response to ongoing economic crisis and the politics of austerity, the higher education (HE) curriculum in the global North is increasingly co-opted for the production of measurable outcomes. Such co-option emerges through financialisation and marketisation (McGettigan, 2014), and encourages a re-focusing of HE through the production of data that can be commodified as learning gain or teaching excellence (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [DBIS], 2015a), and in the production of tradable services (Fallon, 2013; Harris et al., 2012). As the relationships between teachers and students, and any hope for living more humanely, are driven by a commodity-valuation rooted in the measurement of curricula performance, the messy realities of the curriculum are lost. The concrete work that teachers and students do inside and outside the classroom is subsumed under the compulsion to create and accumulate value.

This idea of the subsumption of university life under the structuring realities of the law of value contains within it a recalibration of the relationships between teachers, students, institutions, the State and the market. New educational tropes rooted in entrepreneurialism and future earnings (Enterprise for All, 2014) emerge, which then restructure the work of teachers and students (Hall, 2014; Winn, 2015), and limit the potential of HE to become a social or communal good. One way of rethinking this process is to critique it from the perspective of those who are excluded, in order to ask: where are the curricula spaces inside formal HE that enable education as the practice of freedom, when the only freedom available is increasingly that of the labour-market? (bell hooks, 1994). Here, the collective work of students and academics working as scholars on projects like the Dismantling the Master's House community (DTMH, 2015) are relevant in exploring alternatives. Such an exploration, rooted in the organising principles and content of the curriculum, asks educators and students to consider how their curriculum reproduces ongoing forms of colonisation. In particular, as the Rhodes Must Fall (2016) campaign has made clear, there are explicit links between the on-going colonisation of the curriculum by capital, for the extraction and accumulation of value, and on-going colonial repression. Here the curriculum and the university are important nodes in the transnational reproduction

of hegemony, and reflect the intersection of class and race. At issue is whether listening to, and interacting with, voices that have been de-legitimised in the definition, regulation and governance of the curriculum might in turn enable forms of 'educational repair'.¹

With a focus on English HE, this article will describe the ways in which the design and delivery of the curriculum in the global North is used to open up academic practices, so that new financial mechanisms and markets can be created, rooted in new, exportable services. Here the argument is that through performance management, the relationships between teachers and students have become tradable commodities that do not enable us to address global socio-economic and socio-environmental crises. We then address the different ways in which the HE curriculum can be conceptualised, recognising both its contested nature and the ways in which it is problematised and bounded within the university. Such a bounding is legitimised pedagogically, technologically, and culturally.

The argument then connects these observations to the possibilities hinted at through alternative approaches to curriculum production and circulation that are grounded in the collective, scholarly work of students and academics. It will be argued that such work, rooted in a co-operative curriculum, might enable these collectives to build an engaged curriculum, through which students and academics no longer simply learn to internalise, monitor and manage their own alienation. Might such forms of educational repair, situated as pedagogical projects, enable academics and students to dismantle the dominant structures that abstract from them the ability to engage with global emergencies? Might they thereby catalyse new forms of sociability? How might academics and students reconceptualise the curriculum as an act of resistance?

¹ The idea of educational repair emerges from the work of the Dismantling the Master's House project at University College London. It focuses on liberating the curriculum through a critical questioning of the received canon and the pedagogic practices that reinforce or reproduce hegemonic, social positions. One reading of educational repair is that by revealing and then challenging the racialised nature of the curriculum, it becomes possible to enable repair as a form of social justice. Just as the dominant social goals of education enact forms of violence against specific groups by marginalising or silencing them, more progressive pedagogic practices enable repair to the fabric of society and education.

The crisis of sociability in HE

The landscape against which the HE curriculum is forged is increasingly dominated by processes for financialisation and marketisation (McGettigan, 2015), with a specific focus on a university education for value (McGrath et al., 2015; Tremblay et al., 2015). This has underscored a recalibration of the governance, regulation and funding of HE, in terms of its institutional forms, and its products or services. Inside English HE, the research, knowledge transfer, and teaching activities of the university are increasingly subject to innovations like 'learning gain' and 'teaching excellence'. For Tremblay et al. (2015: 41), this is important because 'Students' learning outcomes are a key factor of institutional performance, and hence of aggregate system performance'. As a result, curriculum design, delivery and assessment are each affected by a need to quantify and valorise the performance of students and staff inside and outside the classroom.

The key driver in this process is the need to create marketised or tradable commodities, be they student employability or future earnings data, performance information about programmes of study, forms of accreditation, learning content, and so on (Hall, 2015). Pivotal in this process is the production and circulation of data about current and predicted performance, so that an HE market can emerge (US Department of Education, 2015). As a result, performance measurement and management are seen to dominate the curriculum, and to bring the relationships that emerge in the classroom into stark relation to the market. Increasingly, academic life inside and outside the classroom is collapsed around the need to generate surplus value, through exchange and enterprise. What happens inside the classroom becomes a primary, societal concern that is dominated by exchange rather than social use, and governed by quality regimes (DBIS, 2015a). Thus, for English HE the United Kingdom (UK) Government's reforms have focused upon repayment of loans by course and institution, driven by human capital investment, which it argues:

. . . will also help to create an incentive and reward structure at universities by distinguishing the universities that are delivering the strongest enterprise ethos and labour market outcomes for their students. (DBIS, 2015b)

This process of financialisation is insinuated inside the curriculum as a key commodity produced and circulated by institutions, and consumed or purchased by students and their families (Johnson, 2015; McGettigan, 2015). However, several counter-narratives have emerged that press for a re-conceptualisation of the purpose of HE as a form of social wealth, or of mass intellectuality (University of Utopia, 2015; Vercellone, 2007). The first is rooted in critical pedagogy and reconnects the curriculum to democratic and radical processes for self-actualisation (Amsler, 2015; hooks, 1994). The second is an outcome of critical political economy and seeks to situate the work of students and academics as forms of labour, which are themselves alienating and might be abolished (Hall, 2014; Winn, 2015). The third seeks to analyse educational work in terms of new public management techniques and the ideas of performativity, signalisation and dressage (Ball, 2003, 2015; Foucault, 1975). The fourth emerges from Marx's social theory, and sees the potential for a revolutionary re-imagining of the curriculum and of the university through political praxis (Neary, 2011).

Each of these counter-narratives reveals the extent to which curricula relationships are increasingly co-opted and subsumed, in the name of performance management, through learning analytics and value-added learning gain, student satisfaction scores, teaching evaluation and excellence frameworks, alongside strategies for internationalisation, entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer, employability, and so on (Wilsden et al., 2015). As a result, the curriculum itself has become representative of a wider crisis of sociability or social reproduction, through which socially-useful knowledge has been co-opted so that it can be valorised (Fallon, 2013; Manyika et al., 2013). This is a crisis precisely because the relationships of the university, including those that enable curriculum design, delivery and assessment, have been productively intensified in order to facilitate the expansion of capital, rather than for the solution of global crises. These crises include: global, secular, economic stagnation (Hall, 2015); anthropogenic climate change (Bellamy Foster et al., 2010); diminishing access to liquid energy; and, overwork, precarity and anxiety (Hall and Bowles, 2016). Inside HE, the curriculum reinforces this abstraction, so that academics and students fetishise educational innovation as emancipatory, rather than working on abolishing the relations of production that drive them to ignore concrete, social emergencies.

These capitalist relations of production come to dominate the landscape of the university and its social reproduction.

The curriculum perpetuates and reinforces hegemonic social relations between students and academics, which are rooted in debt, employability, entrepreneurialism and internationalisation. Increasingly, the binaries of teacher/student, provider/consumer, and vendor/purchaser dominate the governance and curriculum of HE. Here, the quantified-self is situated inside the quantified-curriculum, as previously marginal sectors of the economy are made explicitly productive. The jobs for which the curriculum is expected to prepare students are steeped in services that are grounded in fossil fuels and commodities trading. Yet this construction of the global economy is precarious, in the face of access to liquid fuels and the macroeconomic effects of binding resource constraints. There is also an increasing recognition that the global economy has to respond to these issues, and that this demands a new transformation of labour processes, as well as the knowledge and cultures that are collectively produced, shared and valued. More pressingly, climate change is a global commons problem, forcing societies to engage with the concrete realities of adaptation rather than mitigation (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2013). This is a transformation that is pedagogical if it is anything. In the face of these realities, how does the curriculum enable global societies to adapt as a piece of collective work, or collective, educational repair? Or does the curriculum only enable individuals to place their labour-power for sale in the market? Does the curriculum simply help society to become more efficiently unsustainable?

Thus, as the University of Utopia (2015, n.p.) argues, academics and students might usefully politicise the curriculum as a point of departure where:

As intellectual workers we refuse the fetishised concept of the knowledge society and engage in teaching, learning and research only in so far as we can re-appropriate the knowledge that has been stolen from the workers that have produced this way of knowing (i.e. Abundance). In the society of abundance the university as an institutional form is dissolved, and becomes a social form or knowledge at the level of society (i.e. The General Intellect).

It is only on this basis that we can knowingly address the global emergencies with which we are all confronted. (Utopia, 2015: n. p.)

This point of departure is a flowering of alternative educational practices that require the development of socialised knowledge, or mass intellectuality, as a direct, social force of production. Such a departure is asymmetrically placed against the commodification, exchange, accumulation and valorisation of curricula knowledge, skills and practices for exchange and trade (Clever, 2002). It therefore becomes a potential rupture in the existing view of the curriculum so that academics might ask whether it is possible to focus on alternative educational practices as alternative forms of social reproduction or sociability. At issue, therefore, is a re-framing of HE through:

... a lack of faith in the inevitability of progressive transformation, based on a negative rather than a positive critique of the social relations of capitalist society. . . the future is not the result of naturally upturning economic cycles, nor the structural contradictions of capitalism, but is made by the possibility and necessity of progressive social transformation through practical action, i.e., class struggle. (Neary, 2011: 3)

Neary develops Vygotsky's work to argue for the revolutionary nature of teaching, deeply connected to the social relationships of the academic and the student. In this view, the curriculum becomes a radical space where its concrete and abstract social contexts are revealed, alongside the use-values and exchange-values of the products of those contexts.

This is important because the sociability that emerges from the fluidity of the classroom is increasingly determined by value, and this questions the nature of academic autonomy and identity. Rather than the concrete relationships that existed inside the curriculum, educational lives are being restructured through entrepreneurship, impact, excellence, or student satisfaction. The curriculum as it is currently imagined and realised cannot enable society to see beyond the logics that recompose academic life as competitive. As a result, academic life is unable to move beyond its crisis of sociability, in order *either* to re-imagine social reproduction beyond the

market, *or* for academics or students to organise their own lives as pedagogic projects that generate material, social wealth (Ball, 2015). One key issue for academics and students is that 'a growing disparity separates the conditions for the production of material wealth from those for the generation of value' (Postone, 1996: 297). It is impossible to circulate and consume the kinds of socialised knowledge that would enable us to work against global emergencies, because the relations of production for such knowledge reproduce alienation.

This revelation, that HE is unable to generate material, useful, social wealth beyond its appearance as an immense accumulation of educational commodities, has implications for conceptualising the curriculum. For Vercellone (2007: 27) this requires '[t]he establishment of a diffuse intellectuality [. . .] configured as the necessary historical condition', where such a diffuse intellectuality is rooted in the 'transformation of the intellectual quality of living labour' (Vercellone, 2007: 29). This serves as a point of departure for reorienting the curriculum for a different social purpose. However, it should be noted, that whilst our treatment of the curriculum is generalised, different clusters of disciplines have the potential to contribute differentially to crises. The flows of knowledge and practices that potentially emerge from clusters of disciplinary expertise form a strand of Vercellone's 'diffuse intellectuality'.

Conceptualising curriculum

The extent to which the curriculum can be realised as a means to transform education as a participatory, communal good is dependent on how academics and students define and instantiate it. The general perspective that has prevailed to date, and upon which the quantified curriculum may be seen to be predicated, is that the curriculum comprises the range of learning opportunities that are offered to learners by their educational institution, within the context of a planned course or programme of study that is formally assessed and criterion-based (e.g. Macdonald, 1977; Print, 1993; Gosper and Ifenthaler, 2014).

However, beyond this generalisation, curriculum is a contested concept that can be defined and enacted in order to place different emphases on what it is, where

it is located, who it is for, and, crucially, its social purposes. In a wide-ranging overview that considered what curriculum means for both informal and formal education, Smith (1996, 2000) distinguished between: curriculum as a body of knowledge to be transmitted; curriculum as product, as a means to achieve certain ends in/by students; curriculum as a process of interaction between teachers, students and knowledge; and, curriculum as praxis. These conceptualisations are related in terms of: first, where and with whom the ownership and control of the curriculum rests; and second, the definition of curriculum within and for the purposes of formal HE, or beyond the institution.

In addressing the need for education to engage beyond formal education spaces and contexts, Freire (1970: 126) defined praxis as 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed'. On specifically viewing the curriculum as praxis, Grundy (1987) suggests that:

... the curriculum itself develops through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection. That is, the curriculum itself is not simply a set of plans to be implemented, but rather is constituted through an active process in which planning, acting and evaluating are all reciprocally related and integrated into the process. (Grundy, 1987: 115)

Curriculum as praxis is manifested through: a focus on collective understandings; an emphasis on human emancipation; and, interventions designed humanely for 'collective good'. Smith (1996, 2000) offers a number of examples of the curriculum as praxis, including learning and teaching interventions that seek to explore the experiences of different cultural and racial or racialised groups in society, and within which academics and learners would expect to confront the material conditions through which social attitudes are constituted.

Curriculum as praxis is dialectically opposed to the notion of curriculum as product, a perspective Smith (2000) observes as being heavily influenced by the development of 'scientific management', and within which the curriculum is based on values aligned with the division of labour, and with detailed attention to what people

are expected to know. When viewing the curriculum as praxis, we are essentially positioning the curriculum – and formal education – as a means to improve society and the human condition. There are important synergies here with the notions of ‘outside curricula’ and ‘public pedagogy’ (Schubert, 2010), and more broadly to HE as a social or communal good.

However, conceptualising and enacting the curriculum as praxis brings with it inherent tensions and contradictions, particularly concerning the nature and value of academic knowledge. Academic knowledge as a product of the curriculum is implicit within the commodification of education, and the positioning of the individual as commodity. Yet academic knowledge, in disciplinary, vocational and social contexts, is critical for the curriculum as praxis, in relation to the learner’s becoming and in her challenging of inequity and injustice. Dewey (1916) recognised this tension between, firstly, the democratising potential of education and, secondly, how education systems sustain hegemony. The value and purpose of academic knowledge comes to define relations of production for the HE curriculum. This also challenges us to ask whom HE is for, and to observe that access to knowledge and learning is unequally distributed within society.

The curriculum is a critical, contested space, and its democratisation forms *both* a start *and* an end point for developing alternative forms of sociability. In refusing the idea that the university is simply a node for the production and circulation of capital, such a curriculum becomes a source for: critical discourse; new capacities for democratic planning; the formation of networks of academics and students; and a commitment to direct action that is ‘informed within this curriculum by the lessons learned from the history of struggle inside and outside of the academy’ (Neary and Hagyard, 2011: 219). Such an engaged curriculum reflects ‘the need for critical educators to act on the belief that academic work matters in its relationship to broader public practices and policies’ (Giroux, 2000: 34). There are implications here for the roles of academics and students as public scholars, and also the extent to which the curriculum legitimises or de-legitimises specific voices engaged in forms of social action. At issue is whether it is possible to realise HE curricula that are socially engaged, which recognise diverse interests, and that contribute to social change, from inside the university.

The bounded curriculum

In addressing how the organisation and instantiation of the curriculum reinforces hegemony, its pedagogical, technological, and cultural boundaries are revealed. A number of constraining factors are identified below. In some cases these limits have been challenged, for example the limitations of modularisation and culturally narrow curricula. Other factors, including the bounding of intellectual property through assessment and the need to reframe the open education debate, are emergent. Their implications are less well understood, and they are put forward here in the context of requiring further critical consideration. However, a common trait across all of the factors identified is that each effectively reduces the potential value and impact of the collective learning experience and ensures that the curriculum, which should be a way for communities to respond to crises of sociability, is disempowering.

The prevalence of curriculum as product

The idea of what the curriculum is, or could be, remains narrowly defined within notions of what the university will offer or provide to their students by way of closed courses and course content. In their considered and broad-ranging review of curriculum models and conceptions for the UK Quality Assurance Agency for HE, undertaken to inform a national enhancement initiative around the development of the curricula in HE, Fotheringham et al. (2012) looked at issues of curriculum design, ownership and participation, alongside wider societal implications. In their model of *Factors Influencing Curriculum*, it is evident that the locus of control of the curriculum is still very much with the institution, accrediting and awarding bodies, and sector policy makers, with a strong explicit and implicit focus on the curriculum as a body of knowledge to be mastered, and the curriculum as a product which is concerned with achieving certain ends within the skills and attributes of students. This reflects the dominant tension within HE curricula between desired academic knowledge and the needs of 'external stakeholders', including employers and professional bodies (Laurillard, 2012: 16–17). Whilst Fotheringham et al. (2012) put forward and argue for alternatives, and provide examples of university initiatives that very effectively enact the curriculum as praxis, the overall lack of progress within the sector as a

whole is evident. The UK HE sector does not radiate a strong commitment to reimagining and radically reinventing the curriculum as praxis.

Modularisation

The modularisation of HE curricula results in fragmented learning experiences that are limited to, and kept within the confines of, enrolled module and programme cohorts (Savin-Baden, 2008; Morris, 2009). Unless academics 'design in' interdisciplinary and cross-cohort learning, the organisation of the modularised curriculum tends to simplify the complexity of the real world. In turn this also simplifies the range of ways in which knowledge is created, shared, challenged, and re-created outside of formal HE. A contributing factor here can be an over-reliance on abstract forms of assessment focused on specific isolated learning activities and outcomes, as opposed to authentic forms of assessment (Kvale, 2007) that better reflect the complexity of how knowledge is developed and applied. This includes assessment that is designed to support learning in complex social contexts (Crossouard, 2011). An over-reliance on abstract forms of assessment enables the co-option of HE curricula for employability and enterprise agendas, but it does little to enable interdisciplinary responses to societal crises.

Institutional digital silos

The institutional systems and technologies through which academics organise and deliver the curriculum often place unhelpful space and distance between learners. Particularly problematic is the information architecture of institutional, digital spaces, like Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). In these spaces, a student is typically represented by a matriculation number that is linked to module and programme codes that in turn determine which learning resources and spaces each individual is allowed to access, alongside the peers with whom they are able to work. In this respect the student records system and the VLE might be viewed as working in combination to 'design out' opportunities for students and academics to cluster around shared needs and interests. In turn this delegitimises forms of co-operation across disciplines or levels of a course, and across formal and informal boundaries. The organisation of the curriculum and cohorts of learners, within institutional

VLEs is both an outcome of modularisation as well as a factor that exacerbates its difficulties.

There are additional challenges here for particular groups of learners, including mature students who may be 'less likely to form the tightly-knit peer support groups that [they] have recounted as being invaluable for their survival in the HE system' (Morris, 2009: 108). This observation can be extended to other marginalised groups of learners, for whom 'the fragmented nature of programmes will inhibit the opportunities for connected and creative thinking that HE can offer' (Morris, 2009: 108).

Clustering and social action

The opportunity for the formation of networks that can connect the curriculum to opportunities for social action and change requires learners and the academics who support them to 'cluster' around topics, projects, and concerns of shared interest. Within the context of the curriculum as praxis and the broader context for the production of collective, social wealth, clustering reinforces learning, communal wellbeing, social interaction, and social action. The instantiation of the curriculum within HE, for example through modularisation and through imposed virtual walls and silos, greatly restricts the potential for clustering. Within the context of HE, and in extending its purpose, there is a need to understand who could cluster around and through the curriculum, and how the curriculum might be relocated or co-located across formal and informal boundaries.

Assessment and the bounding of intellectual property

The assessment practices embedded within the curriculum often limit what learners are allowed, or able, to do with their own knowledge, as a socially-useful form of wealth. Many forms of assessment result in the intellectual work of the learner remaining within the institution. The problem and challenge here is not simply one of allowing our learners to share their work more easily (as an e-portfolio or personal domain). Instead, the question becomes for whom are our learners producing assessed work? Moreover, are there alternative purposes for which they could be sharing the knowledge they create? Returning to the implications of the

academic as a public scholar (Giroux, 2000), there is a need to explore the idea of students as public scholars, able to contribute to public bodies of knowledge. Here the modularisation of assessment limits the individual and collective production of knowledge or artefacts that can then be applied across their own or other communities.

Culturally bounded curricula

The curriculum is critically limited by its narrow cultural definition. The dominant cultural context within which the curriculum has been devised acts as a critical limit. The Why is My Curriculum White? collective (2015) continue to explore the problems and challenges of culturally exclusive curricula, through their work on *#educationalrepair*. With respect to how we develop more culturally inclusive curricula, both De Vita and Case (2003) and Welikala (2011) stress the critical need to look beyond internationalisation and cultural inclusion as something we do to the curriculum, and instead as factors that should enrich, shape and determine the curriculum and its activities. De Vita and Case (2003) observe how the 'flavouring' of the curriculum with global or internationalised elements is a failure to address more fundamental issues and opportunities in creating culturally inclusive and authentic forms of learning. Welikala (2011) argues that a globally and culturally sensitive 'multi-perspective curriculum' can develop rich knowledge and values of respect, alongside the broader skills needed in a complex world. This position questions how the global challenges of a crisis of social reproduction are amplified by hegemonic curriculum positions.

The distributed curriculum

Emerging notions of the distributed curriculum, including different conceptions of 'the community as curriculum' (Starratt, 2002; Cormier, 2008), offer useful ways of thinking about how the curriculum can be further reimagined and repositioned within the narrative of HE as a public good. Cormier's work on the rhizomatic model of learning is particularly relevant within the context of learning within and across online or online-supported communities, but applies equally to other contexts in which the curriculum itself is negotiated collectively:

In the rhizomatic model of learning, curriculum is not driven by predefined inputs from experts; it is constructed and negotiated in real time by the contributions of those engaged in the learning process. This community acts as the curriculum, spontaneously shaping, constructing, and reconstructing itself and the subject of its learning in the same way that the rhizome responds to changing environmental conditions. (Cormier, 2008: 3)

This work also underscores a consideration of the importance of 'clustering' within and through the curriculum, and a challenge to understand how the curriculum can be distributed to enable a diffuse intellectuality. Thus, with further development, the notion of the community as curriculum (and of the curriculum as community) may come to provide a nuanced extension to the notion of curriculum as praxis, possibly enabling a better understanding of 'the curriculum as place' (including as a distributed and co-located space or place).

Reframing open education

In considering the curriculum as a conduit for education as a public good, this article proposes a strong need to reframe the current debate around open education, and open educational practice, so that it moves away from addressing (almost exclusively) open online education, and begins to challenge universities to make greater use of their physical spaces as open spaces for learning. If education is a communal good, then universities have to be good (and certainly much better than present) at using both their physical and online spaces for wider engagement. The instantiation of the curricula within open online spaces and contexts may have widened access to education in some respects, but it has also served to amplify the role of social and intellectual capital in enabling access to HE. This includes distancing the university from learners in the wider community who may be digitally excluded or disenfranchised.

Implications

What might be taken from the bounded curriculum, as it is reproduced through the factors explored above, with respect to the crisis of sociability in HE? How might curricula be re-positioned and enacted? Principally, these factors

are presented as the key limits on teaching and learning. Individually and in combination they work to fragment the curriculum, and to constrain both its activities and student learning. Curriculum activities are commodified as learning objects, and student learning is commodified as learning outcomes. This commodification is a form of bounding that occurs within increasingly narrow knowledge domains, which are themselves framed by specific social, cultural and institutional limits.

These boundaries emerge from within the curriculum and are immanent to it, and they affect how academics and students organise and instantiate their work. It therefore fails to reflect the complexity of the wider world, and the concrete realities of socio-environmental and socio-economic crises, which in turn are realised as crises of social reproduction. The curriculum is a form of crisis of legitimacy of the university, precisely because it limits the capacity of universities to respond to the needs of local and global contexts.

From a critical perspective this leads us to question the relevance and legitimacy of the university. Is it possible for the curriculum to be engaged or for it to be a site of agency beyond the market? In recognising the current limitations and failings in how universities tend to conceptualise and enact the curriculum, this argument simultaneously recognises how the relevance and legitimacy of both the curriculum and the university may be re-imagined (Harris et al., 2011). Such re-imagining references the concrete examples of projects and initiatives that provide radical hope for how the curriculum might be unbounded (Amsler, 2015), and which exemplify the 'pedagogies of possibility' (Bussey et al., 2011).

The curriculum unbounded

The wider HE sector, taken here to be inclusive of informal and community-focused adult education, is beginning to reveal the development of alternative approaches to curriculum production and circulation. These are increasingly rooted in collective work, which centres individual activity in shared social needs and contexts, and is predicated on social action, participation and change. This is not to fetishise these spaces for curriculum production as beyond the hegemonic relations of production

that dominate formal HE. Rather, it is to present alternative possibilities that are centred on the curriculum and political pedagogies.

One such potential space is the Social Science Centre (2015) in Lincoln, UK, which forms a laboratory for co-operative production, consumption and distribution of higher learning, which is rooted in democratic organising principles (governance) for *both* the Centre and its activities, *and* its content (for instance, childcare arrangements, curricula, events). The Centre's pedagogical underpinnings are in critical theory and critical pedagogy as defined by the Student as Producer project (Neary, 2011). This reconceptualises and reorganises the curriculum around research-engaged teaching, with students and academics co-operatively producing intellectual and creative works that have a resonance and relevance across scholarly communities. It should be noted that the Social Science Centre attempts to dissolve the binary between student and staff so that the power relationships that exist in educational settings can be explored. There is a redefinition of the educational setting through a form of workers' enquiry, in which participants with different levels of expertise and knowledge can contribute as scholars. This means that spaces like the Social Science Centre operate through co-operative governance practices, including consensus decision-making and peer production, and this underpins both management of the Centre and the design and delivery of its curricula. Projects cannot be said to be teacher- or student-led.

Whilst its curriculum activities, such as its Know-How course, might be represented inside some universities and through some courses, there are some scholars who do not wish to, or cannot, undertake such a course inside the university. Equally, the content and curriculum is co-negotiated and produced in a way that attempts to liberate what is bounded inside. It is critical that the production, consumption and distribution of the curriculum circulates inside and through the organisation of the Social Science Centre and informs its governance. In re-imagining the idea of the university inside a new form of sociability, spaces of potential and possibility become central to rethinking and reliving the possibilities for transitional alternatives. It is important to see these alternative forms as transitional and pedagogic, and not to be fetishised as academic philanthropy.

A second example of such a reorienting has been the Dismantling the Master's House project (DTMH, 2015), which emerged at University College London, and that asks: 'why is my curriculum white?' This work has emerged deliberately as a collective, student and staff process of questioning the colonial legacies reproduced in the governance, design, delivery and assessment of the curriculum. It questions whether a canonical curriculum, rooted in a specific, abstracted cultural view of the world, can be anything other than 'monstrous'? Indeed, can it enable societies to confront global emergencies that have emerged from the dominance of that very cultural view of the world? The end point for the project is to enact forms of educational repair that are themselves forms of societal repair, because they use the curriculum as a point of departure for delegitimising specific forms of alienation rooted in ongoing historical and material racism. As a result, the ongoing production of new collectives of students and staff opens up the possibility for counter-narratives, as witnessed in campaigns like Rhodes Must Fall (2016) in South Africa and the UK.

The practical work of these anti-imperial and anti-colonial projects is rooted in militant research, which forces the university to confront how race and racism have shaped its activities. Critically, these collectives seek to liberate the curriculum through a 'crossdisciplinary and intersectional approach to racialisation'. This aligns with Neary's (2011: n. pag.) focus on 'the possibility and necessity of progressive social transformation through practical action'. Here the curriculum becomes a space for praxis, rooted in the legitimisation of a counter-narrative:

The curriculum is white because it reflects the underlying logic of colonialism, which believes the colonised do not own anything – not even their own experiences. The role of the colonised in knowledge production mirrored their role in economic production, where their resources were to provide raw materials that could then be consumed in the west. . . Implicit in the white curriculum is irrefutable evidence of white superiority as a matter of truth and objectivity, while crafting a world-view that judges anything that it could define as "non-white" or "other" as inferior. ('Why is My Curriculum White?' collective, 2015)

Such a collective critique dismantles the organising principles of the curriculum, and asks both academics and students to question how their conceptualisations enable the reproduction of alienating and violent social relationships. This potentially deconstructs the material, social wealth of the university, where it refuses the idea of HE as a positional, tradable good (Amsler and Neary, 2012).

One of the interesting connections between the Social Science Centre and the Dismantling the Master's House project is the relationship between affirmative self-actualisation and the negative critique of established positions. Both projects have used the curriculum as a central reference point to explore the subsumption of cultures and identities by hegemonic positions. As a result, they have revealed the possibility of counter-narratives that must be either recognised/accepted, incorporated/subsumed or ignored/refused. In the process of such revelation, a politics of educational autonomy (*pace* Dinerstein, 2015) emerges as a form of potential pedagogic energy. Through a negative critique of the historical and material realities of the curriculum, alternative possibilities for future agency and autonomy are offered. These possibilities lie beyond the dominant, alienating view of HE governance and curricular practices, and instead point towards a curriculum that enables academic labour to become self-actualised. Such self-actualisation means that students and academics can reach beyond the law of value to address their lives as a form of humane and humanising, collective work. In the process of humanising, the connections between anti-colonial narratives that refuse cultural subsumption and the negative critique of HE are refreshed. For hooks (1994), this is a capacity to live more fully and deeply, and to share in each other's intellectual and spiritual growth.

These examples demonstrate the range of ways in which many of the factors that 'bound' the curriculum in HE are being questioned. Such questioning is a starting point for their wider, societal negation. It is possible to draw from these projects and initiatives a holistic view of what a liberated university curriculum, or curricula, might look like. At issue, then, is whether and how that can be reproduced inside the university, or whether it can only happen in less commodified spaces. In particular, 'outside' initiatives such as the Social Science Centre might be analysed as forms of

exodus or refusal of formal HE. In part this view is reinforced by the clearer differentiation between teacher and student that exists inside the university, and which maintains established power relationships. This is not to say that spaces beyond the university are utopias, more that they offer the possibility of working on relations of power and relations of educational production, which do not exist inside the university.

The impacts of marketisation and financialisation, revealed in quality regimes, teaching excellence frameworks, and metrics for learning gain, reinforce binaries like teacher/student, provider/consumer, vendor/purchaser. Given these restrictions, students and academics might then question whether a liberated curriculum is possible inside the university? If so, what might the unbounding of the curriculum within and from the university enable, in terms of responding to crises of sociability?

Conclusion: dismantling the curriculum

The ways in which the governance of HE might enable a curriculum as praxis, and which might then enable HE to engage with global crises of social reproduction are increasingly limited. For example, in English HE the Teaching Excellence Framework (DBIS, 2015a) and the consultations on learning gain (HE Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2015) are both designed to impact how academics conceptualise good practice in learning, teaching and assessment (Johnson, 2015). They offer a more data-driven, quantifiable view of teaching and learning, thereby challenging how those activities are prioritised and incentivised. This is a marketised re-imagining of the university revealed through the curriculum.

In response, the eight 'bounded curriculum' points noted above represent some of the challenges that affect institutional responses to policies which are themselves framed by normative and hegemonic views of economic growth. They encapsulate a range of pedagogic, cultural and technological dimensions within which the curriculum as praxis is fragmented, limited, or prohibited. In particular, power relations surround socially just alternative curricula and pedagogy, just as they do standardised curricula. This highlights how both political and educational knowledge underpin the process of unbundling, in particular given the unequal distribution of knowledge in society.

The Social Science Centre and the Dismantling the Master's House project can be seen to work on these issues by reimagining and reconstructing the nature and purpose of the curriculum at an institutional level. These spaces are focused on opening up the curriculum, whilst emphasising the production of horizontal power relations as a process that is constantly enabled through collective, educational work. This is much less possible inside the university, where curriculum development and reform is processed through marginal and superficial change. This disables the ability to respond to crisis through the curriculum. Instead, quality processes enable the replication of current curriculum models, and amplify normative views of the curriculum, for example in the name of enterprise or employability.

Whilst there is limited space inside the university to begin to address the development of the curriculum as praxis, we recognise that more research is needed both to engage with alternatives and to reveal and reproduce the everyday refusals of academics and students to neoliberalism. Acts of refusal shape a counter-hegemonic narrative that asks who has power over a curriculum context shaped by *learning gain* and *teaching excellence*? It questions the nature of the curriculum as it is framed by learning outcomes or future earnings data, to reveal what is lost in this process of measuring. It points toward the refusal of the quantified curriculum that amplifies certain forms of power, in order to transform education as a participatory, communal good. Moreover, it forces a reconsideration of the voices of those who are excluded. This set of alternatives connects to hooks' (1994) idea that the curriculum should be engaged:

[To be engaged] invites us always to be in the present, to remember that the classroom is never the same. Traditional ways of thinking about the classroom stress the opposite paradigm—that the classroom is always the same even when students are different. To me, the engaged classroom is always changing. Yet this notion of engagement threatens the institutionalized practices of domination. When the classroom is truly engaged, it's dynamic. It's fluid. It's always changing. (hooks, 1994: 158)

At issue is whether refusal will enable a re-imagination of HE as a process or way of working that is dissolved into the fabric of society. This alternative way of working

involves dismantling the hegemonic nature of the curriculum. It is rooted in revealing how it is bounded inside the university and how it replicates alienating power structures and ways of building the world. This work of dismantling operates at the level of the institution and the classroom, but in order to engage with the crisis of sociability it has to be public. This means taking HE into society, with the curriculum as a departure point. This is not the curriculum as a canon, rooted in a specific, abstracted cultural view of the world. Such a bounded, quantified, canonical curriculum cannot enable societies to confront global emergencies.

Thus, in responding to social vulnerability, there is a need for those who labour inside the university as academics and students to re-imagine new, public forms of HE. One possibility is through engagement with the voices of delegitimised academics and students, which make clear how the ongoing colonisation of the curriculum by capital is reflected in its explicit links to colonial repression. Such a revelation is a search for radical democracy inside the university, framed by research-engaged teaching and learning that is deliberately militant, public and counter-hegemonic (Thorburn, 2012). This positions the curriculum as contingent upon, and sensitive to, societal values, objectives, and risk perceptions, with recognition of diverse interests, circumstances, social-cultural contexts, and expectations. This is a pedagogical project at the level of society.

There are existing examples of the collective work of students, academics, activists and communities engaging with this work of dismantling abstract experiences and their concrete impacts. Is it possible to draw on these examples, in order to associate educational repair, through the ability to hear and attend to de-legitimised voices, with wider societal repair? One way of so doing is to build a curriculum that is engaged and *full of care*, in which as academics and students, we no longer simply learn to internalise, monitor and manage our own alienation inside, but work explicitly outside. It is only by liberating the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the university curriculum into society that the crisis of sociability that forms a global set of emergencies might be addressed. This demands that HE be re-imagined as a collective rather than a positional good, and realised beyond the university in the governance and activities of the dismantled curriculum.

Competing Interests

Richard Hall is employed by an institution of Higher Education. He declares no financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years. Richard Hall is a Trustee of the Open Library of Humanities.

Keith Smyth is employed by an institution of Higher Education. He declares no competing interests with respect to the content of this submission.

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