

Reframing 'curriculum transformation' through attention to university students' conceptions of good teaching

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Defining key terms

curriculum

noun [C] • **UK**  /kə'ɾɪk.jə.ləm/ **US** 
/kə'ɾɪk.jə.ləm/ PLURAL **curricula** **curriculums**

★ **B1** **the subjects studied in a school, college, etc. and what each subject includes:**

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/curriculum>

transformation

noun [C or U] • **UK**  /,træns.fə'meɪ.jʰn/ **US**
 /,træns.fə'meɪ.jʰn/

★ **C1** **a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved:**

... not just *what* is taught, but *how* it is taught & the *values* behind the teaching

... *formal, informal & hidden*
(Karnieli-Miller et al. , 2010)

... always ideological; a site of struggle & contestation
(Apple, 2004)

... “breaks” – changing the questions asked & the manner in which we ask them
(Apple, 2004, p. viii)

'Good teaching'

- a contested notion & a complex undertaking

(Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Marsh, 1984)

- generally associated with a focus on students & their learning needs

(Biggs & Tang, 2011; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010)

- also associated with particular characteristics & actions

(Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Lee et al., 2015; Parpala et al., 2011)

'Good teachers'

are professional & organised

promote a positive environment & establish rapport

are knowledgeable

communicate clearly

are open to learning from students

affirm diversity

provide constructive feedback

challenge students & explain ideas

promote students' learning

(Airini et al., 2009; Airini et al., 2011; Chu, Abella & Paurini, 2013; Curtis et al., 2012; Davidson-Toumu'a & Dunbar, 2009; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Friedenber, 2002; Kirkness & O'Rourke, 2005; Lee et al., 2015; Parpala et al., 2011; Saito & Eisenstein Ebsworth, 2004; Skyrme, 2007)

But...

- 'good teaching' may be contextually defined (WU, 2015)
- the complexity of 'good teaching' practice is not captured in lists of characteristics (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010)
- much literature on 'good teaching'
 - is thin on methodological detail (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010)
 - reliant on survey-based data collection approaches
 - assumes *difference* as a starting point

The Good Teaching Project - rationale

Theoretical (ethical?)

- to foreground diverse students' complex voices, without assuming their sameness or difference to each other

(Anderson, 2014; Bullen & Kenway, 2003; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Madge et al., 2009)

Methodological

to pilot & compare three data collection approaches:

- open-ended questions
- critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954)
- 'photovoice' (Wang & Burris, 1997)

Practical

to develop a staff-researcher network spanning (Pacific, Māori, international, general) student support & academic development

The Good Teaching Project - what we did

Recruited 33 Humanities students to 7 focus groups:

Pacific combined; Māori, international & (other) local - undergrad & postgrad

'Positive deviance' approach (Marsh et al., 2004): B average or above

7 Māori, 6 Pacific, 9 international, & 11 (other) local students

(17 undergrad & 16 postgrad)

2 focus group sessions, a week apart:

1. open-ended questions & critical incident technique
2. 'photovoice' - students discussed 4 photos they had taken that captured 'good teaching' & 'effective learning' for them

Findings

- Students across all four cohorts referred to similar *attributes & actions* when describing 'good teachers'
- Good teachers are
 - passionate
 - approachable
 - knowledgeable & able to communicate knowledge effectively
- Specific emphases within cohorts:
 - Māori students: 'good teacher' role models are powerful & important
 - International (EAL?) students: clear communication is a crucial 'good teacher' attribute
- Teaching & learning are *cognitive, social & affective* processes

Good teachers are passionate

Passion as a *way of being*, or a way of relating to a subject area, teaching & students

“I find that lecturers are quite influential in kind of who we aspire to be ... Someone who’s passionate about ... their job, how, [it applies] to their life, they tell us of all their experiences and stuff, it’s like wow. I want to do that with my life. I want to change the world like that ... I think they need to realise how influential they really are.”

(Māori undergrad student)

Teachers show *passion* by...

Speaking in an animated way

Relating content to personal stories

Asking questions

Inviting discussion

Providing comprehensive course materials

Considering concepts from a range of angles

Using a range of examples

Communicating clearly

Being a role model



“I think for me as a young Māori person, like having somebody who, not only is a really successful Māori person herself, but someone who manages to articulate a history that is sometimes kind of ignored or dismissed by other students ... I find that quite inspiring to me.” (Māori undergrad student)

Getting your hands dirty



“Good teaching is being willing to work alongside a student as opposed to simply instructing ... and getting your hands dirty sort of thing.” (Pacific student)

Good teachers are approachable

Approachability as allowing a sense of *connection*, promoting a sense of '*safety*', facilitating a sense of *enjoyment & engagement*, & fostering a willingness to *take risks* or *express disagreement*

“For one of my lectures, ... he got us to introduce ourselves and then he actually asked a question about the information that we said. And I was like, oh, he was actually paying attention. Like he was actually listening and, at times, he would bring that up over the course of our class ... So ... that whole personal atmosphere where you feel known and stuff.” (Pacific student)

Teachers show *approachability* by...

Introducing themselves & being proactive communicators

Creating opportunities for interaction, regardless of class size

Affirming students' contributions

Telling students how & when to contact them

Fostering student-student relationships

Acknowledging & inviting diverse viewpoints

Treating students as equals

Using questions as a teaching tool

Taking a learner & teacher stance

The 'open window'



“I was mostly thinking of the fact that that window was open ... and that’s just thinking about openness and how important that is on a whole bunch of different levels. So for teachers to be open to questions being asked, hard questions, like not ... shying away from challenging topics as well, and the whole open door policy thing showing that you care even if you’re not necessarily always in your office or always available, at least ... the sentiment being there.” (Local undergrad student)

Good teachers are knowledgeable & able to communicate knowledge effectively

Knowledge as *proficiency & competence*: the ability to explain complex ideas effectively, relate it to students, & adapt teaching in response to students' learning needs

"I do feel short changed if someone doesn't sort of lecture with some measure of authority on a subject that they know ... the content they have to teach, as well as feeling like I could push them a little bit ... and the good lecturers do that ... allow you to go off on a tangent for 20 minutes and bring in another topic and see if their argument still stands or not." (Local postgrad student)

Teachers communicate knowledge effectively by...

Having a clear 'storyline' that 'takes students with them'

Linking content to 'real world' experiences & examples

Using humour appropriately & in ways that are genuine

Providing a range of learning opportunities

Using questions effectively to promote discussion & debate

Linking content to the 'big picture'

Providing constructive & explicit feedback

Teachers communicate knowledge effectively by...

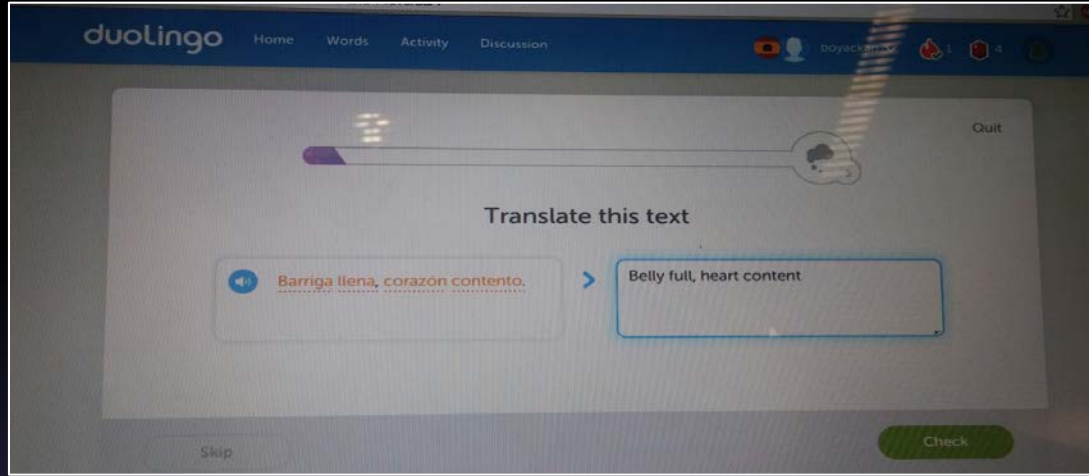
Articulating realistic expectations & helping students prioritise tasks

Explaining things clearly & avoiding jargon where possible

Providing access to materials that support independent study

Providing guidance on how to learn & what is expected

'Translation'



“A good teacher ... knows how to talk your language, knows how to speak to you and ... then you can understand. So I just thought that was quite a good thing where a teacher would take time to really think about and consider ... could I do this in a different way so that my learner will learn?” (Local undergrad student)



'Sitting with'
or 'soaking'

"It has to be taught in a way that you can understand it before moving on to other parts ... It's like sitting on the information, because ... once it's new to you, you kind of need to like just sit there for a while ... I think of it as like marinating ... for the flavour to be good, you can't just chuck sauce on top of it and then eat it straight away. *You've got to let it soak.*"

(Local undergrad student, emphasis added)

How can attention to students' voices transform curricula in university teaching?

By domesticating it...?

- aligning with the 'performative turn' in HE (Stevenson et al., 2017)
- positioning students as 'consumers' (Molesworth et al, 2009)
- promoting a 'pedagogy of frailty' (Land, 2017)

By expanding it...?

- problematising a sole focus on content
- disrupting assumptions of (some) students' 'difference'
- highlighting the power of the 'informal' & 'hidden' curriculum in shaping both *what* & *how* students learn (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2010)
- alerting us to the significance of our:
 - ways of being (demeanour)
 - ways of doing (everyday actions & interactions)
 - use of *time* in teaching
 - level of influence
- highlighting conditions that may constrain 'curriculum delivery'
(what we do & who we are as teachers)

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