

Chapter 3

Engaging International Students as Curriculum Co-Creators

Chi Maher

University of Greenwich, London, UK

Catherine Bedwei-Majdoub

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5735-305X>

Ravensbourne University, London, UK

ABSTRACT

The chapter examines the process of engaging post-graduate students in co-creation of the curriculum. Despite extensive research in curriculum design, there remains more to discover about how engaging postgraduate students in co-creation of the curricular impacts their awareness of the link between their learning and their career chosen paths. The research employed qualitative data collected from 54 post-graduate international business management students studying in UK higher education institutions. The findings suggest encouraging students to co-design the curricular empowers, motivates them as active participants in their learning and prepares them for the world of work. The research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that providing opportunities for students to co-create the curriculum should be embedded from the start of the curriculum development process.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an exploration of the link between business management student's participation in co-curriculum design and their chosen career paths. It approaches this exploration via the recent conceptual shift in higher education in the perceived place of students – from subordinates to their lecturers and professors (traditionally seen as purveyors and creators of knowledge) to their co-producers and partners in imparting knowledge and stimulating learning. This conceptual shift is, in this chapter, encapsulated by the phrase ‘curriculum co-creation,’ and specifically the idea of students as co-creators of the curriculum *alongside* academics in the higher education sector. Furthermore, the chapter explains how international students on postgraduate business management courses have been involved in curricula

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7999-2.ch003

co-creation and how their involvement connects them to their chosen career paths. In the 21st Century how individuals plan their career paths may be related to their profession, qualifications or simply moving around to maximize progression.

Students' participation in Higher Education curricula co-creation dates to Dewey (1916; William, 2017), who argued that education is a social contract facilitated by educators who, Dewey thought, could move individuals towards national identity, citizenship, and authentic democracy. These democratic ideals persist and endure within the contemporary higher education environment. In the UK, the base for those who participated in the research used for this chapter, international students arriving for postgraduate study are finding themselves positioned as important stakeholders whose experiences and unique perspectives are as equally valid as the academic staff tasked to teach them. They were encouraged to engage in their studies as co-producers of knowledge. That is, as active participants with their peers' learning and development. In short, once in the UK, international students discover that they are studying at non-traditional, pragmatic, and increasingly Deweynian learning environments (Bacon & Sloam, 2010) that prioritize autonomous thinking over the deference to lecturers and professors expected of them in their home countries. In the UK's pervading liberality (Kings College, 2023), increasingly higher education staff are involving students in curriculum co-creation and celebrating it as a late recognition of their equal validity.

But what is curriculum co-creation? According to Cook-Sather et al., (2014, pp. 6-7) it is "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis". Thus, they urge academics not to speak frivolously about partnering with students to improve learning and teaching. They ask them to establish curriculum co-creation on strong working relationships that foster respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility: and their emphasis are supported by literature. For example, Kolb (1984) and Tomlinson (2023) provided a range of rationales for involving students in the development and design of the curriculum, with the key among them being that learning deepens with engaged activity and through experience, i.e., that it is shared between the instructor (enabling conceptualization) and the student (reflecting from ontic experiences and actions). Bovrill et al., (2011) and Gironella (2023) have found that students' participation in curriculum co-creation emboldens them to take more responsibility for their own learning and commitment.

Moreover, Senior et al., (2014) and Kahn and Anderson (2019) have noticed that participating students have enhanced levels of confidence, satisfaction, and critical thinking, i.e., skills that are much-sought after by public, private and third sector organizations. Additionally, Finn and Zimmer (2012) established links between curriculum co-creation and student engagement, while Shafaei and Nejati (2012) connected co-creation to empowerment, and Senior et al. (2014) to employability. Furthermore, Borge et al., (2020) and Vulperhorst et al., (2020) found positive links between student's involvement in curriculum co-creation and improved grades, learning, collaboration, confidence, and motivation.

Despite the variousness of the above research, there is still limited exploration of *how* international students studying in the UK are being involved and whether their involvement helps them to better understand the progression from academic context to world of work.

The chapter attempts to redress this knowledge gap, and thus represents an important contribution to what is known about the importance and practice of curriculum co-creation within higher education environments. Its value emerges from the fact that the business environment and the world of work rapidly change. The recent Covid-19 pandemic confirmed this. Following the slowdown and even standstill

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