

# Being a University in the Twenty-first Century: Rethinking Curriculum

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*Abstract: 'The World Universities Forum has been created in the belief that there is an urgent need for academe to connect more directly and boldly with the large questions of our time' (<http://ontheuniversity.com/ideas/>; accessed 20100914). In this paper, we examine the core educational function of the university in the light of this conception of the university's role in society. The question at issue is this: what are the curriculum and teaching implications of a university's commitment to addressing the fundamental challenges of the twenty-first century? This paper draws from, reflects on and shares some of the ideas crystallising out of the first author's PhD research on challenges of educational design in the twenty-first century university. We focus on the concepts of human aspiration and education for personal agency. We develop our case by reporting on two case studies – the first author's PhD theorising and Charles Sturt University (Australia's) institutional renewal project. We are in the process of ascertaining whether our emergent curriculum of becoming theory or mindspace could provide universities with an alternative approach to curriculum design – one that not only places students' individual and shared meaning making centre-stage, but also one that enables universities to engage in the challenges of the twenty-first century as 'participants in the travail' rather than as arms-length knowledge brokers.*

Keywords: Curriculum, Theory, Aspiration, Agency, Being, Becoming

## A Preliminary Comment on Human Aspiration and University Education

**F**OR THE FORESEEABLE future, universities will continue to provide educational opportunities for aspiring, 'upwardly-mobile' individuals. Education is about human development, about change, and so if university studies are to be attuned to the range of students' desired and actual meaning making experiences, they will need to take into account a fundamental human orientation to the future.

Inasmuch as we have *some* future  
we reserve the right to hope... endlessly.  
A university *curriculum of becoming* is nothing  
if it does not place our dreaming centre stage  
as we search for something more<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement serves as a foretaste, an anticipation of the argument to follow. It gives expression to the authors' collective inner voice. In a future paper we shall consider how an 'inner voice' may be appropriately reported in scholarly writing about *inner curriculum, reflexive, lifelong lifework\** and other aspects of human becoming. [\*Francine Shaw writes about 'lifework' and its alignment with one's 'authentic Self' (Shaw, 1975, p. 443).]

Such searching can be described as pursuing the goal of becoming something (or someone) more. Education at its best is a space for *goal-responsive thought*. The hypothetical opposite to this position is *conditioned-responsive thought*. Conditioned-responsive thought refers to the moods and modes of thinking of those who live the life that circumstances have prescribed; goal-responsive thought describes the meaning making orientation of those who embrace the unknown future as a stimulus for creative action (A. D. McKenzie, 1996, p. 99).

This paper will unpack the proposition of universities' 'big ideas' agenda as an expression of goal-responsive thought, drawing on the authors' current lived experience of institutional renewal at Charles Sturt University, Australia (CSU). Complex and relational meaning making processes are in evidence as we report on CSU's curriculum renewal project and the first author's *curriculum of becoming* theorising project—two big ideas. Through these two case studies we will progress our argument.

## Setting the Scene

Charles Sturt University (CSU) is a national, regionally-based Australian university. Its motto, stated on its coat of arms, is *For the public good*, a reference to the aspirations of the Australian colonial explorer, Charles Sturt, after whom the University is named. Sturt noted that, aside from personal ambition, his inland explorations were motivated 'chiefly with an earnest desire to promote the public good' (<http://www.csu.edu.au/about/history/emblems>). The three authors of this paper all work at CSU, and all, like Sturt, aspire to advance the welfare of the community, in particular our students, in their professional roles and in their lives.

In this paper we examine the nature of the core educational function of universities in the light of the value proposition of the World Universities Forum 'for academe to connect more directly and boldly with the large questions of our time' (<http://ontheuniversity.com/ideas/>; accessed 20100914). To put this more directly, what and how should universities teach if their goal, role or calling is to 'connect more directly and boldly with the large questions of our time'? The question may be approached along two lines. First, what kind of learning experience should universities be providing their students if these institutions are committed to germinating big ideas and benefits for society? Are some curricula better aligned than others with this institutional agenda? What consonance might we recognise between our engaging with students and engaging in society? The second—the flipside of the coin in fact—is, how might academic staff become more closely attuned to their universities' big ideas and outcomes agendas as they conceptualise and continually reconceptualise their teaching challenges? Asking these questions will naturally raise other questions about the 'teaching—research nexus', which are frequently mentioned in higher education discourses. More critically, however, given our declared interest in examining 'goal-responsive thought'—including personal and institutional aspiration, expressed in 'dream-wishes' (A. D. McKenzie, 1996, p. 98) thence vision statements, goals and objectives—our questions invite you and us to think beyond the obvious, perhaps even 'a little bit introspective—fancy'. What we aspire to for our students in fact is *the renewing of the mind*. We aspire to *perspective transformation* (Mezirow, 1978) in both the individual, experiential realm and in the public, collective realm, through curriculum and institutional renewal. The ideas listed in figure 1 are all elements of our global position in this paper.

a university's core educational function  
the large questions of our time  
goal-responsive thought  
curriculum renewal  
curriculum of becoming  
for the public good  
think introspective-fancy  
perspective transformation

Figure 1: Elements of our Global Position

We shall be arguing our case using our institution and ourselves—in particular the first author<sup>2</sup>—as case studies in goal-responsive thought and practice. We start to articulate that position in a reprise of the first author's experience of his recent institutional history. We shall make selective use of a 'pseudo-interview' text genre to progress our argument<sup>3</sup>. (Note: reference is made in this account to several unpublished/self-published documents by the first author. Consider these as primary sources articulating his theorising or meaning making project.)

## **Case 1: Reflections of an Educational Designer**

### ***What Changed when Orange Campus (New South Wales) Changed Hands?***

Joy

Tony, Orange Campus of Charles Sturt University was originally an independent post-secondary agricultural college but by the time you went to Orange as an educational designer/academic developer in 1998, it was part of The University of Sydney. In 2005, the institution became part of Charles Sturt University. A new flag, a new name appeared at the gate. For you, what was important in this change for our argument here?

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is a collaboration between Tony McKenzie, CSU PhD candidate, and Professor Joy Higgs and Associate Professor Maree Simpson, his supervisors.

<sup>3</sup> The interview device allows us to progress our collective scholarly argument in which authors 1 and 2 retain their separate points of view.

Tony

Part of the answer is that Orange Campus provides a rich case study in goal-responsive thought in curriculum design since I've been there. The other part of the answer is more subjective, yet equally relevant to this paper's argument.

When I started work in Orange, the institution specialised in undergraduate and graduate studies in agriculture and management. The bachelor's programs in farm and land management were undergoing major reviews in an effort to evolve a more coherent, whole-of-course approach to developing quality-assured graduates, job-ready for their chosen careers—course team effort expressive of individual and collective goal-responsive thinking. Inspired by work elsewhere on 'capability approaches' to higher education, multi-disciplinary staff in Orange drew on their understanding of rural management practice in Australia and crafted a set of 'rural management capabilities' (Cochrane, Mahony, Bone, & Squires, 2002, June). A major challenge for staff was to think about course-level graduate outcomes on the one hand and about the *implications* of this consensus capability set<sup>4</sup> for their teaching in their respective subjects on the other. I was one of the two educational developers who assisted teaching staff in these processes.

I will give an example of the many conversations that occurred. The coordinator of a final year unit in the farm management program, *Leadership Issues*, was keen to re-conceptualise the unit. She and I agreed to consider how leadership might be conceived to make sense to Orange students *and* how leadership capability, well-attuned to rural community needs, could be effectively cultivated in students. I drafted a set of developmental benchmarks for what I believed were six dimensions of leadership capability. The idea for the schema was inspired by Biggs' SOLO taxonomy (Biggs, 1999, pp. 37-40). The five levels of that taxonomy were taken to be five levels of *conceptual capability*. I simply added five more 'capabilities', each with five developmental stages. Conceptual capability was only one of a number of important attributes of Orange graduates. The resultant matrix did not suit the unit coordinator's needs, so I published it later as 'an idealised, *personal* schema of growth'. (I will return to this shortly.)

What's my point? The first point to be made is that the schema arose out of my engagement with a curriculum problem. The schema was a problem-solving heuristic—a possible design solution to the question, *what* leadership capability should we cultivate in our students? A central proposition of our argument here is that the notion of a '*curriculum of becoming*' model (as presently being articulated in my PhD thesis) offers a solution to the question, how can universities teach in a way that is aligned with an institutional agenda of germinating big ideas and outcomes in society? That is, how can universities provide a 'fit-for-greater-purpose' university education in the twenty-first century? How can the individual student's becoming (as well as that of the entire cohort) address these greater public good issues? (An interim account of the *curriculum*

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<sup>4</sup> Academic Board adopted a set of rural capability statements for its undergraduate courses and several years later endorsed a revised set as The University of Sydney sought a common graduate capability framework across all its undergraduate programs. Our 'consensus' in Orange was expressed in Academic Board's capability sets and in its implementation plans. Translating the aspiration into a coherent, developmental course curriculum design was not so successful.

*of becoming* model is available online; see T. McKenzie, Higgs, & Simpson (2010, pp. 3-5).

An answer (in a nutshell) to the ‘fit-for-greater-purpose curriculum’ question is that ‘*curriculum of becoming*’ is a fuzzy yet expansive, boundary-dissolving idea that offers an integrated solution to *the* twenty-first century university educational challenge. According to the *curriculum of becoming* ‘mindspace’: (a) course teaching teams need to model the capabilities they are attempting to teach; (b) one of the central attributes that will help graduates engage in these supercomplex, uncertain times<sup>5</sup> is a capacity for and commitment to *making a difference for good*—venturing like Charles Sturt into the unknown *for the public good*; and, as a consequence, (c) members of teaching teams need to live out and share their personal understandings of their own commitments to making a difference for good. We need a more explicit and fundamental commitment to individual human agency in higher education and therefore a curriculum that nurtures learners’ sense of self, because that is the seedbed for individual agency. We need a new curriculum mindset, one that honours the rich understanding that awaits us, teachers and learners together, as we accept the validity of subjective, personal and interpersonal understanding<sup>6</sup>.

This case study (see also T. McKenzie (2010a)) points to what Tony sees as a large challenge that could impede acceptance of the *curriculum of becoming* model. The way we conceive curriculum renewal reflects the way we conceive curriculum<sup>7</sup>. In the *curriculum of becoming* mindspace, learners themselves are part of the flux that is the learning domain. When it comes to curriculum renewal, coming to terms with the idea that ‘the transformation is us’ will require a change in the mindsets of staff and students, a change that may be especially challenging for scholars trained in the scientific disciplines. In our *CSU Ed 2010* conference presentation we posed the rhetorical question, *how foreign-sounding is the aphorism, ‘the transformation is us’, to whom, and for how long?*

And yet, if (as the international media attest) the perceptible world is changing so profoundly before our eyes, why should our mindsets be resistant to change? Perspective transformation should not be considered abnormal but rather the change process experienced by meaning makers every day as they continuously draw new learnings into their existing frames of understanding. It lies at the heart of our educational endeavour. For example, it is transformative to think that ‘striving to achieve one’s individual potential’ segues naturally into ‘making a difference for good’. *For the public good* need not be seen as a ‘do-gooder burden’, certain to frighten off self-motivated achievers:

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Supercomplex’ in Ron Barnett’s sense of the term, a state in which ‘professional life is increasingly becoming a matter not just of handling overwhelming data and theories *within* a given frame of reference (a situation of complexity) but also a matter of handling multiple frames of understanding, of action and of self-identity’ (Barnett, 2000, p. 6), viz., a state of supercomplexity. ‘A higher education curriculum, if it is in any way to sponsor the kinds of human qualities and dispositions appropriate to [an age of supercomplexity], is necessarily one that fosters human beings that are able to flourish amid uncertainty and incessant change’ (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 164).

<sup>6</sup> Ken Wilber does not underestimate the scale of the challenge of broad acceptance of acknowledging ‘the within of things’ in our scholarly pursuit of understanding human experience: ‘subtle reductionism’ too readily intervenes. See *A view from within*, chapter 4 of his *Sex, ecology, spirituality: The spirit of evolution* (Wilber, 2000, pp. 115-157).

<sup>7</sup> The reader may gain insight into this proposition by pondering on McKenzie (2010c).

explorer Charles Sturt admitted to personal ambition, but in the very same sentence asserted his commitment to making a difference for good. My personal schema for growth, mentioned earlier, proposed various ways of making a difference for good in four of the six capabilities identified in the schema. Table 1 highlights the behavioural shifts from *self development* to *agency* (making a difference for others) in these capabilities. The transition to agency in the first three rows occurs from level 4 to 5, while *communicative capability* by its very nature presents a more complex picture.

**Table 1: Developing Individual Purposeful Action—segues from *Self-development* to *Agency***

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Affective capability	[Self-development]	[Self-development]	[Self-development]	Integrates feelings, values, beliefs, thoughts and insights into a personal praxis of living	Creates a more sensitive community
Valuing capability	[Self-development]	[Self-development]	[Self-development]	Defends institutions, people, property and/or ideas on moral or ethical grounds	Creates a more appreciative community
Conative capability *	[Self-development]	[Self-development]	[Self-development]	Resolves any inner conflicts between the will to act, and the lack of it – managing one’s will-power	Creates a climate that encourages achievement
Communicative capability	Effectively expresses what he or she experiences, thinks and feels through language and/or in other ways	Establishes empathy and rapport in communication with others	Practises continuous critique of the structures of knowledge and power	Fosters the habit of empathy, rapport and continuous critique in others	Creates a more critical and mutually-respectful community

\* Conation: that portion of mental life having to do with striving including both desire and volition (the will to act).

Source: based on *An idealised, personal schema of growth* – see <http://csusap.csu.edu.au/~tmckenzi/downloads/1999a.htm#table> (A. D. McKenzie, 1999)

At this point the authors resume their shared authorial voice.

We believe that Tony's interpretation of institutional practice in Orange sheds light on what we mean by goal-responsive thought and by engaging in, enacting a *curriculum of becoming*. The schema of personal growth has untapped potential as a tool for curriculum shaping as well as for reflecting on how a curriculum can be transformed into a *curriculum of becoming*. We now explain what we see as a potentially generative way of considering that possibility.

In our presentation to colleagues at CSU's 2010 in-house conference on learning and teaching we articulated our *curriculum of becoming* model against the backdrop of North American literature on school curriculum theory. As we noted, for William Pinar and colleagues, 'curriculum ceases to be a thing, and it is more than a process. It becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope' (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 848). (In a vintage yet still relevant paper, Macdonald suggests that curriculum design is a utopian pursuit, 'a form of political and social philosophizing and theorizing'. He suggests that 'if we recognize this, it may help us sort out our own thinking and perhaps increase our ability to communicate with one another' (MacDonald, 1975, p. 293).)

In our 2010 conference presentation we also recalled a submission to the 2007 review of the University's *Foundations* program in learning and teaching, in which Tony proposed that *the transformation is us* (T. McKenzie, 2007). Tony admitted to CSU Ed 2010 conferees that

on reflection I can see that [in 'the transformation is us' statement] I was really trying to say that curriculum *out there* and curriculum *in here*—I point into the distance then point to my chest—are two dimensions of the one thing (T. McKenzie, 2010c).

Tony

Do you sense an idea welling here, protected from the harsh light of day, lurking in the shades, yet palpable for those whose eyes can adjust to the dark? What has *segues from self development to agency* to do with *perspective transformation*? Who has eyes to see such metamorphoses? What kind of university education might emit such soundings, evoke such possibilities?

We divine such a quest in educational philosopher, Philip Phenix's writings, for example:

Since education is a means of helping human beings to become what they can and should become, the educator needs to understand human nature. He [*sic*] needs to understand people in their actualities, in their possibilities and in their idealities. He must also know how to foster desirable changes in them (Phenix, 1964, p. 17).

From within a *curriculum of becoming* mindspace, perspective transformation is possible through empirical inquiry, or else it can arise organically, holistically, as we embrace the constructivist belief that we are not separate from the world we seek to understand. According to this view, understanding is *sensing the patterns from within*. Henri Bortoft offers a parallel, complementary argument for 'seeing comprehensively'. 'When things are seen in their

context, so that intrinsic connections are revealed, then the experience we have is that of *understanding*.' By contrast he observes 'our long-established habit of seeing things in isolation from each other', for which we must then find explanation: 'external connections are introduced with a view to overcoming separation'. For Bortoft, 'understanding is holistic whereas explanation is analytical' (Bortoft, 1996, pp. 290-291).

Tony

I really think I am part of the world I experience. My personal schema of growth was initially intended as a curriculum heuristic to test the timbre of the leadership capability we wanted to cultivate in students. Even in that initial mental exercise my own deep valuing of making a difference for good was working quietly for me. According to the schema personal growth is simultaneously transformative and agential, as the level 5 accomplishments attest. The proposed schema of leadership capability development was not taken up for its intended purpose, yet now I am able to see how its creation and renaming as a schema of personal growth gives us a way of articulating our curriculum of becoming theory. My PhD thesis will attempt to present this argument in depth.

## Case 2: Charles Sturt University—venturing into the Unknown?

In the foregoing, we have attempted to explore the notion and span of goal-responsive thought within the frame of reference of an individual meaning maker in his educational design interventions in Orange NSW and beyond. Since the take-over of Orange Campus by Charles Sturt University in 2005 management-led institutional development has been a top priority of the University. We now describe and comment on this institutional renewal project with special reference to two five year plans: 2007-2011 and 2011-2015. The purpose of the exercise is to attempt to understand the nature and reach of goal-responsive thought at an institutional scale.

The 2007-2011 five year plan (Charles Sturt University, 2006) acknowledged the university's motto, *For the public good*, on its front cover. The inclusion in the plan of Charles Sturt's commitment to making a difference for good can be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the University's value orientation. Working for the welfare of others or society or the environment is fundamental to preparing people for professional life at CSU, and the same values underpin much of its research. These examples from the University website suggest a diversity of expression of the University motto:

- In November 2010, Professor Bob Perry from CSU's Murray School of Education addressed a research centre seminar. In an item on the school's website he explained his reasons for conducting educational research 'in terms of career and institutional achievement but, *more importantly*, in terms of "wanting to make a difference" in the worlds of children, families and educators' (italics added). He believes that 'research should, first and foremost, be a vehicle for enhancing the wellbeing of the researched'. (Source: <http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/educat/murrayed/news.html>; accessed 3 January 2011)
- On the same school webpage appears a story about the annual Allan Brown Award, named after a former highly respected regional school educator. Final year students in



the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) course are eligible to apply. ‘Applicants are encouraged to reflect upon the contributions to community they can make as teachers, beyond the contributions made through their direct teaching. The articulation of how teachers can add to the cultural capital of communities will be included in a philosophical statement written by students making an application’ (source: m4.rtf, FAC. OF EDUC. PRIZES & SCHOLARSHIPS; University intranet). ‘As Allan’s life demonstrated so clearly teachers are intricately connected to communities and have the privilege of being able to use these connections to influence the wellbeing of a community.’

- The School of Humanities and Social Sciences Social Justice Innovation Award offers senior high school and TAFE students ‘the platform to write about “Making a Difference”’. Competition coordinator, Dr Bill Anscombe, admits, ‘I have been surprised by the quality and variety and depth of passion for social issues that many of the entries display.’ One winner in 2009 acknowledged that competitions of this sort ‘encourage young people to have an active interest in the world around them and reassures them that their voices are being heard. All that is required to enter the competition is passion.’ (Source: <http://www.csu.edu.au/student/mad/>; accessed 2 January 2011)<sup>8</sup>
- CSU’s Bachelor of Clinical Practice (Paramedic) course promotion webpage claims the course ‘offers you a rewarding, fast-paced career that makes a difference to people’s lives’ (etc.). (Source: <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/undergraduate/paramedic/>; accessed 2 January 2011) According to the School of Policing Studies, ‘Policing is a career where you can really make a difference and that’s one of the reasons why record numbers of people are applying to join NSW Police’. (Source: <http://www.csu.edu.au/study/arts-courses/policing/>; accessed 2 January 2011)
- In 2007 the CSU Institute for Land, Water and Society hosted the 5th Australian Stream Management Conference under the title, *Australian rivers: making a difference*. The scope of the conference is hinted at in the welcome from the conference convenors: ‘Our conference is being held at one of the most challenging and exciting times for river/stream management practitioners. Almost all of the rivers in southern Australia are severely stressed.’ (Source: <http://www.csu.edu.au/research/ilws/news/events/5asm/docs/proceedings/Preface%20to%20proceedings.pdf>. Accessed 4 January 2011.)

### ***Charles Sturt University, 2007-2011—a Vision to Achieve Excellence in Educating for the Professions and in Flexible Learning***

In the period 2007-2011 the University Vision was to be ‘a national university for excellence in education for the professions, strategic and applied research and flexible delivery of learning and teaching’. Vice Chancellor Ian Goulter observed that the strategy ‘enables us to define our own future and embrace opportunities that will arise in the rapidly changing international higher education environment’. The values that underpinned the strategy were overtly goal-responsive and agential, imbued with commitment to the common weal:

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<sup>8</sup> archived copy: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:CLq15uKzNS4J:www.csu.edu.au/student/mad/+I+have+been+surprised+by+the+quality+and+variety+and+depth+of+passion+for+social+issues+that+many+of+the+entries+display&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=au&source=www.google.com.au>

Charles Sturt University values:

- intellectual independence and freedom of inquiry
- the discovery, refinement, preservation and dissemination of knowledge
- engagement with professions and communities through responsiveness, partnerships and inclusiveness
- social justice including ethical practice and global citizenship
- economic, social and environmental sustainability, including the responsible stewardship of resources, and
- its staff and students, their well-being and development (Charles Sturt University, 2006, p. 2).

### ***Charles Sturt University, 2011-2015—the Overriding Question is the Student’s Whole Course Experience***

The University has recently released several documents that together constitute its 2011-2015 five year plan, which are all accessible at <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/plandev/strategy/>

The documents are:

- University strategy and plans 2011-2015: Our commitments
- University strategy and plans 2011-2015: Research plan
- University strategy and plans 2011-2015: Student experience plan
- University strategy and plans 2011-2015: Course profile plan.

As the *Curriculum renewal* webpage says,

CSU has made a commitment to all CSU undergraduates that, as well as gaining an in-depth understanding of their chosen disciplines and professions, they will have access to:

- A supported transition into the first year of university; and thereafter throughout the undergraduate student experience
- Employability and generic skills such as effective communication; analytical skills; critical and reflective judgment; problem-solving; team work; and time-management
- The opportunity for international experiences and to develop an international perspective in their discipline or profession
- An engagement with the responsibilities of global citizenship
- The opportunity to develop cultural competence
- The opportunity to engage meaningfully with the culture, experiences and histories of Indigenous communities
- Understandings of financial, social and environmental sustainability
- A firm understanding of ethics
- Education based in practice
- Engagement in activities that foster web-based proficiency
- Threshold disciplinary outcomes (to be developed).

Source: <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/landt/curriculumrenewal/index.htm> (accessed 6 January 2011)

In the authors' opinions, by any measure, CSU management provides a highly visionary work environment for staff. The new five year plan needs to be understood in terms of the University's developmental work on what will be called 'the CSU Degree'. This blueprint for 'curriculum renewal' was developed in 2009-2010, significantly in response to the Australian Government's 'Bradley review' of higher education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) and the institutional audit carried out by the Australian Universities Quality Agency in 2009. The University has determined that by 2015 all undergraduate courses will align with the principles of the CSU Degree, and is resourcing a range of strategies under the umbrella of the CSU Degree Initiative.

### **'Self-fulfilling Utopian Dreams' or 'Pie in the Sky'?**

We hope we have shown that the two 'cases' reported here—'the *curriculum of becoming* mindspace' and CSU's institutional renewal project—are both strong on goal-responsive thought. We also hope that both meet the educational quality benchmark we proposed at the beginning: the need for both theory and practice to take into account the meaning making orientation of those who embrace the unknown future as a stimulus for creative action. Both cases moreover embrace the value of committing to make a difference for good, although at this stage in the unfolding of both case studies—one, unfolding theorising, the other, unfolding practice—we see a difference in the position agency is given:

- In the CSU institutional renewal project 'making a difference for good' may be inferred to be embedded in some of the 11 'graduate commitments'; moreover, the University now places value on graduates becoming

'agents of change—we think differently and look beyond the obvious. We ask 'why' and 'why not'. We constantly strive for new and better ways to achieve our goals. We make things happen' (Source: *Our commitments*, University intranet: <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/plandev/strategy/docs/Overarching.pdf> (accessed 4 February 2011).

On the ground, in specific programs, as evidenced in the examples above from the University website, agential teachers aim to ignite an aspiration in their students to make a difference for good.

- In a curriculum of becoming, fostering agency is central: the learning journey is so designed that students will cultivate a *sense of self in the world* as the foundation for moral judgment *and personal agency*; thus the theory achieves a potential synthesis of agency and 'the curriculum project within', a journey in 'sensing the patterns from within'.

### **Introducing a Model of Curriculum Renewal**

We now introduce and articulate a 'triple hologenesis model' for curriculum renewal (Figure 2). 'Hologenesis' is 'the coming to be of wholes' (A. D. McKenzie, 1999), a concept remin-

iscent of Ken Wilber's *holarchy*<sup>9</sup>, but also influenced by Teilhard de Chardin's *cosmogensis*<sup>10</sup>. The idea of a *curriculum of becoming* is an ideal that may be progressively approximated, if never fully realised. The triple hogenesis model asserts that there are three synergistic processes in the realisation of a *curriculum of becoming*:

- In the first place, the course teaching team works to reach consensus on the curriculum *WHAT*—what a graduating student needs in order to be a novice rounded, grounded practitioner in a given field of practice. Of course, consensus itself is contestable and needs to be continuously challenged as conditions and expectations of practitioners change over time.
- Second, the course team collaborates and strives for agreement on the curriculum *HOW*—on how to design and implement the course-long learning experience. Because teaching is mediated by technology and because technology is evolving rapidly, learning experience design will also always be a work in progress.
- As the course team works to realise consensus on the curriculum *WHAT* and *HOW* it naturally undergoes a transformation into a community of belonging:

The defining feature of a community of belonging is that members have a strong bond to the community and a strong, shared commitment to the work and welfare of the community. In return, the community has a strong commitment to every member and his or her capacity to contribute fulsomely to its 'being-in-the-world'<sup>11</sup> and its activities. It is out of this reciprocal relationship that the community can pursue its goals effectively, elegantly, responsibly (Olsen [ aka Tony McKenzie ], 2009).

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<sup>9</sup> A *holon* is a whole that is simultaneously a part of a more comprehensive whole. *Holarchy* refers to a set of nested holons – a hierarchy with no upper or lower limit.

<sup>10</sup> In the context of this paper 'cosmogensis' conveys the idea of a cosmos in process of becoming. In the following lyrical and imaginative passage, French Jesuit priest and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin provides a quintessential example of goal-responsive thought:

... like a subtle fluid, space-time first drowns our bodies and then penetrates to our soul; it fills and impregnates it; it blends itself with the soul's potentialities to such an extent that soon the soul no longer knows how to distinguish space-time from its own thoughts .... The very act by which the fine edge of our minds penetrates the absolute is a phenomenon, as it were, of *emergence* .... How indeed could we incorporate thought into the organic flux of space-time without being forced to grant it the first place in the processus? How could we imagine a cosmogenesis reaching right up to mind without being thereby confronted by a noogenesis? (Teilhard de Chardin, 1977, p. 243).

<sup>11</sup> *Being-in-the-world*. Olsen borrows Heidegger's landmark concept (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 78-90) and suggests that communities of belonging, like individuals, experience a kind of being-in-the-world. This idea has not yet been critiqued.

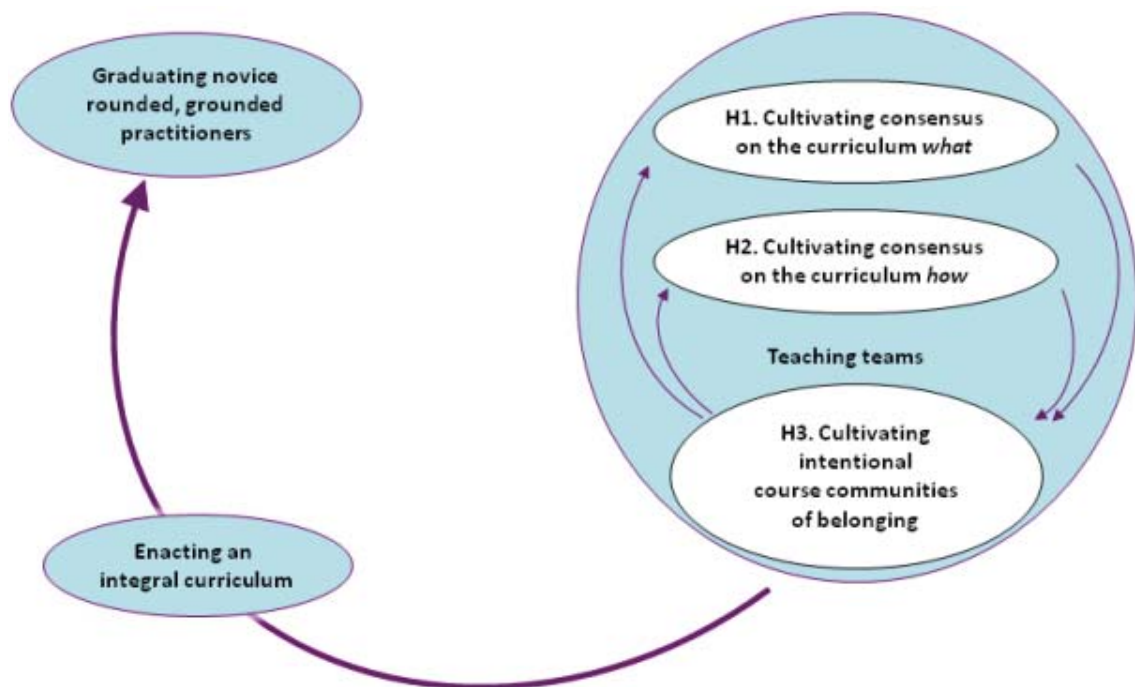


Figure 2: Curriculum Renewal as Triple Hologenesi (Redrawn from the Diagram in McKenzie (2010b, p. 7))

Some of our language here resembles that in Ronald Barnett's latest book, *Being a university*. In this book Barnett writes about his predisposition to pursue 'feasible utopias'. He writes:

The options for which I have argued in my books are utopian, in that they are precisely not the present situation, and probably are unlikely ever to be fully realised, given the structures of power and ideology at work. However, I have tried to show that these utopias are not entirely fanciful for the depictions that I have conjured can already be glimpsed in our daily practices in universities and higher education. They are, therefore, *feasible utopias*. In the best of all possible worlds, they could just be realised... (Barnett, 2010, p. 4).

Barnett's words focus attention on the merits or otherwise of aspiring beyond one's current 'reality' horizon. Given the fact that Australian universities must meet prescribed standards to continue receiving government funding and retain their university status, our view on aspiration, formed from inside a *curriculum of becoming* mindset, is that

quality is most assuredly assured through realisation of the [utopian] aspiration. Fulsome pursuit of the [utopian] aspiration is the most strategically sensible way of assuring a consistent, institution-wide transformative education. It will be the quality of relationships among members of ... course teaching teams that will breathe life and value into the interpretation of standards and other quality assurance mechanisms (T. McKenzie, 2010b, p. 7).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Carl Bereiter provides a useful way of seeing the relationship between goals and visions/ideals: 'A goal is a conceptualised outcome. If it is conceptualised at a high enough level, it becomes a vision or an ideal. If the

Earlier we juxtaposed two ideas: the idea of *sensing the patterns from within* and Bortoft's idea of *seeing comprehensively*, and suggested that they be considered as parallel, complementary ways of thinking. The triple hologenesis model provides a way of imagining this happening, in a Barnettian 'feasible utopia', once we make room for two ideas: (a) holistic curriculum, as distilled in the goal of a curriculum of becoming—graduating novice rounded, grounded practitioners; and (b) inner curriculum—as implied in the statement, *the transformation is us*. We are aware this line of thinking is challenging and needs further development. We include it here in order to help us clarify for ourselves what it is we wish to explore.

## Reprise

So what is our global (holistic) position? Universities are still ideally placed to conduct research as a way of tackling the large challenges facing the planet. But beyond that, and central to our argument, the teaching and research roles of the academy are both expressions of *a more basic impulse—an individual and collective pursuit of ever-richer understanding of ourselves and the world. It is in that sense that we invest our trust in notions of metamorphosis, transformation, hologenesis*. We consider our triple hologenesis model of curriculum renewal to be just one instance of a more universal model of becoming. The model reflects level 5 expressions of agency in Table 1—agential engagements to create a more *sensitive* or *appreciative* or *striving* or *respectful* community, plus whatever ideals you would care to add to the list. ('*Wise*' would be a clever addition.) These achievements may be realised in *any* of our (your and our) extra-mural communities of concern and possibility. It is therefore not pie-in-the-sky to hope that (a) *the transformation is us*, which means, from a holarchic perspective, (b) *the hologenesis is us...sensing hologenesis, sensing becoming from within*.

Within a mindspace such as this, there is no doubting that some curricula will be better aligned with a hope-imbued commitment to the planet than others.

## Finale

We declared in the beginning that our intention here was to engage with the World Universities Forum's 'big ideas agenda' for universities in the twenty-first century, and to do so by viewing the proposition as an example of goal-responsive, aspirational thought. We have shed light on the nature of human aspiration through an account of two case studies, one institutional, the other, personal. Our account of the first author's curriculum of becoming theorising has emphasised the critical role of the course teaching team in interpreting the nature of the 'rounded grounded practitioner' (see Figure 2). Space restrictions have prevented us from dealing with other critical processes in designing twenty-first century practice-based education, notably processes to involve the profession itself in shaping curriculum desiderata. Other questions have been raised yet not addressed, but we have retained them to flag fruitful lines for further inquiry. Other areas missing from our argument include the politico-economic environment in which Australian and other universities must operate, and the growing ma-

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conceptual framework is strong and complete enough, there will be ways to connect the vision with lower level goals that can actually be achieved. Otherwise the vision tends to be of only inspirational value and the actual business of reform may not advance toward it at all' (Bereiter, 2002, p. 438). Our position here is that the utopian aspiration is the factor that allows goal-setting to be coherent, drawing us towards a prized and elegant outcome.

nagerialism of university life. These discourses are all worthwhile foci in the larger scheme of things, and are being pursued by others.

Instead, what we chose to focus on here was a theme that is seldom addressed in the higher education curriculum literature—*designing the student learning experience as if human persons, by nature, in their better moments, pursue the goal of becoming something or someone more, and as if, as we proposed earlier, it is transformative to think that ‘striving to achieve one’s individual potential’ segues naturally into ‘making a difference for good’.*

Enacting a university curriculum of becoming is a values-driven, hope-driven endeavour.

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