GENERAL EDUCATION AND WHOLE PERSON DEVELOPMENT: QUESTIONS FOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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RAISING QUESTIONS IN GE

• The meanings and development of the ‘whole person’, how GE serves this, how GE moves from statements of knowledge to development of the ‘whole person’, and the role of non-GE learning;

• Ontology and epistemology of GE;

• GE’s curriculum framing and development;

• Identification of the learning communities for GE.
CURRENT DISCUSSIONS OF GE. . .

• Raise questions of meanings and implementation of ‘general’ and ‘whole person’ and how to develop these;
• Raise concerns in, and meanings of, curriculum planning, e.g.: progression, continuity, balance, relevance, breadth, depth, integration and coherence;
• Sit uncomfortably with some current conceptions of outcomes based education;
• Present significant implications for the hidden curriculum of universities (where and how learning takes place).
QUESTIONS FOR GE AND THE WHOLE PERSON

• How does GE serve whole person education?
• What do we mean by the ‘whole person’, and how does the view of the ‘whole person’ differ from being the sum of the parts of several areas of knowledge?
• What is the ‘whole’ in whole person education, what makes us ‘whole’ and when do we know that we are whole? Who is to say when a person is whole?
QUESTIONS FOR GE AND THE WHOLE PERSON

• What is the relationship between GE and non-GE learning in respect of developing the whole person as, on its own, GE may not produce a whole person – it needs to be complemented by other specialist/practical knowledge.

• Can a person who has largely or only specialist knowledge not be whole? Why should specialist knowledge alone not deliver a whole person?

• Where is the evidence that GE will be any more or less effective than other curricula in ‘delivering’ the ‘whole person’?
QUESTIONS FOR GE AND THE WHOLE PERSON

• How does one move from GE to being a ‘whole person’?
• What is the alchemy that turns GE (courses) into whole persons?
• How does GE serve whole person education?
• How does GE move from statements of knowledge, skills and competencies to development of the ‘whole person’? The former concerns knowledge and curricula, the latter concerns people.
QUESTIONS FOR GE CURRICULA

• How does GE address: progression, continuity, balance, relevance, breadth, depth, integration and coherence?
  – Progression, continuity, balance, relevance, breadth, depth, integration and coherence reside *in the student*? They are personal and psychological matters as well as curricular and epistemological matters.
QUESTIONS FOR THE IDENTITY OF GE AND ITS CURRICULA

• If GE is not an introduction to an area of knowledge, nor a selection from it, nor an example of it, nor an overview of it, nor a representation of it, nor a ‘taster’ in it, then what is it? An ontological question.

• How can GE avoid being an introduction to areas of knowledge? What alternatives to this are there?

• In what terms should GE be articulated, e.g. areas of knowledge, areas of experience, competencies, a common cultural core etc.?

• What is the ‘DNA’ of GE, its integrating principles and/or central concepts in a spiral curriculum?
How does one reconcile GE (with unmeasurable outcomes) with performance-based variants of OBE?

- GE may be reconciled with less measurement-oriented versions of OBE, but may fit so comfortably with measurement-driven views of outcomes in OBE.
GE AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES (LCs)

- LCs are variously defined. Some versions of LC may sit more/less comfortably than others with GE and whole person education.
- Their effect on whole person education and GE may be indirect rather than direct.
GE AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES (LCs)

• There are elective affinities between LCs, whole person education and GE:
  – All three concern themselves with the development of more than the intellectual side of students’ development.
  – LCs may fit the cross-disciplinary nature of some conceptions of GE, so students can explore a topic from many disciplinary perspectives and students’ opinions.
  – All three address whole person development.
GE AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

• Learning communities have several claimed benefits:
  – Academic
  – Pedagogic
  – Social
  – Motivational
  – Personal
  – Emotional
GE AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

• Learning communities have several claimed disadvantages:
  – They can stifle creativity and the development of autonomy and criticality;
  – They can be limiting and closing rather than enabling and opening;
  – They risk ‘group think’;
  – They limit socialization and can over-constrain social relationships;
  – They risk insularity, isolation, ‘exclusionary cliques’ and ‘tyranny’;
  – The promote dependence rather than independence.
QUESTIONS FOR GE AND (LCs)

- Do the benefits of LCs outweigh their potential dangers?
- Why should LCs be any better or worse than other organizational/pedagogical arrangements for achieving GE or whole person development?
- Does an LC risk ‘groupthink’ in relatively immature minds?
- What is the optimum size of the LC?
- Can students opt into and out of LCs?
QUESTIONS FOR GE AND LCs

• Is there a risk that placing students into LCs is an even more artificial learning arrangement than bringing them into university in the first place?
• Are there sufficient human, material, administrative spatial and temporal resources to support students in their LCs?
• How effective is an LC for GE which is not based on cross-disciplinary, theme-based or topic-based studies?
• Why restrict an LC to only 25-30 people when GE argues for exposure of students to a wider range of educational contacts and contexts throughout the university so that they can learn the hidden as well as the formal curriculum of whole person development?
QUESTIONS FOR GE AND LCs

• Who will be in the LC (teachers/students?) and who will decide on their composition?
• How effective is an LC for GE which is not based on cross-disciplinary, theme-based or topic-based studies?
DON’T ASSUME THAT . . .

• GE can serve whole person development;
• Whole person development is an uncontested concept;
• LCs are an unmitigated good;
• LCs will ‘deliver’ GE and/or whole person development;
• LCs, GE and whole person development will be taken seriously by all universities unless compelled to do so.
THANK YOU