Chapter 9
Towards a Critical Curriculum for Engagement

Abstract What is a critical curriculum for engagement? Such a curriculum overlaps with the prescriptions of a mainstream curriculum but takes learning beyond this. A critical curriculum includes all relevant purposes, knowledge and values leading to awareness of self, society and the ecosystem. It enables critique of mainstream knowledge, values and practices and works for greater social justice. The chapter introduces the notion of a 'big E' critical curriculum, which features student engagement as a catalyst for critical learning. While theoretical supports for a 'big E' critical curriculum are canvassed, so are practical applications.

Discussion so far has centred on *how* teachers engage students in a pedagogy of student engagement. We have focused on pedagogy because pedagogy has been and largely continues to be the focus of mainstream student engagement research and practice. While pedagogy is a necessary aspect of student engagement, it is not sufficient. Mainstream engagement pedagogy focuses on techniques of teaching and learning mainly in classrooms. It is concerned with behaviours, skills and attitudes without explicitly considering the varied contexts within which these can occur. According to McFadden and Munns (2002, p. 360) what is critically important in getting to grips with student engagement "is an understanding of how students respond socially and culturally to their educational circumstances, including the teaching paradigm used". They want student engagement to be more than pedagogy and call for a 'big E' engagement curriculum. They adopt Bernstein's view that education comprises three domains: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. According to Bernstein (1996) these operate together as three interdependent message systems through which knowledge is realized. Curriculum identifies valid knowledge; pedagogy determines how students engage with that knowledge; and evaluation judges whether knowledge is validly realized. Mainstream student engagement research and practice focus on what works, rendering largely invisible wider concerns of curriculum such as its purposes, knowledge and values. Priestley (2011) argues that pedagogy overshadows curriculum because of neoliberal ideology. He contends that where mentioned at all, a mainstream curriculum is dominated by behavioural outcomes, generic skills, capacities and key competencies. This view

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of curriculum is narrow instrumentalism based on economic priorities focused on skills required for the workplace.

This view has been widely critiqued as limiting designs for teaching and learning (Yates 2009), and hence for student engagement. Yates visualizes pedagogy as a subset of curriculum offering only a partial understanding of students' learning. She argues that curriculum is concerned with the knowledge being conveyed (or intended to be conveyed), and about the values and processes that are not simply derivable from "evidence of what works". Knowledge, purposes and values are at the core of the curriculum. How these are then present in diverse disciplines, cultures and contexts determines the curriculum at work. Whatever its context of application or purposes such a curriculum cannot be neutral. According to Apple (2012, p. xiv) "it is fundamentally valuative" and involves an act of selection by someone about what should count as appropriate purposes, knowledge and values. In the mainstream selection of these is shared by politicians, administrators and teachers. It conveys instrumental purposes, knowledge and values to build work readiness. A critical curriculum does not replace mainstream learning. Rather, it extends a mainstream curriculum, pushing learning beyond the mainstream. It offers opportunities to complement and challenge the mainstream to build a more just future for all. It occurs within a political, cultural, ecological, institutional and personal framework of values that is shaped in a wider social context (Ramsden and Callender 2014). The knowledge conveyed, the purposes chosen and the values held require students and teachers to become conscious of themselves, their place in the scheme of things and to critically engage with the world (Freire 1972).

This chapter raises two intertwining questions: what critical purposes, knowledge and values are conveyed by a curriculum; and what is an engaging critical curriculum anyway? I suggest that a critical curriculum conveys, first, valid knowledge that includes all relevant Type 1 and 2 knowledge but with an emphasis on critique. Barnett (1997) identifies four levels of critical knowledge: discipline specific critique; critical reflection on one's own knowledge; critical interpretation of existing knowledge; and the transformation of existing knowledge. A 'big E' curriculum covers all levels within specific disciplines and outside them as part of the ethos and culture of the learning environment. Engaging with this array of critical knowledge enables 'big E' engagement (McFadden and Munns 2002, p. 360) where students are active members of a critical discourse community and culture that can engage with mainstream knowledge but also challenge it. Such a 'big E' curriculum must, second, have critical purposes and values. Biesta (2011) draws on the work of the German education theorist Hans Groothoff to describe a continental European conception of education (Erziehung) that could act as proxy for the purposes and values of a critical engagement curriculum. This would enable students to become self-aware as human beings, interact positively with others, become critical learners, understand contemporary social life and actively help shape its future, understand and engage with the ends and means of higher education and act constructively within different contexts and institutions. Such a conception of purposes, knowledge and values offers some specifics for 'big E' engagement in a critical curriculum.

In introducing the idea of a ‘big E’ curriculum, McFadden and Munns (2002) describe some of its features and effects, but leave blank spots and do not engage specifically with critical learning. Au (2012) fills some of these blanks. In the process he provides a more complete description of what a critical ‘big E’ engagement curriculum might look like—from here called a ‘big E’ critical curriculum. He visualizes it as a complex environmental design that seeks to selectively make discipline and critical knowledge available to different students as part of a broader process of shaping self-consciousness and consciousness of the wider world in critical and liberating ways. Au makes clear that such a curriculum is not just another set of generic ‘to dos’ because the critical specifics differ between contexts, populations and disciplines. The chapter now turns to discuss some of the specifics of a ‘big E’ critical curriculum. It is organized around *purposes, knowledge and values*. Although it treats them separately, they are related and even overlap. Under *purposes* we examine how knowledge, performativity and accountability, the three anchoring ideas for a neoliberal mainstream curriculum are reframed into a critical one that centres on student engagement with the world. The focus in the *knowledge* section is on criticality within different knowledge classifications. The *values* section acknowledges the traps in considering values generically but uses the work of Groothoff and the theorists discussed in Chap. 7 to provide a sketch of critical value clusters underpinning a ‘big E’ critical curriculum. Each section concludes with some thoughts on how critical purposes, knowledge and values may underpin practice.

Purposes

Subject fields seek to codify their own purposes, knowledge and values for students in a written, implied or hidden curriculum. The way these are codified is political as the purposes of curricula are shaped within dominant ideologies (Apple 2012). Currently they are shaped in the image of neoliberal norms and expectations. One purpose of a ‘big E’ critical curriculum is to help students’ develop a critical awareness of neoliberal purposes and expectations in higher education. There are two aspects to this. First, such a curriculum enables students to identify and critique such dominant ideological norms and practices (Au 2012). In identifying and critiquing dominant neoliberal purposes, a ‘big E’ critical curriculum opens students to possibilities for learning that lie beyond the mainstream. Practical knowledge, performativity and accountability, the three anchoring ideas for neoliberal norms and expectations are exposed for examination and critique. A ‘big E’ critical curriculum expects students to know both what to critique and how to do so. For example, the limits of what works in a subject area are investigated and analyzed for problems. The neoliberal version of performativity is discussed critically as potentially authoritarian and self-limiting. Other criteria for evaluating performance are critically examined. The narrow neoliberal application of accountability is recognized and critiqued and more critical forms of accountability are examined.

The curriculum emerging here is strongly committed to developing in students both a consciousness of the neoliberal hegemony shaping their learning and ways of critiquing and perhaps changing it (Brookfield 2005).

The second aspect of developing critical consciousness in students is to reframe neoliberal norms and expectations by developing a critical awareness of what is possible (Au 2012). A ‘big E’ critical curriculum does this by engaging students in learning that offers a deeper and wider understanding of the world than is afforded in a mainstream curriculum. In particular it encourages students to develop, argue and defend positions based on reason (Brookfield and Holst 2011). Reason opens students to perceiving the world beyond neoliberal constructions of knowledge, performativity and accountability. While technical and interpretative knowledge is also part of a critical curriculum, the focus is on critical knowledge. This privileges criticality and dialogue to strive for agreement (Habermas 1987). Such a curriculum also introduces the notion of paradigm change in which new knowledge is constantly discovered and old discarded (Kuhn 1999) and the concept of fallibility is made accessible to students (Popper 1992). In a curriculum where even well-established empirical knowledge is seen to be fallible, the hold of neoliberal hegemony weakens. The meaning of taken for granted performance standards such as course completion and winning employment change to include self-set standards for successful learning such as how to set standards, question own consciousness and explore how the persistence of official knowledge might affect the future (Au 2012). The meaning of accountability changes from a technical understanding that stresses compliance with externally set quality standards to a collegial practice of quality enhancement requiring mutual responsibility (Charlton 2002).

It is common for educators and others to argue that democratic principles should underpin an engaging education and curriculum. Indeed, Brookfield (2013) claims that whenever discussions about curriculum occur, the mention of democratic curriculum goals provides an uncritical seal of approval. But the meaning of democracy is malleable; it is not uncontested and has neoliberal as well as critical purposes. One thing is certain though, whatever meaning is used, democratic curriculum goals call for students’ active engagement in learning, decision-making and wider society. Biesta (2006) suggests that a mainstream view of a democratic curriculum is that it is instrumental in producing democratic citizens who participate as individuals in society. This view is favoured in neoliberal times as it suits neoliberal instrumental purposes. Another view is that democratic principles require social and political activity in which students are expected to learn about working together for a greater good in the classroom, wider community and society. Such social activity is not critical in itself. To be critical a curriculum requires collective participation in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social and political life (Bernstein 1996). A ‘big E’ critical curriculum achieves this participation in democratic practice *through* democracy. This requires that curricular require students to know and experience democratic principles directly within everyday democratic classroom structures and cultures. Such engagement has a positive by product. It provides students with the purpose to learn about and engage actively with democratic principles and so foster a democratic culture (Biesta 2006).

Another key purpose of a democratic and critical curriculum is to enable students to understand and practice power democratically in the world. But power, also has multiple meanings and a curriculum must be clear what it intends. I support Cervero and Wilson's (2001) view that all power exercised in a classroom is political and is ever present in relationships. Its purpose in a curriculum is to enable students to understand the politics of the classroom and wider society. Cervero and Wilson identify three strands of political power in higher education. These are important because they clearly differentiate between uses of power in a mainstream and a critical curriculum. The first two strands are well suited to a curriculum constructed along neoliberal lines. The first strand Cervero and Wilson label *political is personal*. This is about the power of the independent learner who is motivated and equipped to identify their own learning needs and who commands the political and social capital to meet them. The second strand, which overlaps the first, is that the *political is practical*. Such a curriculum emphasizes instrumental applications of power with politics focusing on the ability to get things done; to acquire and command whatever resources are needed to achieve goals. The third strand is critical although it can include the first two strands. Here the curriculum stipulates that the *political is structural* and is involved in the redistribution of power to groups who are under-capitalized politically, socially, culturally and economically.

A further purpose of a 'big E' critical curriculum is to give voice to those lacking the necessary capital to engage with what a mainstream curriculum offers. Numerous authors have addressed this issue. hooks (2003), for example, consistently exposes the lack of power of women, people of colour and members of the working class while recognizing many others considered 'diverse' by the mainstream but who lack personal, practical and structural power to benefit from mainstream education. Diversity is recognized in mainstream curricular but in a way that considers people who are different as lacking something that must be fixed; they must be made into something else (hooks 2003). In a 'big E' critical curriculum all students are accepted on their own terms, by valuing who they are and what they bring. It adopts a standpoint that challenges hegemonic views about the power of western cultural norms, avoids forcing people who are different to conform to those norms by valuing their knowledge, skills and attitudes (Au 2012). An example of applied standpoint theory can be found in Madden (2015). While writing about indigenous people, her four pedagogic pathways serve as proxy for a 'big E' critical curriculum conscious of the standpoint of minorities. She identifies: respect for minority knowledge and approaches to education; integration of content that is relevant to, and builds upon minority students' views of human, natural, and spirit worlds; reciprocal teaching and learning relationships that disrupt a teacher/student hierarchy; and teaching that employs knowledge to develop responsibility to one's relations, including future generations.

Developing engaged citizens is a central purpose of a mainstream curriculum. Through learning, individuals are expected to demonstrate the will and skills to do everything possible to get fit for the race that leads to market place success. Hence, the mainstream curriculum constructs engaged students as skilful and active rather than as feeling and thinking beings. In short, students are expected to conform, respond and adapt to the world as it is (Allman 2010). This version of an engaged student is challenged in a ‘big E’ critical curriculum. Students must have the will to engage in more than their personal success. Engagement now is about coming to understand consciousness of self, others and the world; to look critically at the way the self, the classroom and the wider world are structured and controlled; to identify ways in which structures might be improved; and to act knowingly in order to achieve their own and society’s critical ends. The knowledge required to realize these purposes of a critical curriculum lies in critical theory and the diverse fields of study available in higher education. Barnett (2009) summarizes some of the general purposes of a ‘big E’ critical curriculum. It is sufficiently demanding to promote ‘resilience’; offers contrasting insights and perspectives, so that ‘openness’ to even troubling ideas can develop; requires from teachers and students a continual presence and commitment, through course regulations, for example, to develop ‘self-discipline’; contains sufficient space and spaces, so that ‘authenticity’ and ‘integrity’ are likely.

Table 9.1 Critical purposes in a ‘big E’ critical curriculum

Critical Purposes	Focus	Curriculum learning tasks
Learning to critique	Critiquing ideological domination	• Identify dominant ideologies • Critically reflect on their meaning personally and for others • Critique dominance
Awareness of possibilities	Expanding knowledge	• Recognize the ‘fallibility’ of knowledge • Critique and reframe ‘fact totems’ used in performativity and accountability
Practicing democracy	Active engagement in classroom decision-making	• Work, listen to and debate with others • Listen and negotiate • Make decisions for themselves and others
Understanding power	Power is everywhere and is political	• Recognize that power is political • Use personal power to meet own learning needs • Apply practical power to get things done • Critique the distribution of structural power
Valuing difference	Inclusion of knowledge and beliefs of groups not in the mainstream	• Recognize and critique disadvantage • Learn what is relevant to minorities • Respect minority views of their human, spiritual and natural worlds
Fostering active citizenship	Developing engaged citizens	• Look critically at how the classroom is structured • Participate in democratic processes • Identify and critique undemocratic practices

Critical Purposes in Practice

A basic assumption of a ‘big E’ critical curriculum is that it is embedded in different ways in disciplines, cultures and ways of thinking. This does not mean that there are uncountable numbers of curriculum designs without anything in common. Rather, critical purposes in a ‘big E’ critical curriculum feature in every curriculum but may be applied differently in different contexts. Table 9.1 attempts to summarize the purposes embedded in ‘big E critical’ curricula.

Knowledge in a ‘Big E’ Critical Curriculum

Without valid knowledge there is no curriculum. But the meaning of valid knowledge is contested. The contest is mainly between those who claim it as objective and representational of reality and those who see it as subjective and socially constructed. To me neither position convinces. I assume that there is real valid knowledge, but it may not be known at a given time or it changes. This fallibilist view of knowledge is widely supported. Kuhn’s (1999) work on scientific paradigm change lends credibility to the view that knowledge can be and is constantly challenged and changed. Writers in the hermeneutic tradition like Hirsch, Gadamer, Habermas and Derrida perceive the truth value of knowledge to be open to a wide variety of interpretations (Kinsella 2006). Feminist writers have long questioned the truth of what they consider to be male constructions of reality (hooks 2003). Writers asserting the knowledge claims of first peoples challenge the hegemony of western knowledge claims (Smith 2005). A realist like Popper (1992) seems to accept that even in its strong objective form, knowledge consists of theories and arguments, not incontrovertible truth. Curriculum knowledge then depends on multiple factors for its validity. It is theorized through many intellectual, cultural and social filters based on gender, ethnicity or class; and on the power exercised by political and disciplinary ‘official knowledge’ (Apple 2012). Valid knowledge in a curriculum is real but is always challengeable as it is only a best attempt to make sense of the world and explore possibilities (Young 2014).

A ‘big E’ critical curriculum challenges official knowledge as the only valid real knowledge and so offers alternative possibilities to the neoliberal mainstream. Its defining characteristic is criticality. According to Brookfield (2000) critical curriculum knowledge has four functions. One he calls ideological critique. This holds that certain belief systems such as neoliberalism impose one way of thinking. This creates inequities in education and society at large. Another is rooted in humanist psychology. According to this, people want to develop themselves to their full potential. To achieve this, they must be able to examine their experiences critically. A third function is philosophical. This holds that we do not learn effectively unless we know how to identify and refute false arguments. We do this when we examine the factual and logical bases of meanings and when we critically reflect on ideologies and our own assumptions. A fourth function flows from fallibilism; that valid knowledge is changeable but offers clear accounts of what knowledge is justifiable at a given point in time. Subject fields as well as diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, gender and religious traditions construct views of what knowledge is justifiable. Overarching such functions is criticality which must be learnt as a vital and problem identifying and solving part of any curriculum. Yet criticality is often neglected in mainstream engagement. In a 'big E' critical curriculum, engagement involves active involvement in critical thinking about knowledge of the self, the ideological standpoints represented in a curriculum and underlying issues with disciplinary and social knowledge.

According to Freire (1972) at the heart of a critical curriculum is *conscientization*. This is awakened by knowledge enabling self-awareness in students of who they are, what they know, their place in the world and what they must yet know and do to meet the requirements of their field of study. Self-awareness also enables them to gauge the effects on themselves and others of social, political and economic conditions in the world. To become more self-aware students are taught to critically reflect. Critical reflection embedded in a critical curriculum helps students identify faulty facts or logic in the thinking and reflection of others, recognize and challenge ideas that ensure the dominance of certain ideologies, examine their own reflections and assumptions about the world in the light of how others explain theirs, and actively work to improve to reach their potential. But students do not automatically become self-aware or critically conscious. To achieve this requires students to be fully engaged in their learning. Barnett and Coate (2005) visualize three interrelated curriculum tasks for gaining self-awareness. The first enables students to know how to make legitimate claims in a world of uncertainty and to negotiate challenges to such claims. The second helps them know how to act constructively in the world. The third task grows self-awareness how to affect a world that is open, fluid, contested and in need of courageous knowledge acts. In short, knowing how to critically reflect leads to understanding of how democratic practices can lead to changing what is.

Barnett and Coate's overlapping curriculum projects inspire students' engagement with the world beyond themselves. Through critical reflection *conscientization* provides students with knowledge how to act to affect their sociocultural world (Door 2014). Barnett and Coate identify four levels of criticality in a curriculum: critical skills, reflexivity, refashioning of traditions and transformative critique. Each level requires students to acquire different knowledge that achieves different effects in the world. Critical skills enable problem solving that is deeper and wider than non-critical skills do. Reflexivity provides opportunities to critically reflect and act on students' own perceptions, experiences and actions in order to create change in their sphere of interest. Refashioning traditions requires students to challenge their own thinking and flexibly transfer this to traditions such as those in their subject field. Transformative critique in a curriculum sees students question the validity of existing knowledge in order to reconstruct aspects of their sphere of influence. These curriculum projects require students to engage in critical reflection as a matter of course. This will make an important contribution to a ‘big E’ critical curriculum, one that is foreshadowed in Habermas’ (1987) critical domain of cognitive interests. Such a curriculum encourages students to engage with aspects of society and culture that are germane to a field of study. But, because it is holistic in design and critical in purpose a ‘big E’ critical curriculum enables students to think beyond their spheres of interest and influence. It mandates critiques of oppression, power imbalances and undemocratic practices and engagement in social and political action.

Personal and political conscientization demands a ‘big E’ critical curriculum that prioritizes thinking outside the boundaries defined by text. This requires a curriculum that teaches to deconstruct written, oral or symbolic messages (Derrida 1967/1978). Engagement with such thinking is needed whatever subject area a curriculum addresses. A critical curriculum ensures that students know what it is to think in this way. Minimally, they are taught four key principles: to identify faulty facts or logic in the thinking and reflection of others (Cottrell 2011); to recognize and challenge ideas that ensure the dominance of certain ideologies (Brookfield and Holst 2011); to examine their own reflections and assumptions about the world in the light of how others explain theirs (Barnett 1997) and to actively work to improve self so they can reach their potential (Rogers 1969). These principles have two applications. They require, first, being able to find fault. Being deconstructive in this sense is to spot a problem with an idea, fact, structure or action; analyze, research and reflect on the problem and argue solutions convincingly. Deconstruction may identify acceptable alternatives to the faulty one. Second, a critical curriculum teaches students to recognize and challenge ideas that ensure the dominance of certain ideologies; to examine their own reflections and assumptions about the world in the light of how others explain theirs; and to work actively to improve themselves so that they reach their potential. The first application provides the knowledge to learn a process; the second transforms them into critical beings (Barnett 1997).

McFadden and Munns (2002, p. 357) quote the following aphorism from the work of Bernstein: “if the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher”. This implies that if curriculum knowledge is to be accepted as valid by students, the curriculum must demonstrate consciousness of and give voice to their world views and understanding of what is valid knowledge. The aphorism addresses the ongoing challenges faced in higher education when students from underrepresented or even oppressed (not white, male, western, middleclass, heterosexual and able bodied) populations reject knowledge and learning offered in mainstream education. A ‘big E’ critical curriculum recognizes that for students from such backgrounds mainstream knowledge comes from nowhere they can identify with or recognize as including their own previous knowledge and experience. To meet this challenge, the standpoints of such students as offering valid knowledge to the field of study are highlighted. Au (2012) draws on standpoint theory to sketch how an inclusive standpoint curriculum can be developed. He argues that it carries with it acceptance and application of knowledge not of the mainstream; challenges and possibly changes the hegemony of that knowledge by developing a consciousness of inclusion; develops as a result a consciousness of opposition to the status quo; and offers a new approach to knowledge production. The inclusion of diverse standpoints in a curriculum enables all students to see that knowledge comes from somewhere familiar.

The application of standpoint theory in the curriculum expands students' consciousness of the world. It enables them to engage with knowledge well beyond the technical favoured in a neoliberal curriculum. In any field of study becoming conscious of diverse standpoints develops political literacy (Douglas 2002). This is not a priority in most mainstream curricular. Indeed knowing how the world works in a wider political sense is often excluded from them. A 'big E' critical curriculum on the other hand expects political literacy even beyond appreciating diverse standpoints. Political literacy of how and why education and society work the way they do becomes important. On a macro-level such a curriculum includes materials relevant to a field of study. It investigates how policies affecting the field and the students being socialized into it are made, why they are made, what is right and wrong about existing policies and what students can do to change them. Students working in the field are tasked with questioning why ideals transmitted in the classroom may not be evident in the field. On a micro-level the political literacy component of a curriculum explains how power, relationships and practices circulate in the classroom. Specifically, such a curriculum makes visible the politics of the classroom. For example, different approaches to teaching, specific curriculum inclusions and exclusions and evaluation techniques are openly and perhaps critically discussed. Political literacy also enables meaningful exploration of the hidden applications of power in the classroom. In particular, these relate to questions about whose voices are heard and whose are not.

Possibilities for the future are more assumed than discussed in a mainstream curriculum. Where they are investigated explicitly as part of the curriculum, the future is mainly concerned with preparing students for employment, explaining skill and attitudinal requirements and adapting flexibly to foreseeable changes in students' chosen field of study. The future is seen in economic terms and the curriculum is focused on identifying and maximizing trends in employment opportunities. Where the future is seen as problematic, solutions focus on developing flexibility and adaptability. A critical curriculum also is committed to enabling students develop understanding about the future of work. But additionally, it expects students to acquire knowledge and courage to critique givens and identify opportunities to influence and even sometimes tweak them. Such a curriculum teaches students about the future in more critical terms. This involves thinking about the past and present of a subject and exploring the multiple pathways the past and present may open. Learning includes speculating about personal, educational and occupational futures and engaging in, what Toffler calls the politics of the preferable (Voros 2003). Here students develop ideas about preferred policies and educational strategies based on their values, assumptions, preferences and debate

Table 9.2 Critical knowledge in a 'big E' critical curriculum

Critical Knowledge	Focus	Learning tasks
Fallibility of knowledge	The truth value of knowledge is not stable	• Consider how special interests help shape curriculum knowledge • Recognize knowledge held by special interests • Question such knowledge
Official knowledge	The curriculum is shaped by knowledge that supports the dominant ideology	• Critique ideologies • Seek knowledge that is justifiable true belief • Examine experiences critically • Identify and refute false arguments
Conscientization	Students are self-aware of social, political and economic conditions in the world	• Critical reflection on own beliefs • Critical reflection on how to act constructively in society • Contribute to refashioning invalid knowledge traditions • Engage in transformative critique
Deconstruction	Identify faulty facts, logic and bias in knowledge	• Question dominant ideologies • Examine own reflections in the light of such questioning • Actively work to improve self in response to own and others' reflection
Value diverse standpoints	Knowledge held by underrepresented and oppressed groups is valuable	• Critically reflect on knowledge not of the mainstream • Challenge mainstream knowledge by developing a consciousness for inclusion • Develop a new approach to knowledge production
Political literacy	How and why policies are made	• Identify strengths and weaknesses of policies • Critique weaknesses • Analyze how official knowledge and power circulates in the classroom and society
Future focus	Speculating about a preferable possible future in discipline, culture and diverse contexts	• Identify trends in own discipline and society generally • Construct a possible desirable discipline and personal future • Critique trends and their possible consequences

these in open classroom and other forums as a basis for developing self and social consciousness. Engagement in this form of future thinking helps students to develop a sense of critical realism about knowledge and teaches students about its conjectural nature (Bell 1998).

Critical Knowledge in Practice

Although knowledge is at the core of a curriculum, its nature is widely debated. To make a claim for 'one true' knowledge seems dangerous and I do not make it. Different disciplines and cultures make different truth claims for knowledge. This section in this chapter on critical knowledge is designed to bypass the debate about the truth values of disciplinary and cultural knowledge by suggesting that critical knowledge is external to that debate and should be central to every curriculum. Table 9.2 offers a picture of critical knowledge in a 'big E' critical curriculum.

Values

Curriculum values underpin purposes, norms, standards, rules and expected behaviours of students in a teaching–learning environment (Halstead and Taylor 2000). Whether they learn in large or small groups, are similar or diverse, student values are shaped by explicit or implicit patterns of principles in a curriculum. Explicit values are those conveyed through a discipline and are at the curriculum's core. They apply wherever and whenever the discipline is studied. Their continuity and change are in the hands of experts. Implicit curriculum values are principles and beliefs from outside the subject field. They are part of the learning–teaching environment that surrounds and overlaps the explicit values of the subject area studied. They may convey broader academic values such as literacy, but also express political, cultural and ethical values introduced by policy makers, teachers and also students. As they engage with a curriculum, students help develop, contribute to and maintain cultural practices through explicit and implicit values that fit together to form coherent value clusters or patterns of principles and beliefs. These coherent value clusters prevent a curriculum from becoming a collection of ill-fitting parts (Messenger 2015). The influence of implicit curriculum values determines as much as the subject matter whether a curriculum is mainstream or critical. Individual employability, competence, enterprise and compliance are values underpinning the mainstream curriculum. Political action based on beliefs about criticality, democracy, collegiality and change describes the values of a 'big E' critical curriculum.

Barnett's (1997) description of four levels of critical knowledge suggests that critical values are present in all curricular, regardless of whether they are explicit in the subject matter or implicit in the teaching–learning environment. But values are not uniform in subject fields as some disciplines are more open to critical values than others. For example, a discipline replete with empirically informed facts that have to be rote learnt is perhaps less open to accommodate critical, democratic and collegial values than disciplines that are more interpretative or speculative. It would be unwise, therefore, to assign generic or universal critical values across disciplines. Values are not uniform in diverse learning–teaching environments either. But implicit curricular are generally more open to influence from critical theory. For example, the utopian cluster of values in Brameld's (1965/2000) work may strike root implicitly in the curriculum as it forms around disciplines rather than in the disciplines themselves. Reconstructionism is a philosophy made up of value clusters that envisages the creation of a radical democratic society in which teachers and students analyze critically what is wrong with current educational values and work towards values that shape a more democratic future. Administrators, teachers and students together shape this implicit curriculum by infusing critical values into the teaching–learning environment. I do not claim that such values emerge without struggle or opposition and certainly not uniformly as neoliberal values remain strongly embedded in curricular. Nevertheless it is the learning–teaching environment that enables a critical 'big E' curriculum to flourish and that is the focus for the remainder of this section.

Other critical value clusters present in a 'big E' critical curriculum highlight dialogue. Dialogue demands engagement by all members of a learning–teaching community in problem solving, developing self and social awareness, interacting positively with others, becoming critical learners and understanding contemporary social life (Groothoff, cited in Biesta 2011). The work of Habermas and Freire (see Chap. 7) is crucial in dialogue becoming a key value in a critical environment. For Habermas (1987) dialogue, in the form of communicative action, counters the instrumentalism that is built into neoliberalism. It is a form of dialogue that aims for consensus based on a debate about validity claims. Dialogue here is conceived as a reciprocal and courteous debate in which two or more relatively equal individuals address a problem by asking questions and replying to them. The participants do not seek to win the discussion or argument, but aim for a consensus about truth and how to proceed. Where evidence is convincing agreement is possible. While the possibility of dialogue actually achieving consensus by rational means is questionable, the potential value of consensus seeking dialogue in education is not. In a slightly different way Freire (1972) also cites dialogue as a critical value in a curriculum. It is a multi-faceted value. It rejects banking education which shapes students as compliant and information absorbing learners and supports problem posing education which creates active learners engaged in praxis. Praxis values both reflection and practice; it promotes both studying and acting in the world by means of conscientization.

Standpoint theory provides the foundation for another important cluster of values in a 'big E' critical curriculum. This espouses values opposed to the generically oriented neoliberal mainstream, develops a culture of inclusion of a variety of values and offers a new approach to knowledge production. For the purpose of this chapter hooks and Smith (see Chap. 7) provide inspiration for inclusion as a critical curriculum value. Hooks (1994/2006) opposes the rise of a dominator culture fuelled by gender and racial injustices that limit learning. She rejects political, cultural and social norms and advocates transgressions against them as a way of challenging dominator culture. Challenge can free students as well as teachers from fear, help them to value difference and help build a world of shared values. Challenging dominator culture makes space in a curriculum for alternative values held by the currently powerless like women, the poor and ethnic minorities to achieve respect. Smith (1999, 2005) focuses on indigenous research and the dominance of western scientific methodologies at the expense of indigenous ones which are considered to be ‘other. This dominance trades qualitative richness and complexity for scientific simplicity. If accepted, her analysis leads to curricula that acknowledge indigenous values as equal to mainstream ones. Smith (2005) makes clear that she writes from indigenous historical, political and moral spaces rooted in resistance to colonialism, political activism and goals for social justice. In a critical learning–teaching environment positive outcomes in this struggle could lead to an acceptance of alternative value clusters.

The neoliberal curriculum in higher education is hegemonic. A ‘big E’ critical curriculum contests this and anticipates change to a post neoliberal future for engagement. Instead of focusing on the future of the engaged individual, it spotlights the whole ecosystem in which the individual plays but a part. Engagement is to create change. This orientation to the future reveals another cluster of values informing a ‘big E curriculum’. Whereas the future in a mainstream curriculum is assumed to be stable and a continuation of the present; in a ‘big E’ critical curriculum it is fluid, uncertain and contestable. Students and graduates believe they have opportunities to change the status quo and to create a more democratic, inclusive and socially just future for themselves and others. Student engagement becomes an agent of change and hope by diluting its elective affinity with neoliberalism. Freire (1972) and hooks (2003) both call for a pedagogy of hope. Such a pedagogy is sponsored in a curriculum that enables students to become self-aware as human beings, interact positively with others, become critical learners, understand contemporary social life and actively help shape its future, understand and engage with the ends and means of higher education and act constructively within different contexts and institutions (Groothoff, cited in Biesta 2011). Such a curriculum accepts that engagement is political and full of strife; that students in addition to their studies in a discipline learn how to read and change the world. The complexity that is engagement is accepted, even embraced.

Critical Values in Practice

Disciplines, cultures and contexts have their own explicit sets of values embedded in curricula. Critical values about purposes and knowledge are also held and promoted within these specific curricula. Table 9.3 attempts to show how such values may be developed in practice.

Table 9.3 Critical values in a ‘big E’ critical curriculum

Critical values	Focus	Learning tasks
Reflecting on curriculum values	Explicit and implicit curriculum values	• Criticality • Democracy • Collegiality • Change
Dialogue	Speaking, listening, debating	• Interacting positively • Hearing student voice • Listening • Social awareness
Alternative standpoints	Learning about and respecting standpoints not of the mainstream	• Learning about domination • Critique dominator culture • Challenge dominator culture
Change	Engagement for a different future	• Understand the neoliberal future • Learn ways to challenge this •Aspire to democratic change

An Example of a ‘Big E’ Critical Curriculum in Action

In this chapter I have outlined theoretical and practical aspects of a ‘big E’ critical curriculum. Such a curriculum centres on purposes, knowledge and values in engagement that are beyond the mainstream and pedagogy. It leads students to a growing awareness of self, society and the ecosystem; and enables them to critique mainstream knowledge, values and practices in pursuit of greater social justice. A ‘big E’ critical curriculum is not just another generic and universal recipe for curriculum design. The nature of subject matter, composition of learning groups, their geographical location and cultural dispositions, their ideological orientations and levels of instruction ensure that ‘Big E’ critical curricula are diverse.

One question remains: how might a ‘big E’ critical curriculum play out in practice? This chapter concludes with a glimpse of a living curriculum beyond the neoliberal mainstream. It draws on the work of Susan Deeley (2015) who describes what students may learn through a critical service-learning curriculum. Deeley describes one learning experience from a service-learning curriculum of a female student in Thailand. One part of the course asked students to report and reflect on learning from critical incidents (pp. 114–115). A critical incident is a learning event that is disorienting. It is critical because it leads to change by forcing us to question and change our actions, adjust our knowledge and critically inspect our values. Critical incidents are a common feature in a curriculum and are applied via pedagogy. The incident reported here involves critical reflection, critical thinking and critical action just as envisaged by Freire.

The student's service placement required the visit to a Buddhist temple. She was accompanied by a monk. She knew to keep an appropriate distance from the monk as they entered one of the grand temples. She asked the monk to be the subject of a photograph for which he posed happily. Then she tried to hand him her camera to photograph her in the temple. He refused. She was disorientated and questioned her knowledge of social and religious behaviour in a Buddhist setting. Reflecting, she realized that monks could not take anything directly from a woman. So she laid the camera on the ground. The monk picked it up to take her photograph. The important learning for her occurred during a critical reflection on the experience. She realized that her knowledge of Thai culture was incomplete so that her purpose of the monk taking her photograph could not be achieved. She also realized that the values she lived by as a modern western woman were not shared by Buddhist monks. Wanting to have a record of herself and the monk in this exotic setting led her to make an error of judgement. She was very hard on herself in her critical reflection, concluding "this incident reveals a level of my ethnocentrism….[M]y subsequent reflections will lead me to acting in a more ethnorelative manner" (Deeley 2015, p. 115).

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