Chapter 9
From Constructivism to Clarity and Control

9.1 Introduction

In recent times the question of what counts as knowledge within universities and university teaching has become entangled within debates about constructivism. Within the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education, many argue that current teaching practice is focused too strongly on content, and needs to move toward more 'constructivist' approaches in which students' own constructions of knowledge are centered, and learning is 'active' rather than passive (e.g. Barr & Tagg, 1995; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Constructivism is a broad church, and encompasses a range of theoretical traditions. However, collectively, theories associated with a constructivist tradition emphasize the ways in which understandings of knowledge cannot be separated from understandings of the ways in which knowledge is produced, engaged with, and constructed by people within particular contexts and at particular times. Common across them is an emphasis on ensuring teachers account for and engage with students' own pre-conceptions and understandings, in ways which suggest there is a need for some openness in terms of how curriculum is preformulated and how lecturers engage with students (Davis & Sumara, 2010; Sjøberg, 2010). Within a constructivist framework, curriculum content is not understood as solely defined in reference to students, but teachers are expected to take students' existing ideas seriously, and there is a presumption of accounting for difference across and between cohorts of students. However, despite a broad endorsement of constructivism within the higher education literature, there is little agreement about what constructivism is and should do within this context. Concerns have been raised about simplified interpretations of constructivist teaching and what this looks like in practice (Loughlin et al., 2021; Schoepp, 2019; Sjøberg, 2010) and about the appropriateness of constructivist pedagogies across different teaching purposes and knowledges (Biesta, 2010, 2014, 2017; Young & Muller, 2015).

This chapter considers the SandstoneU (Chap. 6) and TechU (Chap. 7) case studies in relation to the aims of the university leaders to encourage active learning and constructivist pedagogies (Chap. 5). The chapter discusses the leaders' framing of

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issues of knowledge and curriculum and the inherent contradictions evident. It also explores the lecturers' approaches to curriculum for the unbundled contexts and the ways this worked against the intent to incorporate constructivist pedagogies. The chapter argues that these cases highlight the emergent problems that arise where institutional commitments to constructivist pedagogies are conceived in ways which overlook the conditions required for its practice. The lack of alignment between intent and pedagogy demonstrated here is particularly problematic in unbundled contexts where the curricular and pedagogic tasks and responsibilities are separated.

9.2 The University Leaders: Tensions and Contradictions in the Aims to Encourage Constructivist Teaching

Encouraging student-centered, constructivist teaching was identified as a key aim of experimenting with unbundled online learning at SandstoneU and TechU (Chap. 5). In their justifications and rationales for the new initiatives, leaders from both universities emphasized the potential of unbundled online initiatives to encourage new teaching practices and promoted constructivist pedagogies and active learning as best practice. There was also either an implicit or explicit dichotomizing of constructivist and/or activity-based forms of teaching (viewed positively as best practice), compared with 'instructivist' and lecture-centered forms of teaching (viewed negatively as poor practice) (cf. Barr & Tagg, 1995).

In the interviews and documents discussed in Chap. 5, however, a number of issues emerged with how this aim to encourage student-centered, constructivist teaching was framed and how this was put together with other agendas. First, active learning and constructivist pedagogies were positioned as best practice regardless of the purpose of the educational situation, the content being taught, or the disciplinary structures in which the subject is located (cf. Biesta, 2017). In dislocating the understandings of good pedagogy from the purpose or content of the subject, the interpretation of what constructivist pedagogies or active learning looks like tended to be devoid of meaning. Instead, the aim became about making sure students were active and 'doing things', rather than acknowledging the particular purposes at play or the connections between what is being learned and how that is developed. This suggests student 'busyness' was valued over a consideration of the substance of what was to be learned or constructed conceptually. At TechU in particular, 'activities' were not understood as necessarily connected with particular content or purpose and all forms of activity were given the same sense of value. This meant that no distinction was made at the institutional level between finding and sharing an article, with providing some form of constructive comment or argument about the ideas embedded within that (see Chaps. 5 and 7). Leaders were also critical of a perceived tendency for lecturers to overload their subjects with content and encouraged a reduction in content in the unbundled online subjects with little regard for how this might affect the different purposes of particular subjects. From a technological perspective, the need to reduce content was strongly

emphasized by management and the platform staff in the directions they gave about curriculum development and the appropriate use of the platform, and this advice was given regardless of the subject discipline or purpose.

The approach to curriculum promoted via the unbundled initiatives also tended to focus on predefined content in ways which positioned curriculum knowledge as fixed and stable rather than negotiated within classroom spaces. Across the different platforms, all subject materials, including pre-recorded video lectures; activities; discussion questions; additional explanatory material; and assessment tasks, were expected to be developed in full prior to the teaching period. This predefinition was framed as a key benefit by the university leaders in encouraging an alignment-driven, outcomes-based approach to curriculum design (cf. Biggs & Tang, 2011). Subject design was seen to ideally start with learning outcomes and assessment tied to those outcomes, with the rest of the subject mapped back to build toward the desired outcomes. University leaders also gave the impression that they saw curriculum content as fixed and stable, and assumed the substance of curriculum required little change between different iterations and cohorts of students.

In addition, the university leaders tended to assume the content and purpose of curriculum was unchallenged by the online format, and there was little consideration of the potential effects on this of the new pedagogies required, the new attention to outcomes that were encouraged, or the modularized subject structure. The curriculum itself was generally not understood as reconfigured by this process but was presented as relatively stable, in opposition to Bernstein's (1976) arguments about the complex relations between curriculum and pedagogy (Chap. 3). At both universities, the potential for a new approach to transform the core substance of a curriculum program, beyond the loss of expendable content, was not raised as a possibility in any of the interviews with university leaders or in university policy materials. The changes the university leaders expected to occur in moving subjects into the unbundled online form were significant in encouraging alignment and active learning approaches. However, they did not see these as transforming the actual make-up and purposes of the subjects in any meaningful way. Instead, the new approaches were seen to refine or pinpoint what matters, rather than transform that in ways which might reconfigure the knowledge field and what is represented as important within the curriculum.

The university leaders' inattention to content and purpose was also evident in their views on MOOCs and the benefits of using the data which could be extracted from the MOOCs platform to understand student learning and engagement. This use of platform data or 'learning analytics' has been critiqued for its underpinning assumptions about learning and education. These include assumptions that learning is individualized (or at least captured collectively by the minute actions of individuals), and that its 'effectiveness' can be captured independently of purpose or values, and that data on the minutia of student actions can have something to say about what matters educationally outside of that specific context (Bayne et al., 2020). The belief in the value of this data begins from an assumption that context—including who students are, where they are coming from, and what they are building toward—does not matter and that the number of unique downloads on a given video lecture can say

something about student motivations that can be abstracted from the broader context of the teaching. Focusing on this data means that understanding what motivates or engages students becomes about whether students are active or not as indicated by the number of videos they watched or the number of the number of forum comments they posted.

The university leaders' focus on outcomes and predefinition of content also worked against their aim to promote constructivist pedagogies. An attention to outcomes—or in other words, thinking through where students are expected to get to at the completion of the subject—is not in itself contrary to a constructivist approach. However, within the two universities, the ways in which the unbundled form of the initiatives restricted interactions between teachers and students pointed toward issues for how these concepts were brought together. Constructivist theories tend to be premised on strong relations between teachers and students, and understandings of learning and knowing as necessarily connected to students' own histories and experiences (Sjøberg, 2010). However, there was little acknowledgment at the university level of how diverse student histories and understandings might be engaged with and little apparent concern with how such characteristics might be undermined within unbundled online initiatives that inhibit educational relationships between lecturers and students.

This points to limitations in how constructivist pedagogies were understood at the university level. As Davis and Sumara (2010, p. 490) explain, constructivist theories, while diverse, commonly challenge the separation of what is taught from how one is taught and run against the suggestion that content or tasks are able to be selected independently of learners, understanding curriculum as arising in the moment of engagement rather than as 'any sort of deliberate constructive practice'. Within a constructivist framework, therefore, curriculum content is not understood as solely defined in reference to students, but teachers are expected to take students' existing ideas seriously, and there is a presumption of accounting for difference across and between cohorts of students. Similarly, Biggs and Tang's (2011) advice for lecturers presumes that lecturers formulate their outcomes and their pedagogies together in line with their own particular purposes, contents, and contexts. The approach imagines a lecturer engaging with students and advocates for teaching approaches which allow for the emergence of 'unintended but desirable outcomes' (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 11) in addition to predefined outcomes.

The university leaders' assumptions about constructivist pedagogies embody some of Biesta's (2010, 2014, 2017) arguments about the insufficiency of the current 'learnification' approach to education to adequately address questions of educational desirability and purpose. Learnification refers to 'the rise of new theories of learning that have put emphasis on the active role of students in the construction of knowledge and understanding and the more facilitating role of teachers in this' (Biesta, 2010, p. 17). In opposition to this perspective, Biesta (2017) argues that education is never just that students learn, 'but always that they learn something, that they learn this for particular reasons, and that they learn it from someone' (p. 28). He contends that the 'language of learning' constructs education as a 'process' in ways which are '"open" or "empty" with regard to content and purpose' (ibid.). The SandstoneU and

TechU university leaders' approaches to constructivist and active learning pedagogies reflect these issues. Leaders at both universities were concerned with making sure students were active and 'doing things', rather than concerned with understanding how students know and learn particular things for particular purposes. They promoted a mainstreamed, common approach to teaching, informed by generalized ideas about what interests and engages students (doing things, interacting with each other) and what students are capable of. They were concerned with being student-centered but this was less about attending to who students are and more about a generic sense of what motivates and engages students and what keeps them on task. Keeping students engaged was framed as a general concern rather than about engagement with particular content or concepts. The emphasis was on engagement as an end in itself, rather than as a means for achieving a broader educational purpose.

One concern raised in wider debates about constructivism has been about whether such work has focused too strongly on social aspects of learning, and as a result led to a devaluing of the epistemic (e.g. Green, 2010; Nerland et al., 2010; Young & Muller, 2015). The case studies examined in this book suggest that such concerns potentially have some merit, with the interest in constructivism leading to an emphasis on student interactions, but not on the ways in which students are being asked to substantively engage with knowledge. This highlights the importance of considering university teaching in relation to the substance of what it produces and orients toward, rather than in terms of a simplistic reading of what constructivist teaching entails.

9.3 The Lecturers' Experiences: Moving Toward Clarity and Control

These tensions in how the university leaders framed their goals for the unbundled online initiatives had implications for the ways in which the lecturers developed their curriculum. At both institutions, while the lecturers' aims for their subjects were oriented to what was distinctive about their fields, their ways of working with the affordances and constraints of the unbundled initiatives were oriented toward issues of clarity and control. Across all the cases, the experience of the lecturers as they worked to enact or construct their curriculum for the unbundled initiatives was to move in a direction that more strongly emphasized subject knowledge as a defined body of content to be taught. Students were primarily directed in ways that were more about fulfilling pre-set requirements than making connections with or building from their own concepts and understandings, particularly at TechU.

In their articulations of the wider subject purposes and content selections, the lecturers emphasized the importance of students understanding the complexity of these fields, and, for the disciplinary lecturers in particular, of seeing the knowledge developed within them as fluid rather than static. Lecturers at both SandstoneU and TechU also emphasized the importance of students' own interactions and knowledge

construction as important in guiding their teaching as evident in the following quotes introduced in Chaps. 6 and 7:

> …we do want to sort of encourage critical thinking and a skeptical view about whether or not things represent good evidence or bad evidence. (Matt, Behavioral Ecology, SandstoneU, Interview 1)

> I think as the instructor you've got to resist the temptation to step in and provide the definitive answer because I think you're going to discourage learning that way. […] I'm wary of posting something that will kill off the discussion because people go 'oh the instructor posted this and so therefore my view must be wrong or invalid'. (Matt, Behavioral Ecology, SandstoneU, Interview 3)

> [you want] to discuss things in detail, to get their feedback, to get them working on a particular version, try and restrict how much you do but don't splinter that effort, don't dissipate the depth that they can go into it. (Laurie, Classical Studies, SanstoneU, Interview 2)

> you have to be able to talk back and […] be given the skills to actually argue back and talk to things because […] [otherwise] we're not empowering teachers to actually digest and unpick the reasoning behind that framework. (Tara, Teacher Education, TechU, Interview 2)

> [They need] to think critically, especially when they're so used to going 'here's a problem, here's how I solve it' and not necessarily being in a habit of rationalising or justifying 'why do I think this is a good solution for this problem'. (Leah, Supply Chain Management, TechU, Interview 1)

However, as they came to work on the actual constraints of the platform, these elements were far less apparent in their thinking and decisions about content delivery and curriculum structure. Content for the unbundled online initiatives was primarily delivered by video lectures (at SandstoneU) or by weekly summaries (at TechU). The lecturers at the two institutions differed with how they approached the issue of clarifying content for students, with those at SandstoneU focused on enhancing the structure and adding extra explanatory material to their subjects, and those at TechU predominantly focusing on reducing content to maintain student engagement and using activities to scaffold toward assessments. Across the case studies, content was positioned as predominantly self-contained, capturing the entirety of what students were expected to engage with and comprehend, with a weekly focus on the explicit identification of the key messages and concepts in the subjects.

At SandstoneU, where the initiatives were video-based, the lecturers designed each video to capture an individual point in a more streamlined and refined way than a typical lecture discussion. In developing these short single-concept videos, the SandstoneU lecturers were highly focused on the order of their content and the ways in which segments of content could be better sequenced to enhance the clarity of the material. In the interviews, they reported focusing more on structure in developing their online subjects than they would for on-campus subjects and saw this as a result of the more detailed process required to select and prepare content for short videos compared with hour-long lectures. These lecturers also spent considerable time scripting the content for their videos and felt this was necessary to avoid 'rambling' (Matt, Behavioural Ecology, Interview 1), and to 'tighten' and make 'efficient' (Rod, Interdisciplinary Logic, Interview 2) the delivery of content. Here, the

emphasis was on refining the content and in making sure it captured everything the students needed to understand within the tight parameters of the short video format. The SandstoneU lecturers were also concerned with making their subjects self-contained and capturing all necessary content within the subject materials. The lecturers developing the Interdisciplinary Logic and Classical Studies subjects added substantial amounts of further explanatory material in addition to their subjects and the Behavioral Ecology lecturers also included the important content from every lecture of their on-campus subject within their MOOC. For Interdisciplinary Logic, Debra developed detailed subject handbooks containing all the additional explanations not able to be worked into the short videos, and for Classical Studies Laurie added additional 'flipbooks' of slides containing the information necessary to understand the videos, including references to particular myths and translations of key terms.

The TechU lecturers were also highly concerned with issues of clarity. This led them to reduce their content and focus only on the most important messages and concepts. Grant, for example, emphasized the importance of making sure the content he brings to the first meeting with learning designers is only at the 'skeleton stage', and commented that only after that would he 'be thinking about particular content that needs to put some meat on the skeleton content' (Grant, Sports Management, TechU, Interview 1). Tara also noted, 'we don't like to bombard the students with a large amount of text on screen' (Tara, Teacher Education, TechU, Interview 1). Leah likewise commented that this reduction of content was about focusing on what was core rather than peripheral to a subject. She stated, 'I do try to take it back to basics, not dumbing it down as such but just going really back to the basics of that particular topic, what do they have to know' (Leah, Supply Chain Management, TechU, Interview 1). As with the SandstoneU subjects, the focus was on defining the most important content and concepts for students, and in making that as clear and explicit as possible, rather than embedded within long swathes of text. However, here there was more of a sense that the overall content and concepts to be covered was more malleable and more easily able to be reduced to conform with policy expectations. These lecturers' curriculum development was also strongly informed by an attention to scaffolding and alignment, and they designed their content and weekly activities to build toward the required assessment tasks. In line with outcomes-based approaches to curriculum design (Biggs & Tang, 2011), they were concerned with ensuring that the content of a given subject mapped toward predefined outcomes, focused on identifying the important content to be learned, and ensured key points were adequately covered and developed within the subject content.

In comparing their experiences developing curriculum for on-campus compared with online delivery, the lecturers at both universities pointed to the importance of reducing ambiguity and making content more explicit for the online context. At SandstoneU, Debra commented on the importance of 'being more focused and sharper' in her video lectures, as without that there is the challenge that 'the students can lose the point of what's the most important thing' (Debra, Interdisciplinary Logic, SandstoneU, Interview 2). At TechU, Grant likewise noted that as he is not involved in the teaching of content, the text he develops 'has to be put into context and the use

of text has to be very careful that there's not ambiguities in the information that's presented' since there are not the same opportunities to explain those face to face within the TechU Online platform (Grant, Sports Management, TechU, Interview 1). In comparing her experience developing subjects for TechU Online to her on-campus teaching, Leah similarly stated that she felt for on-campus teaching 'there's not such a need to be so explicit' compared with developing online materials (Leah, Supply Chain Management, TechU, Interview 1). Lecturers also spoke about the ways in which this concern with clarity led them to focus on singular explanations of key messages and concepts, rather than addressing a concept via multiple explanations:

> …there's a lot of freedom if you like the way you might present those lectures [in face-to-face on-campus teaching] and in particular given that you will probably explain a concept in three or four different ways during the course of a lecture […] You simply can't do that in these lectures [the videos]. The students scrutinize everything. (Ethan, Behavioral Ecology, SandstoneU, Interview 3)

> I think designing for [the TechU OPM initiative] is probably a little bit different to designing for an on-campus course because you've got […] the limitations of the fact that students are remote, so you need to give them information in really bite size chunks. Whereas in a classroom environment you can make it a little bit broader and also introduce multiple perspectives. I think students struggle with that a little bit in an online environment. (Leah, Supply Chain Management, TechU, Interview 2)

They tended to see single and precise explanations as important in making their subject messages clear and comprehensible to students in the online environment and saw students as more likely to be confused by multiple explanations.

Due to the unbundled mode, at both SandstoneU and TechU curriculum decisions were required to be developed in full prior to teaching and there were limited opportunities for lecturers to engage with and respond to students within the teaching of the subjects (with the exception of the Classical Studies subject for SandstoneU OPM initiative, which included a tutorial component). This requirement for content to be predefined and self-contained contributed significantly to the emphasis on clearly defined content because it meant the lecturers paid close attention to the communication of their subject materials, since the opportunity for additional clarifications, explanations or responses to student questions and interpretations was limited. These lecturers confirmed the views of the university leaders in seeing part of the process of developing the new videos as about distilling what was most important from their material and reducing unnecessary repetition. However, this was different from what these lecturers conveyed when talking more generally about their aims, where they valued addressing concepts in different ways, and saw repetition as not simply redundancy.

Comparatively, at TechU there was also a concern about providing clarity and non-ambiguity for students, but in a way that was more self-contained within the outcomes-based focus of the curriculum agenda. Here the lecturers said that they felt the focus on scaffolding and alignment strengthened the subjects by providing enhanced clarity for students. Tara for example commented that she felt the approach was more 'transparent and accountable' than face-to-face teaching as it meant 'you're able to say "alright this is what we'd like the end result to be" but look at what they

can do in the meantime, how they can get there' (Tara, Teacher Education, TechU, Interview 1) and as a result encouraged more 'detailed' thinking about 'how does this build' (Tara, Teacher Education, TechU, Interview 2). What the lecturers liked about the new format was the ways it made them 'sharper' and 'more focused', and the ways this then presented a clearer and more explicit summary of the material and what was expected for students.

In talking about the effects of the developing curriculum for an unbundled online mode, the lecturers tended to be highly positive about the ways in which the unbundled online format encouraged them to make the content explicit and well defined. At SandstoneU, the lecturers highly valued the ways in which the new format encouraged them to think deeply about the sequence and order of their materials and about the best way to explain particular points, saying this led them to rethink what they might have taken for granted in the past. They commented that in comparison to their typical hour-long lectures, the shorter video format helped them to focus more critically on the core content and to sharpen the content and clarify what matters for students as a result.

In addition to their focus on explicit content and the reduction of ambiguities, the lecturers were also highly concerned with prescribing and directing student activities and discussion, and with creating assessments with clearly defined expectations and instructions. Across the subjects, the approach taken to the discussion boards and activities tended to be more template-driven and directed toward the predetermined outcomes and the assessments rather than oriented to students' developing their own constructions of knowledge. In developing curriculum for students with whom they would not interact, the lecturers worried about students misinterpreting activities which were too open and focused more on prescribing defined tasks for students that linked explicitly with their assessment tasks than on opening up broader discussion spaces.

At TechU, the lecturers were highly concerned with prescribing and directing student activities. Within TechU's unbundled online initiative, student activities were designed by the lecturers and interactions were then moderated on student discussion boards by online tutors. In working with a platform which afforded the lecturers no interaction with students beyond the development of subject materials, they tended to provide comprehensive directions to the online tutors to ensure the activities and discussions proceeded as intended. Each of the lecturers drafted additional notes for those tutors which directed them regarding where the discussion generated by the designed activities should go and what kinds of issues should be emphasized. Tara, for example, commented that this level of detail was because she was concerned that the tutors would not 'understand the bigger picture of the degree' and 'might take the 'tone of the unit in a different way' (Tara, Teacher Education, TechU, Interview 2). Leah similarly commented that her approach to online discussion tends to be more 'standardized' and strongly directed than in on-campus (Leah, Supply Chain Management, TechU, Interview 1). Across all three subjects, the use of the discussion boards was far less open than the policy rhetoric about student discussion and social constructivism might suggest. The approaches taken by the lecturers tended to restrict activities to what could be most easily directed, rather than what might be

the most important substantive issues to engage with or discuss. At TechU university leaders were concerned with both alignment and constructivist teaching, and wanted to bring the two together in constructive ways. However, the lecturers in developing their curriculum were more concerned with issues of alignment and tended to focus predominantly on ensuring activities built toward predefined outcomes and assessments, rather than on more open engagements. These practices point to the ways in which an attention to alignment and outcomes can undermine other agendas (Young & Muller, 2015).

At SandstoneU the lecturers developing the SandstoneU MOOCs appreciated what the discussion forums offered as spaces where students could engage in ways that went beyond simply learning the content captured within the video lectures. However, they also saw students' engagements as most valuable where that discussion focused on the video lectures and on correcting student misconceptions which might arise from that, struggling with instances where students took the discussion in different directions. Despite wanting the students to engage in broad ways, they were concerned with ensuring the discussion adhered to their established purposes and in their interpretations of the possibilities of the forums focused less on student interpretation and knowledge construction than on the reduction of misconceptions, and the further explanation of the defined content.

These issues were also evident in relation to the lecturers' assessment practices. At TechU the lecturers' approaches to assessments were focused on providing students with clear rubrics and templated instructions, and with ensuring assessments were closely tied to the defined subject outcomes. Assessment tasks tended to be self-contained and there was little which asked students to go beyond what they were given in formulating their thinking.

For the SandstoneU MOOCs only two options for marking assessment were available: automated marking of responses to multiple-choice tests or peer assessment of responses to short or long form responses. Here, the lecturers developing these MOOCs commented on their struggles with working with these new forms of assessment, and how they were required to change the assessment approaches they would typically take with their on-campus teaching. In taking up these new forms of assessment, the lecturers developing the SandstoneU MOOCs focused on explicitly identifying for students the markers for success and controlling the parameters within which students could respond. This approach reinforced a sense of knowledge as defined content to be learned. While this was not completely against the lecturers' purposes for their subjects, since both require understanding of core concepts, it did shift the emphasis of the subject away from the lecturers' aims to have students understand the knowledge of their discipline as evolving and contested. Instead, the emphasis was on students learning the content as taught rather than on questioning or engaging with that content more comprehensively.

When the SandstoneU lecturers talked about benefits of peer assessment, for example, they emphasized the learning that could occur from the process of marking another's work. However, this learning was seen to be about predefined content rather than interpretation or knowledge construction. Rod (Interdisciplinary Logic), for example, commented, 'You learn the content better by being able to tell whether

this is a good answer or that's a good answer' (Rod, Interview 3). Matt and Ethan (Behavioral Ecology) also used peer assessment in their on-campus teaching and Matt noted that one of the reasons he was interested in this was because 'it's broader, it takes into account difference of opinion, it's symbolically not investing me as a teacher with all the power and all the authority and all the wisdom […] [and it provides] the benefit of arriving at a mark that is potentially a truer reflection than the opinion of a single individual' (Matt, Interview 2). These comments are significantly different from the approach Matt and Ethan took within the MOOC, where they saw concerns about validity as more important.

With the exception of the Classical Studies case study (SandstoneU), where the lecturer did engage synchronously with the students, the lecturers' approaches to student activity and assessment were highly prescribed and oriented toward predefined and rigid rather than open end points. For the assessments in particular, the lecturers tended to either focus on criteria which could most easily be codified or criteria which was objectively quantifiable and definably right or wrong rather than allowing for some fluidity and complexity. These approaches tended to limit the space for student interpretation and restrict the possibilities for students to engage with the content taught in complex ways. In developing assessments and activities that would be assessed and moderated by others, the lecturers were all concerned with making the expectations clear and communicable to both students and tutors, and were concerned with ensuring that those marking the assessments and moderating the student discussions did so in the way that the lecturers intended.

Bernstein (1976) draws attention to the ways in which the form in which content is delivered is about control, arguing that subjects can be analyzed in relation to the degree of control teachers/lecturers and students possess over the selection, organization, pacing, and timing of the knowledge taught. Within the unbundled, predefined form of these subjects, almost all the control over what is taught and the sequence in which that is taught lies with the lecturer or the constraints of the new platforms, with the student expected to work within those predefined parameters. While many of the lecturers articulated a desire to engage with students' own contributions and concepts in ways which positioned knowledge as something negotiated with students and wanted students to understand knowledge in their field as open and evolving, these understandings of knowledge were significantly diminished in the lecturers' discussions of assessment and student activity. As Biesta (2014, p. 1) argues, education is necessarily about risk 'because students are not to be seen as objects to be molded and disciplined, but as subjects of action and responsibility'. Biesta contends that attempts to secure or control the educational process limit the possibilities for students to think otherwise and develop independence. In line with Biesta's critique, the lecturers' approaches to student activity and assessment restricted what was possible and potentially tied students to the predefined requirements, rather than enabling them to take their learning in new directions.

9.4 Unbundling and Challenges for Constructivist Teaching

This discussion of the case study lecturers' approaches to developing curriculum for the unbundled online initiatives highlights the challenges raised by unbundling curriculum development and delivery (Cliff et al., 2020). An unbundled online approach changes not just lecturers' relations with students, but also the ways in which curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are designed, and therefore what is produced as knowledge within the education (Bernstein, 1976).

While the university leaders had hoped that the unbundled online initiatives might encourage more constructivist teaching and more emphasis on student activities, in contrast, the lecturers tended to see this format as necessitating a greater degree of explicitness and standardization and focused on these issues in their subject development. This was evident across all the cases, including the MOOCs, where the lecturers could only engage with students in limited ways, the TechU subjects, where the lecturers had no opportunities to engage with students, and to a lesser extent, in the SandstoneU Classical Studies subject, where Laurie was able to interact with students via a weekly synchronous class. Compared with on-campus teaching, the lecturers saw teaching in an unbundled online mode as requiring greater direction from the outset since the space for incorporating that in the delivery of the subject was not available. They also saw a need to prepare that direction in a standardized form since there was limited scope to negotiate individually with the students.

The focus on the content to be learned is contrary in some ways to what the university leaders wanted the unbundled online initiatives to achieve and aligns more with their critiques of 'instructivist' approaches to education than with their aims to promote constructivist teaching. There is a focus on defining the content in a self-contained way, without acknowledgment of students' own understandings and constructs. These issues have been raised in broader critiques of MOOCs, which have pointed to their focus on transmission at the expense of students' own engagements and constructions (Bayne et al., 2020; Knox, 2013; Shumar & Wright, 2016).

Although the lecturers at both institutions appreciated the attention to clarity of content, they also saw the unbundled online form as producing a requirement for more explicit teaching and content summarization by limiting the opportunities for other kinds of teaching approaches which might address concepts in a less directive or more complex way. As a result, the lecturers' approaches to content delivery and curriculum structure focused predominantly on defining the content to be learned and making that clear for students by reducing any ambiguities. While there are obvious benefits for students in making content clear and explicit, this emphasis positions knowledge as a predefined and uncontested body of content to be learned, rather than an open or evolving construct. The emphasis is on a defined sense of what is important for students to understand and be able to do which is determined at the outset rather than developed in negotiation with the students.

Focusing curriculum development on 'what students need to know' is not in itself problematic. Teaching, as Biesta (2010, 2014, 2017) makes clear, does need to be about something, but there is an emptiness in focusing only on what students

are expected to do rather than what they are to be taught. However, the degree of emphasis on defining that content and on removing ambiguities in relation to that is questionable and points to the ways in which the move to an unbundled online mode potentially changes not just how a subject is taught pedagogically but also what counts as knowledge (Bernstein, 1976).

9.5 Conclusion

The experiences of the SandstoneU and TechU university leaders and lecturers highlight tensions between the push by university leaders for constructivist pedagogies and the challenges of realizing this in an unbundled context. At the university level, although the leaders aimed to promote a collaborative, engaging educational process, the technology, the mode of delivery, and the cost of making any changes led to a fixed and stable construction of curriculum and little room for students to construct own understandings in ways typically associated with constructivist teaching. At the curriculum development level, the lecturers experienced the unbundled context as changing and narrowing what was possible within their teaching. As they worked to enact or construct their curriculum in these online forms, the lecturers became more didactic as well as more tightly focused on clarifying concepts and expectations for students and moved in a direction that more strongly emphasized knowledge as a defined body of content to be taught. Because this approach reduces opportunities for robust constructivist teaching and tends to encourage a more directive and didactic approach, it undermines lecturers' aims to engage constructively with students' knowledge and to illustrate the evolving and complex nature of knowledge development in their disciplines and professional fields. Students were primarily directed in ways that were more about fulfilling pre-set requirements than making connections with or building from their own concepts and understandings, particularly at TechU. In summary, two key points emerge in relation to the university policy for constructivist teaching and the lecturers' experiences in developing unbundled curriculum. First, unbundled contexts can negate and work against directions and intentions to engage in constructivist teaching. Second, fundamental problems can emerge where institutional commitments to constructivism as a teaching and learning model overlook questions of curriculum design and the complex relations between curriculum and pedagogy.

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