

Annex 2: Conceptualising Curriculum as a Learning System with Different Configurations of Entities

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Five conceptualisations of curriculum entities can be identified as constituting different configurations of learning systems.

1. Socio-cultural influences (Lattuca and Stark, 2009)

The first conceptualisation focuses on the offer and resources of an academic institution. In this view, a curriculum equates to a module or a qualification. Lattuca and Stark (2009) emphasise that this is formed in a socio-cultural context. This is illustrated in *Figure 1*.

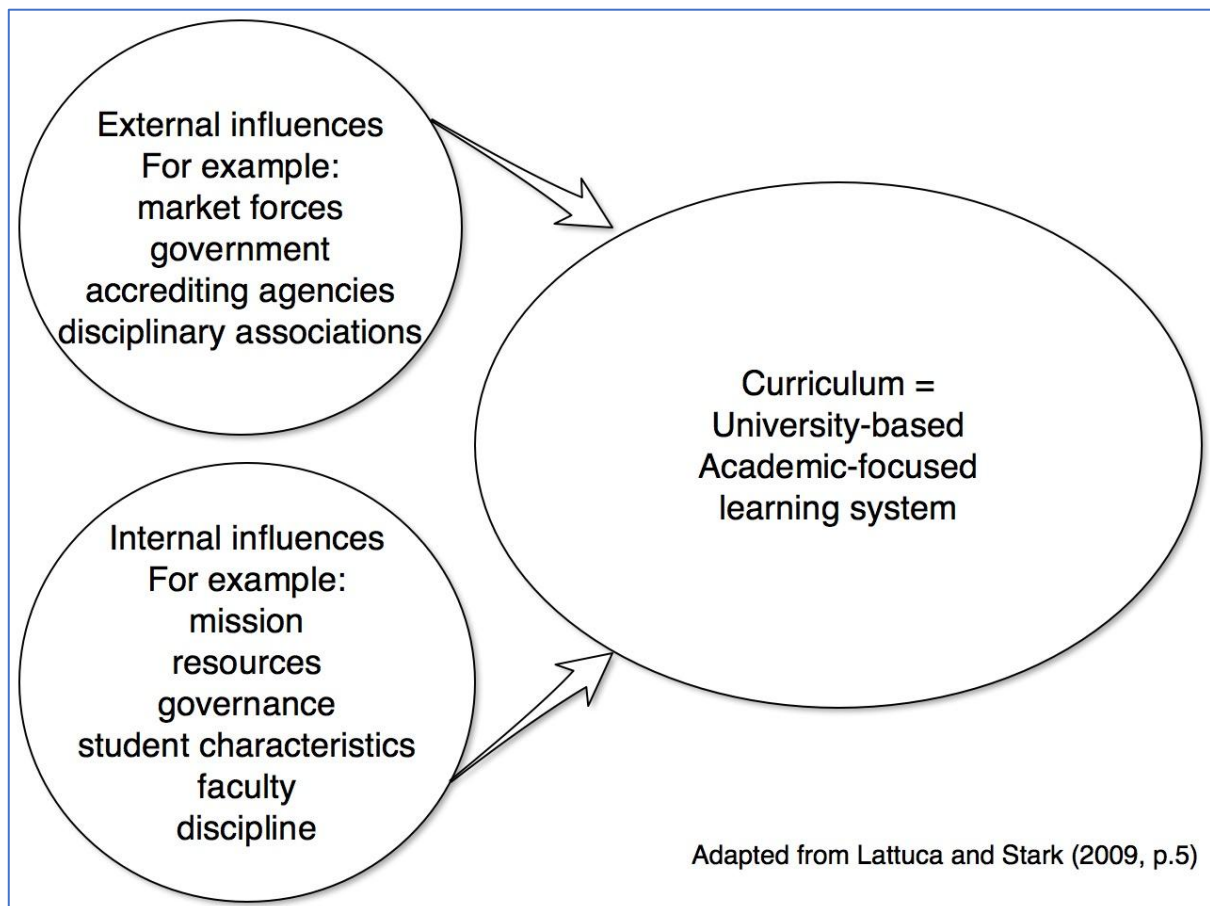


Figure 1: A learning system that focuses on the offer of a university in a socio-cultural context

2. Alternance model (Geay, 1998)

A second conceptualisation expands our learning system to also incorporate a work-based learning subsystem alongside the university one. This recognises that (a) learning arises from experiences in the workplace and (b) new and different experiences arise when students' perceptions and actions are influenced by new knowledge gained through study. Those involved with vocational qualifications, such as nursing, social work and teaching, have a long history of incorporating work-based learning. In other disciplines, this is a newer concern.

Geay (1998, cited in Hahn 2012) identified that a university and a workplace work to different logics and give different status to knowledge. A university and an employer must therefore put arrangements in place known as the interface system. This has institutional, personal and pedagogical dimensions (*Figure*).

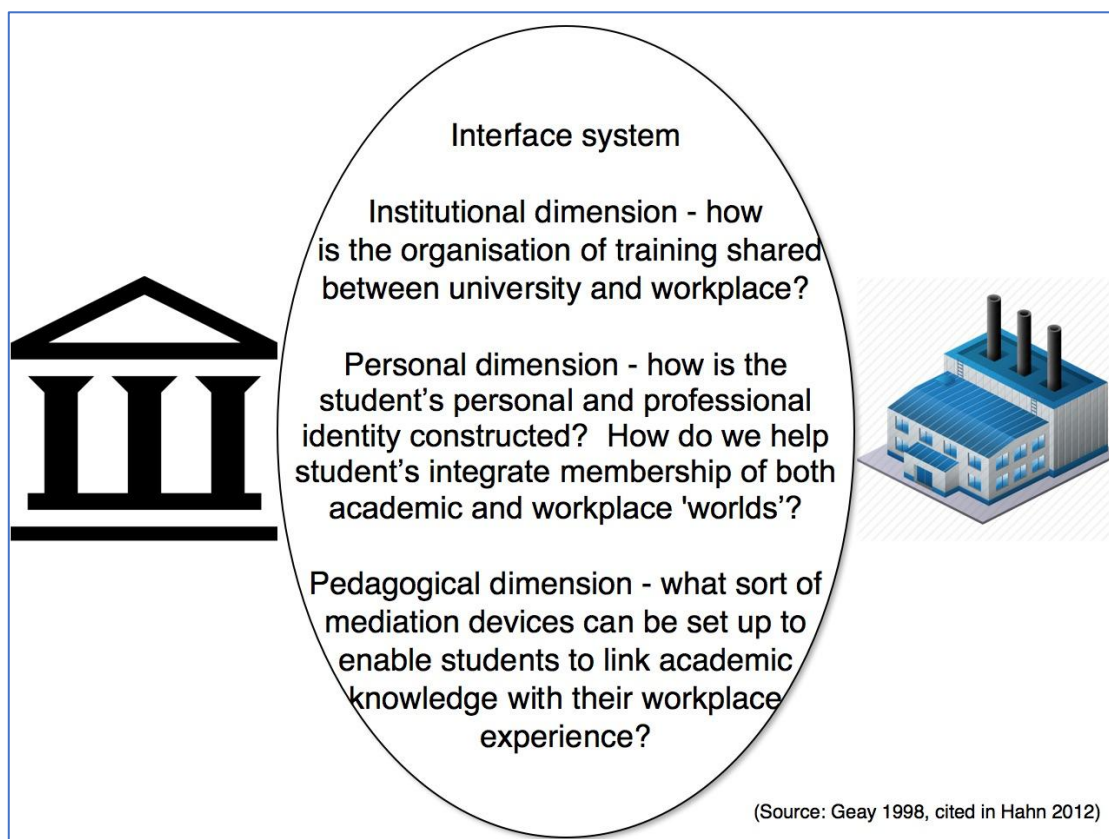


Figure 2: Dimensions of the interface system in Geay's alternance model (explained in Hahn, 2012)

3. Communities of practice *within* the workplace (Wenger, 2010)

A third conceptualisation expands further to acknowledge the role of a community of practice. This term is in common use nowadays and is not always linked back to its origins in the study of apprenticeships. It is useful for our purposes to explicitly refer to those origins:

“People usually think of apprenticeship as a relationship between a student and a master, but studies of apprenticeship reveal a more complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place mostly with journeymen and more advanced apprentices. The term

community of practice was coined to refer to the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice. Once the concept was articulated, we started to see these communities everywhere, even when no formal apprenticeship system existed. And of course, learning in a community of practice is not limited to novices” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, our emphasis)

Becoming part of a community of practice is important, not just for the learning opportunities it brings but for the sense of identity and onward trajectory (Wenger, 2010).

Communities of practice are most commonly understood to be located in a workplace (*Figure 3*). For example, student nurses learn with, and from, a community of nursing practitioners as they do their training.

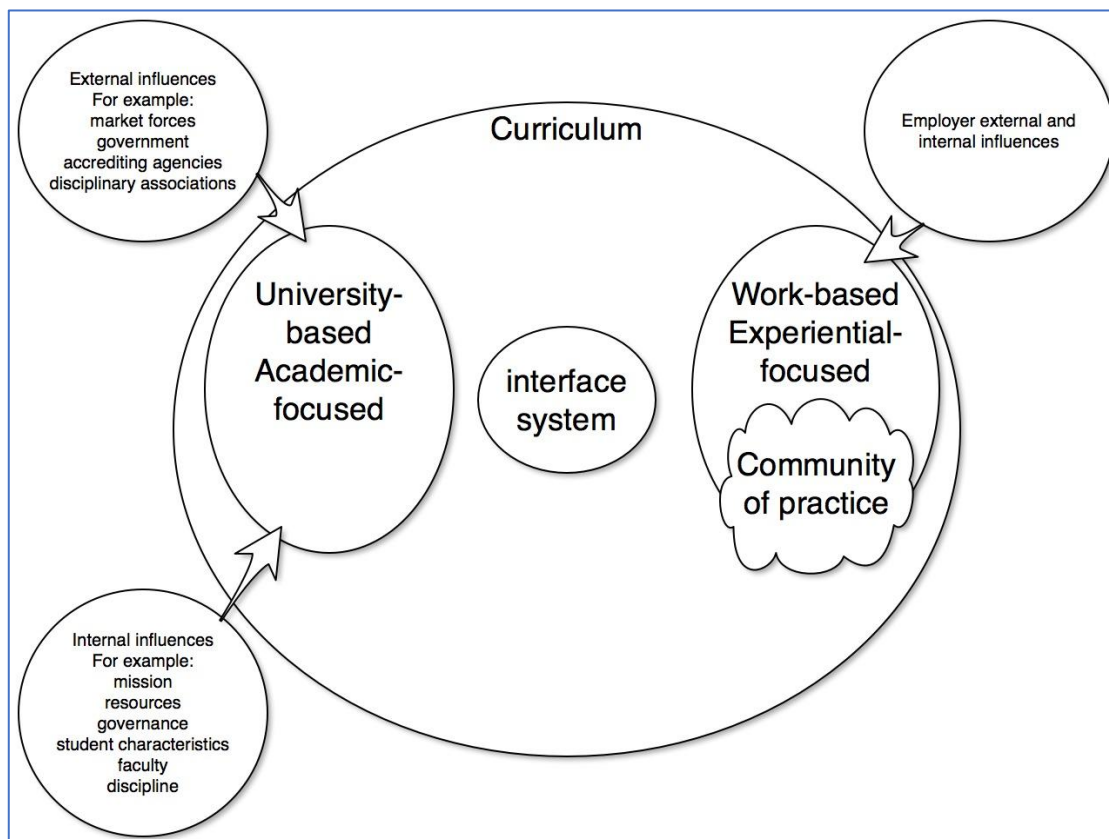


Figure 3: A learning system which incorporates a community of practice within the workplace

4. Communities of practice *outside* the workplace (Wenger, 2010)

In certain situations the community of practice could be outside of the workplace (*Figure 4*). This may be the case for those:

- not in work
- studying to change their existing career
- developing capabilities in emerging or fluid practices (like Systems Thinking in Practice) where there may not yet be an identifiable community in the workplace.

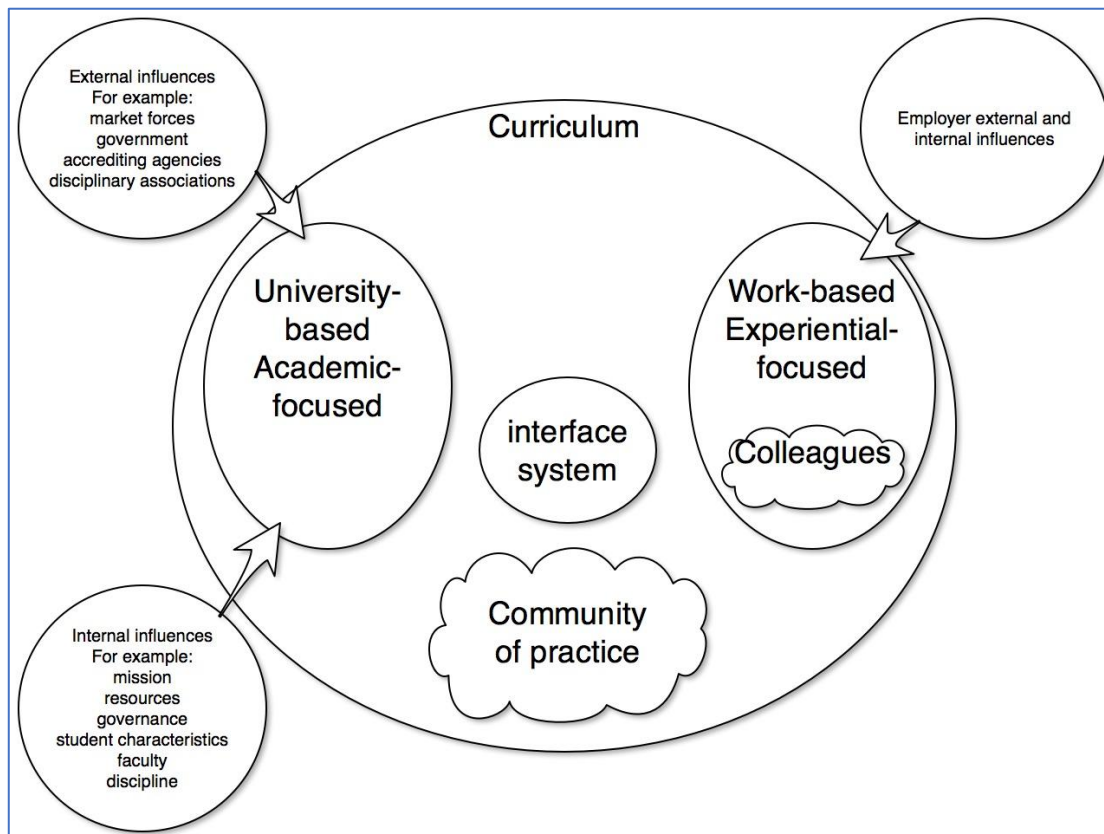


Figure 4: A learning system where the community of practice is predominantly outside of the workplace

The above conceptualisations are all useful for thinking about the sources of learning for an individual. However, they predominantly place the control of learning system design in the hands of higher education institutions and employers rather than with those who ought to be the beneficiaries (students/apprentices).

5. Landscape of lifelong learning (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014)

An additional conceptualisation is to think about a learner in a landscape of educational resources (Figure 5) which they can choose to engage with not just at a point in time but over time in their personally designed and enacted lifelong learning system. Learning to navigate ongoing learning is an integral part of a capabilities approach.

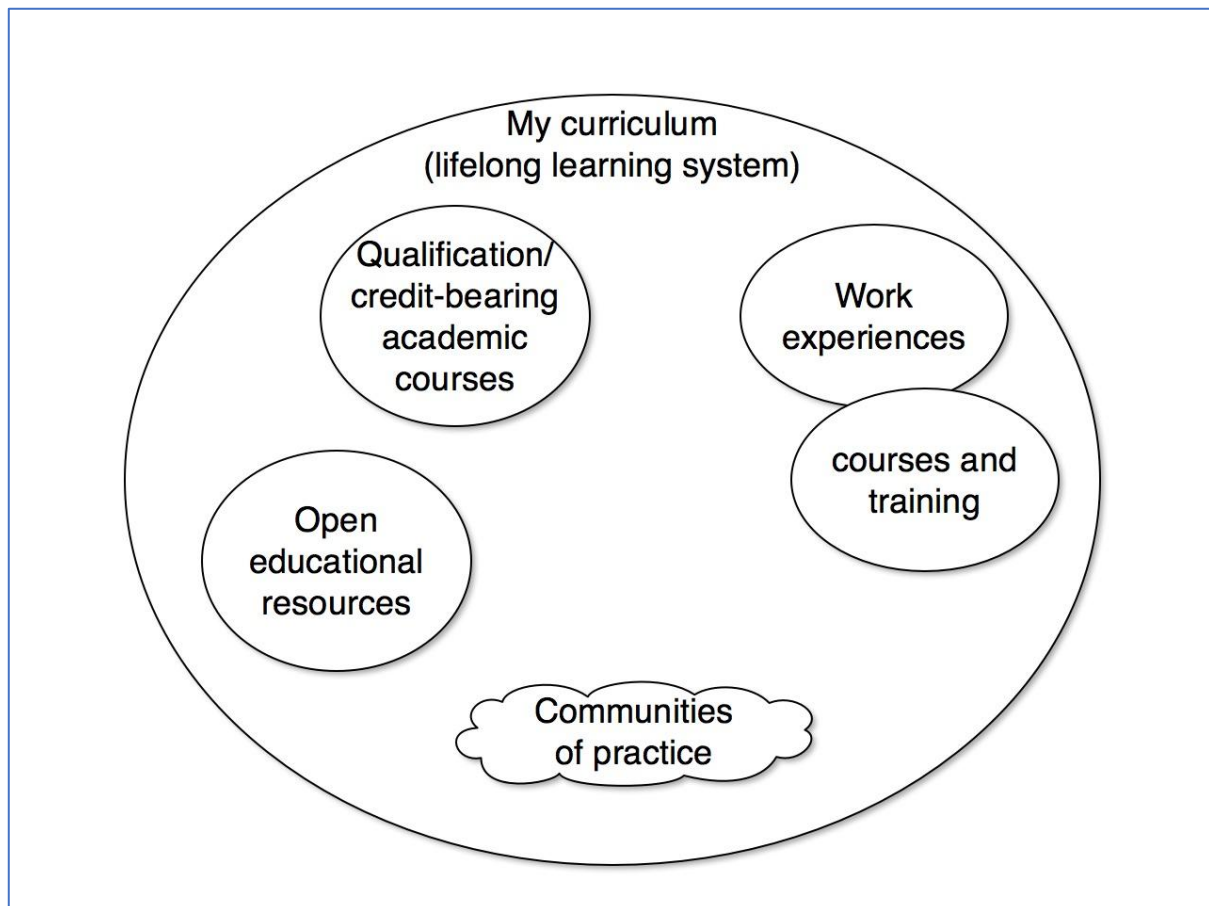


Figure 5: A learner's lifelong curriculum

The five conceptualisations of curriculum entities can be summarised: (i) curriculum as emergence from external and internal influences in a socio-cultural context; (ii) curriculum as an interface system mediating between university and employer; (iii) curriculum learning system with a community of practice (CoP) as part of the workplace but separate from university; (iv) curriculum learning system with a CoP as separate from university and workplace and interface system; and (v) curriculum as an integral to lifelong learning system comprising a landscape of practice

There is no one conceptualisation that is 'better' than others. They can be more or less useful in different circumstances.

References

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