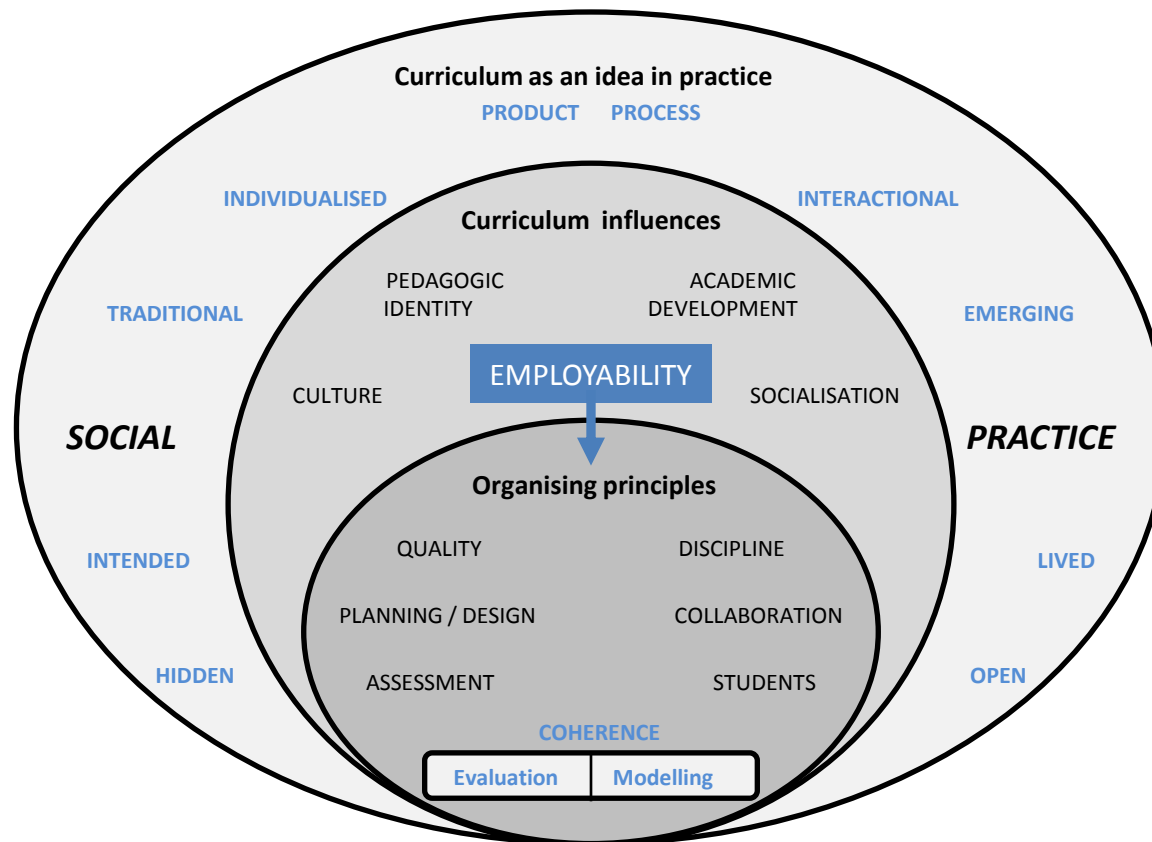# Autonomy and consensus
in course planning and approval
in higher education
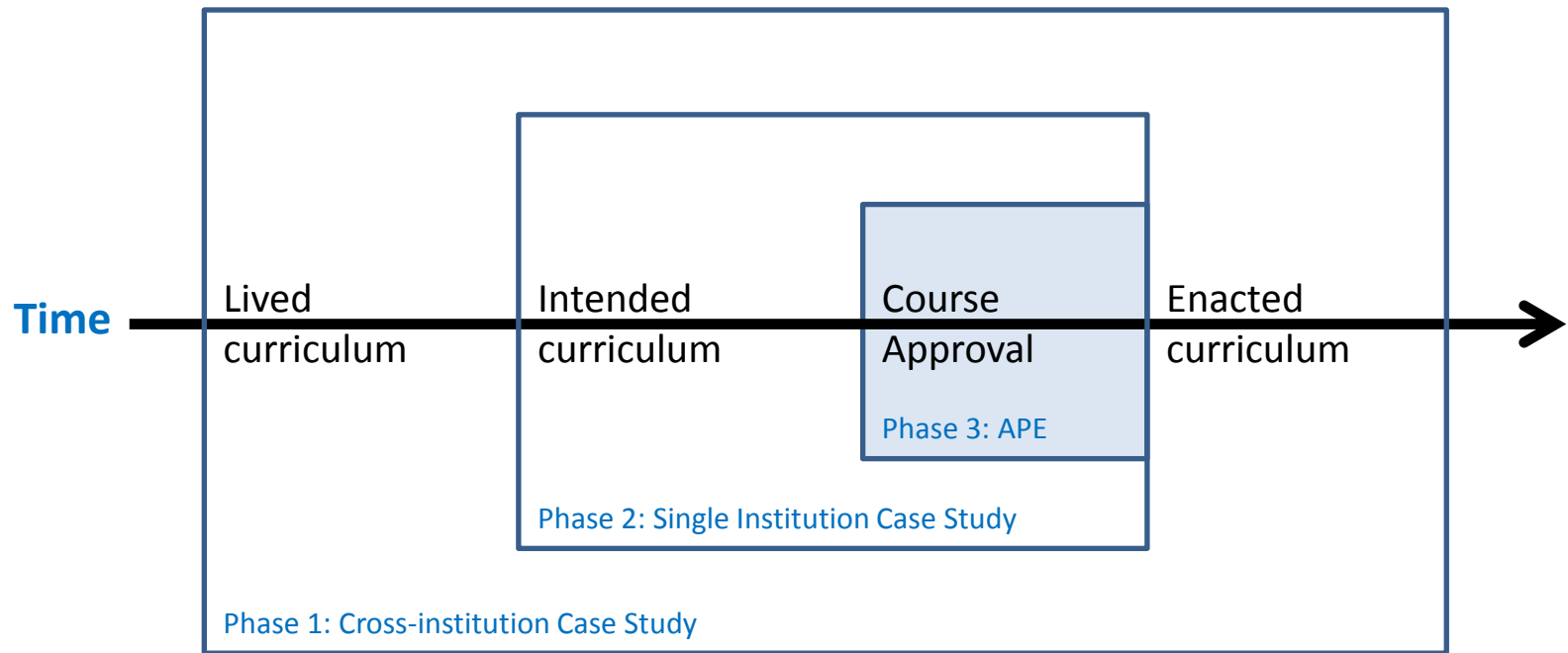
Dr. Richard Pountney

10th February 2015

Key concepts from the literature
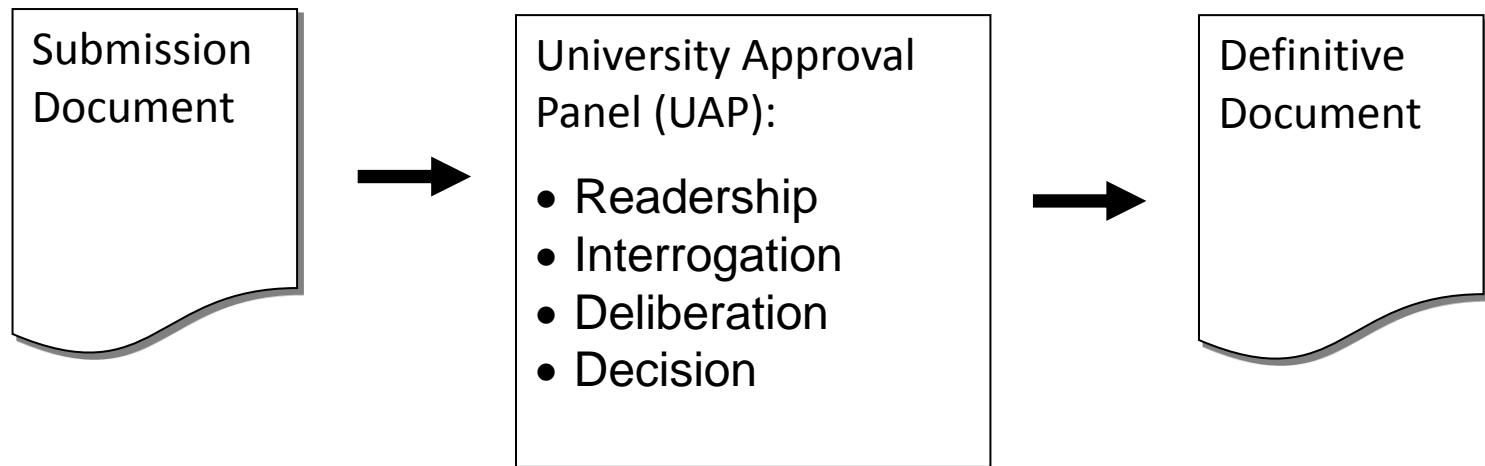
Empirical phases of the curriculum

**Time** → Lived curriculum → Intended curriculum → Course Approval → Enacted curriculum

Phase 3: APE

Phase 2: Single Institution Case Study

Phase 1: Cross-institution Case Study

APE = Approval Panel Event

Production of curriculum development texts

| Submission Document | → | University Approval Panel (UAP):

• Readership
• Interrogation
• Deliberation
• Decision | → | Definitive Document |

The Approval Panel Event (APE) represents practice at various symbolic layers:

- transforms a submission document into a definitive document
- legitimates a course specification according to the UK QAA Quality Code (2012);
- grants a 'licence to operate' to a course team;
- mediates the intended curriculum (and its enactment);
- operates as peer review with 'sovereignty over decision making' (Lamont, 2009)
- has properties of bureaucratic practices while operating within a 'predominantly collegial' type of organisation (Waters, 1989)
- aspires to consensus 'without coercion' (Trimbur, 1989)

# Orientations to curriculum development as a form of quality
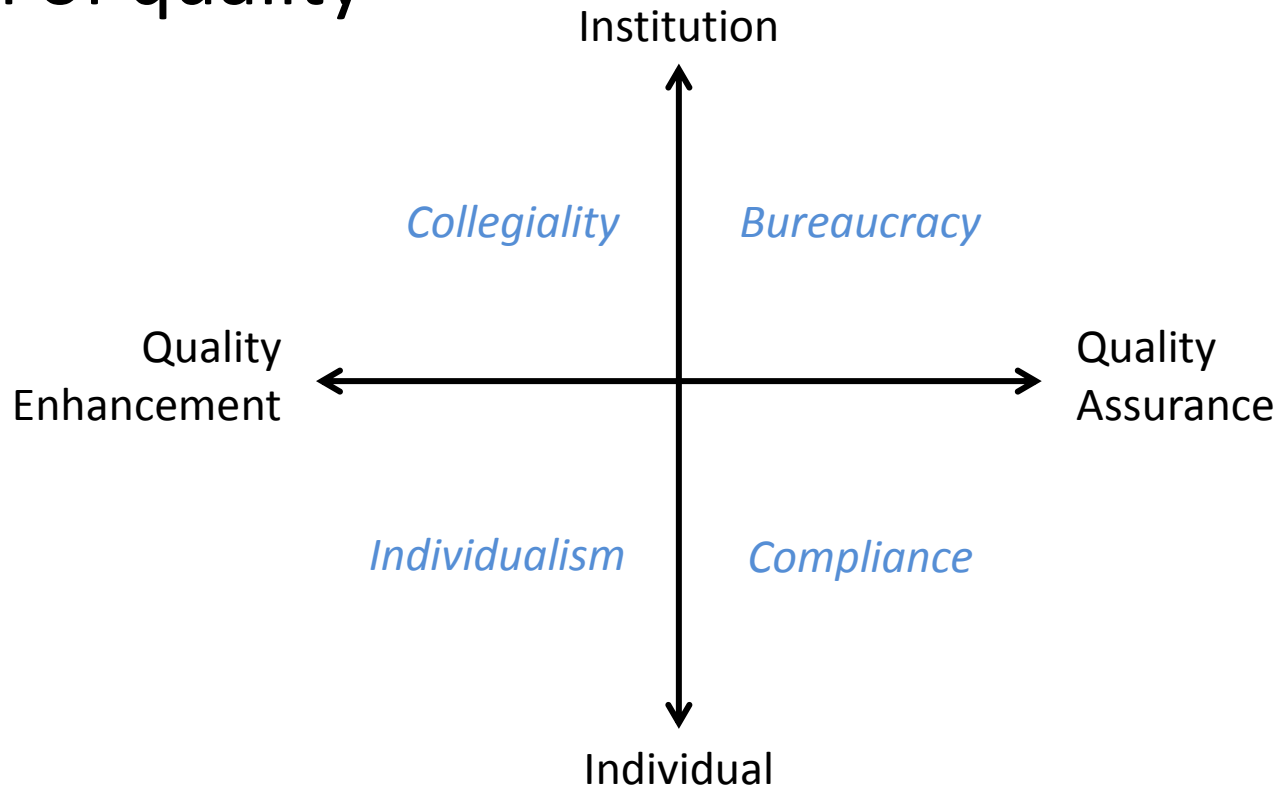
- QA as accountability perceived as managerialism and risk avoidance (Raban, 2007)
- QE as '... taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students' (QAA, 2008)
- Collegiality and bureaucracy as the focus of approval processes but <u>not</u> the basis

Course specifications and what they entail

Course Team	Course Title	Level	Subject Area / Discipline	Awards	Modules	Total Pages	Total Words	Course Rationale
CPT2	Geography, Housing, Environment and Planning	UG	Environment and Planning	7	76	517	154,000	4,300
CPT3	English Language Teaching	PG	English	1	7	63	16,000	2,400
CPT6	Education	PG	Education	12	40	502	157,000	6,300
CPT8	Applied Social Science	UG	Social Science	13	136	724	218,000	8,800
CPT9	Performing Arts	FD	Performing Arts	2	10	106	28,000	2,000
CPT10	Built Environment	UG	Built Environment	9	81	574	164,000	7,500
CPT11	Contemporary Fine Art	UG	Fine Art	3	10	82	27,000	2,000

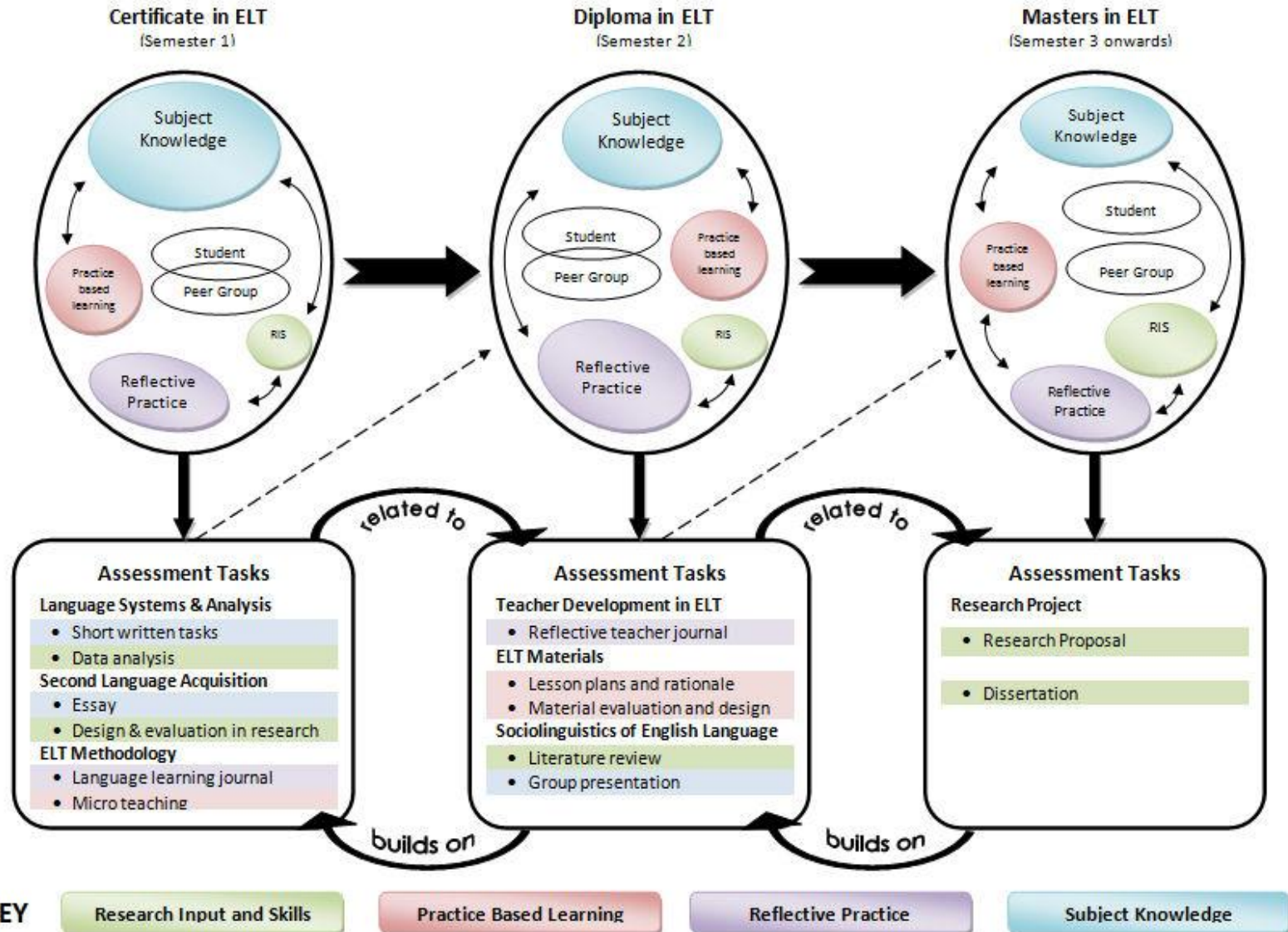# Projections of the Approval Event
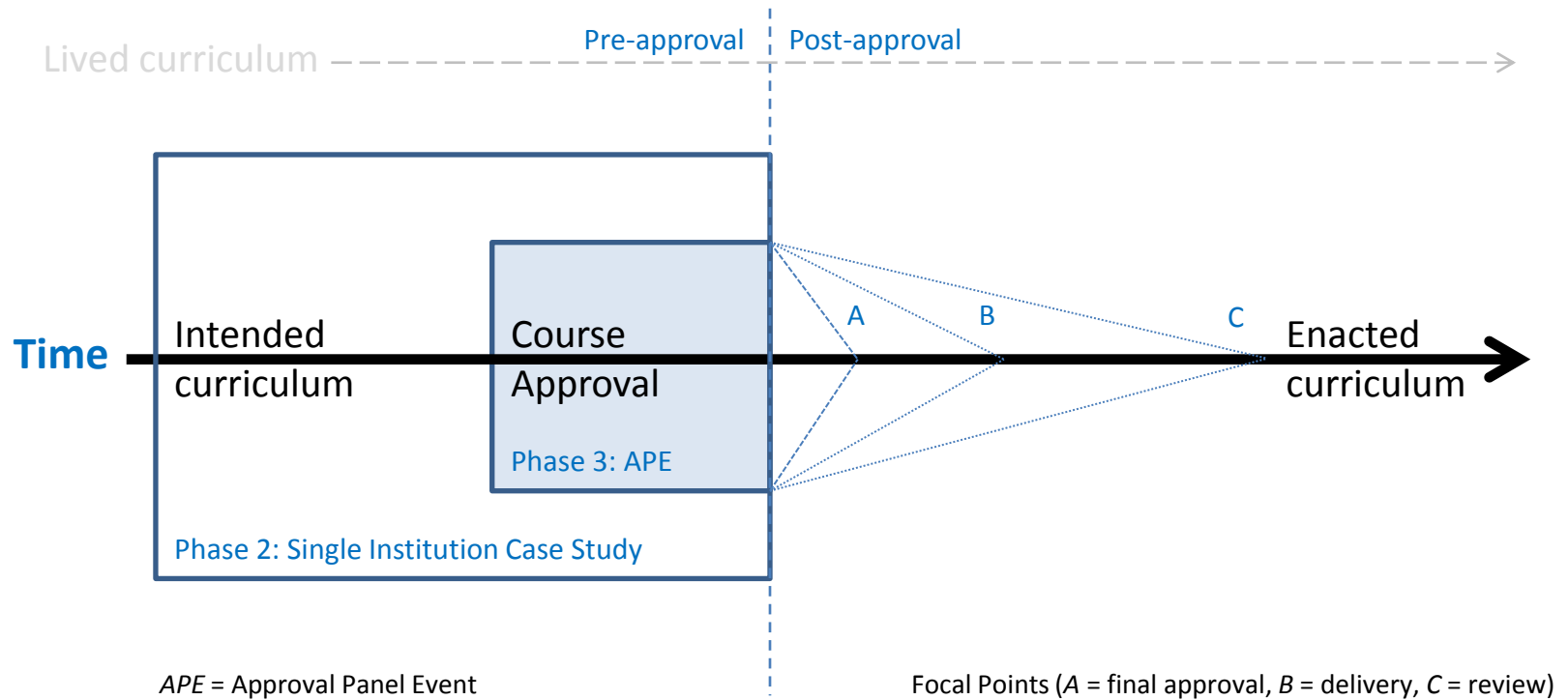
Case 1: MA English Language Teaching: curriculum structure
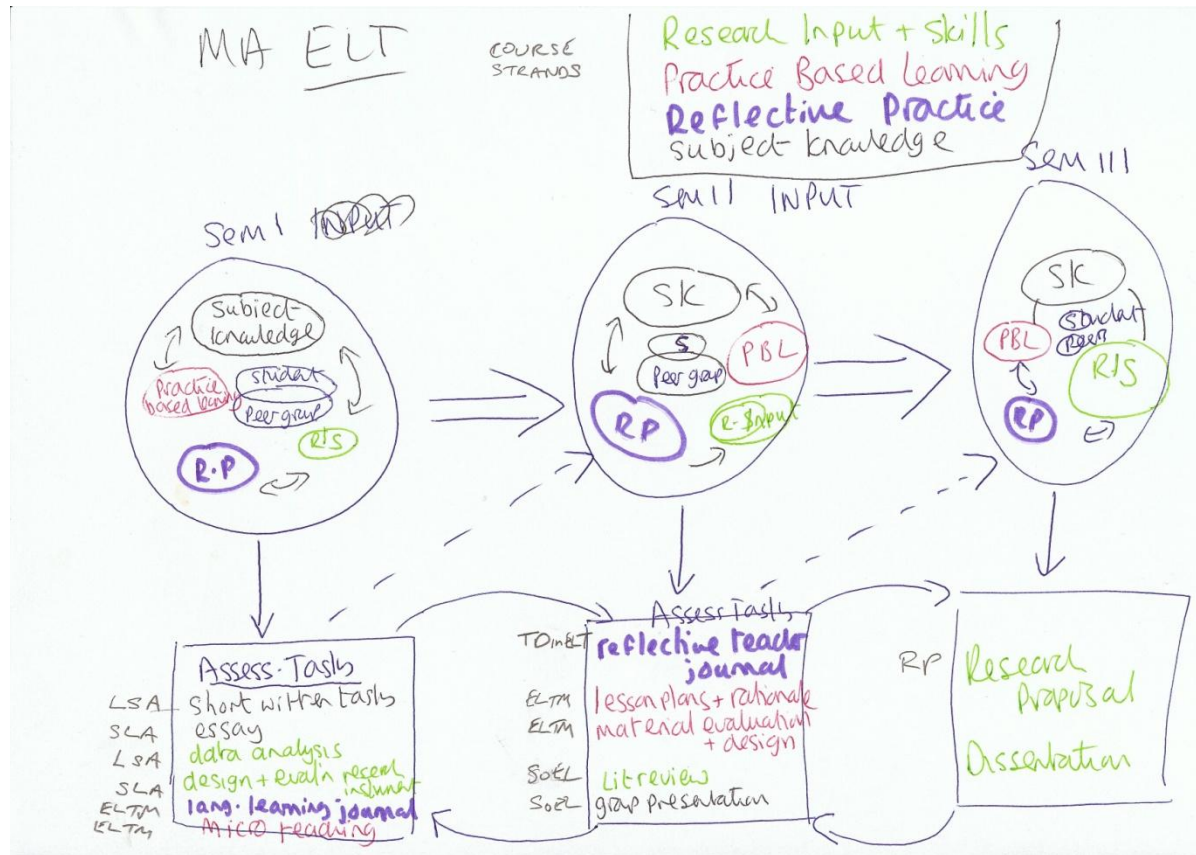
Case 1: MA English Language Teaching: curriculum structure

Masters in English Language Teaching: Curriculum Design

Conceptual tools for examining curriculum development knowledge

- Social realism as a theory of knowledge that acknowledges both its social location and its emergent and objective properties (Barrett and Rata, 2014)
- Basil Bernstein's knowledge codes (Classification and Framing) and the pedagogic device
- Maton's Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) and its 'dimensions' (autonomy, semantics and specialisation)
- 3 message systems: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

Classification (C) of curriculum development knowledge

| Strength of boundaries between ...	Indicators	Example quotes from empirical data
Everyday and specialised educational knowledge	**+C** General experience of teaching in higher education is little valued in the approving courses	*'It wasn't until I had to write my validation document that I realised that module documents really meant anything'*
	-C General experience of teaching in higher education is highly valued in approving courses	*'What has become apparent over time is how crucial an understanding of these concepts is to how students learn'*
Different forms of educational knowledge in a curriculum	**+C** Knowledge gained in developing one's own subject content is of little relevance in approving the subject content of others	*'It doesn't help when someone who specialises in astro-physics is telling you what to do in a subject they know nothing about'*
	-C Knowledge gained in developing one's own subject content is highly relevant to approving the subject content of others	*'I feel that having led the development of my own courses ... I am able to spot the weaknesses, and advise others'*

Note: +/- indicates 'stronger/weaker'

Positional and *Relational Autonomy* of curriculum knowledge

Emphasis	Indicators	Example quotes from empirical data
POSITIONAL AUTONOMY (PA)		
Teacher determines the basis for forms of content knowledge	**PA+** Teacher determines the form of legitimate educational knowledge	*'there were essential topics that we knew we had to cover, and we've included these for a number of years'*
	PA- Teacher less important in defining legitimate educational knowledge	*'there are areas of the curriculum that all courses must cover, regardless of whether students become lawyers, or social workers'*
RELATIONAL AUTONOMY (RA)		
Discipline is the basis for forms of content knowledge	**RA+** Discipline determines the form of legitimate educational knowledge	*'the main thing was that you mentioned something about employability in the course design but no one ever really teaches it ...'*
	RA- External factors determine the form of legitimate educational knowledge	*'it is important that the quality of course content is assured, without that students will not choose us '*

Note: +/- indicates 'stronger/weaker'

Autonomy coding of curriculum knowledge
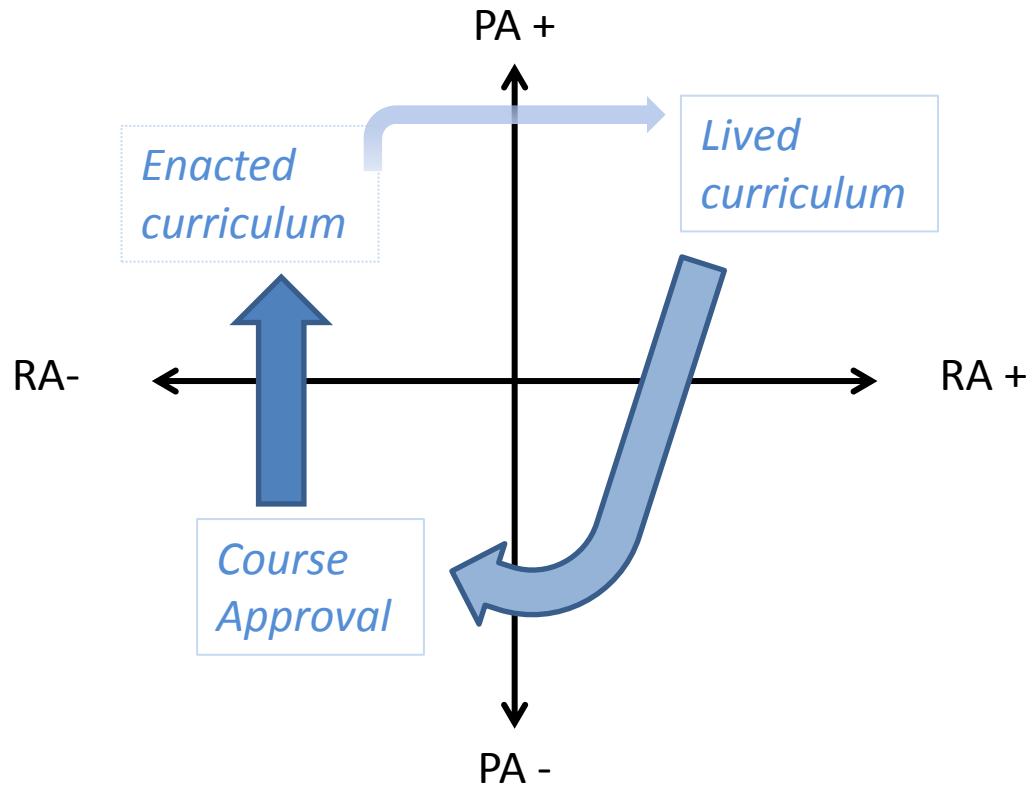
PA – Positional autonomy – who decides what counts
RA – Relational autonomy – according to whose principles

A social realist analysis of field positions and orientations

|	Collegial	Bureaucratic	Consensus seeking
Curriculum design			
Coherence	Heuristic modelling	Evaluative	Contextual
Autonomy	PA+ / RA-	PA- / RA-	Code clash
Pedagogical design			
Pedagogical model	Competence	Performance	Performance-based
Pedagogic code	Collection	Integrated	Mixed
Evaluation (basis and criteria of establishing the worth of the curriculum)			
Exchange	Pedagogic goods	Marketable goods	Approved goods
Peer Review	Horizontal	Hierarchical	Mixed
Authority	Collegial	Bureaucratic	Rules-based
Decision making	Collaborative	Co-operative	Discretionary
Expertise	Mutual & reciprocal	Disciplinary	Technical
Collegial organisation	Predominantly collegiate	Intermediate collegiate	Variable

The autonomic plane
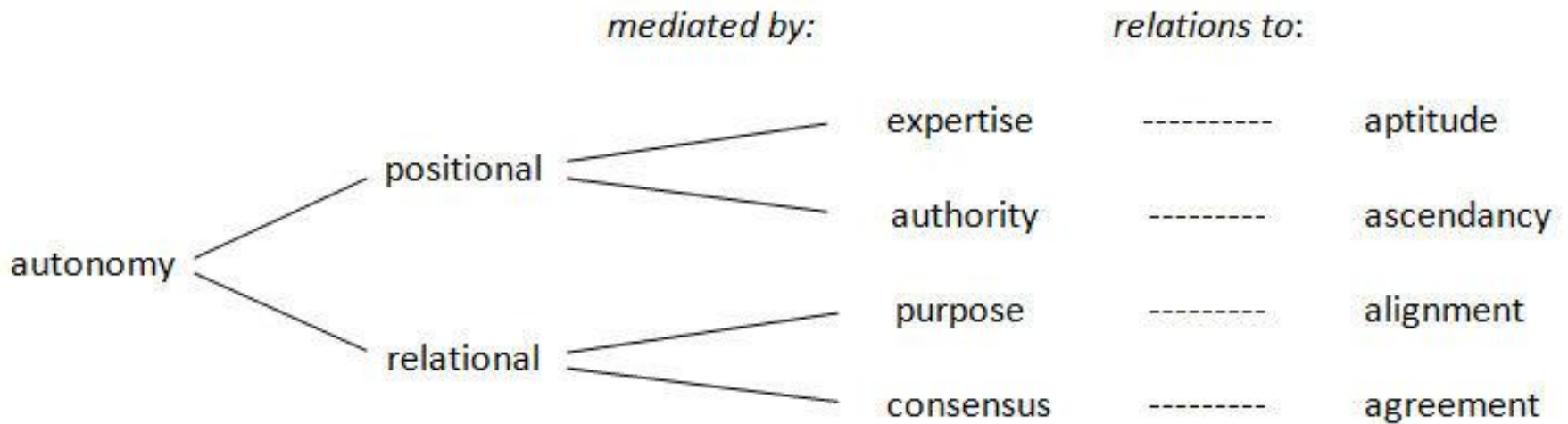
Figure 11: A 'positional-attitudinal' typology of curriculum development knowledge practices

Specialising autonomy: ontic/discursive distinction

positional plane of knowledge practices:

- Expertise : mediated by what status positions knowledge practices relate to (*ontic positional autonomy*)

- Authority : mediated by how knowledge practices relate to status positions (*discursive positional autonomy*)

attitudinal plane of knowledge practices:

- Purpose: mediated by what principles, or ideas knowledge practices relate to or are aligned with (*ontic relational autonomy*)

- Consensus : mediated by how knowledge practices relate to the principles operating (*discursive relational autonomy*)

The legitimation of curriculum coherence

Autonomic type	Evaluative Coherence	Heuristic modelling coherence
Expertise (OPA)	Aptitude in the physical structure and hygiene of the curriculum *(PA- (OR-))*	Aptitude in the conceptual structure and design for learning within a curriculum *(PA+ (OR+))*
Authority (DPA)	Ascendancy derived from status positions based on managerial or administrative activity, roles and responsibilities (hierarchical) *(PA- (DR+))*	Ascendancy derived from status positions based on pedagogical activity, roles and responsibilities (horizontal) *(PA+ (DR-))*
Purpose (ORA)	Aligned with the ideas, principles and needs of the institution and external demands *(RA- (OR-))*	Aligned with the ideas, principles and needs of the discipline and/or the needs of society *(RA+ (OR+))*
Consensus (DRA)	Agreement, or group solidarity in which decisions are reached based on the ideas, principles and needs of the institution *(RA- (DR+))*	Agreement, or group solidarity, in which decisions are made based on the ideas, principles and needs of learners and teachers and on what works in practice *(RA+ (DR-))*
Insight operating (OR, DR) within autonomy (PA, RA)	Doctrinal insight (OR-, DR+)	Situational insight (OR+, DR-)

A possible future for curriculum approval

- The timeline for decision making involves iteration and shared, open and collegial teamwork in which the curriculum is designed with specialist support and resources.

- The decision making process includes the contribution of heuristic modelling, involving mappings and other techniques and involving non-rational and intuitive thinking

- The *structural* and *administrative coherence* of courses is supported by expertise available to advise course teams.

- The *conceptual* and *contextual coherence* of courses is supported by expertise available to course teams.

- The documentary process for assuring the structural alignment of courses is related efficiently and practically to the texts that are used in the delivery of the course by teachers and students.

Consensual principle

Socially consensual structures are those in which there is a tendency towards collegiality achieved between the members of an inclusive and open body of experts who are theoretically equal in their levels of expertise but who are specialized by area of expertise

(Based on Waters' (1989: 956) collegial principle)