Title: Let's have a CHAT about curriculum design: using cultural historical activity theory to analyse the process

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Session Outline

- Locate the curriculum design process within a broader social context.
- Recognise the potential of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) to identify the relationships, tensions and contradictions that exist within the curriculum design process.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The principles of cultural-historical activity theory will be introduced to provide the framework for the discussion. Specifically, Engeström's (2001) triangular model of an activity system will be used to contextualise the curriculum design process. (10 minutes).
Thereafter, the elements which make up Engeström's activity system will be considered, assuming that the subject of the activity system is the course team, and the object is the course. As the elements are introduced, participants will be asked to contribute their views in relation to that element, using an online audience participation tool accessed via personal devices such as smartphones, tablets or laptops. The specific elements of the activity system to be considered are:

- Tools: What tools are used in the curriculum design process? For example: pedagogical models, curriculum design models, or the knowledge base of a course. (5 minutes)
- Community: Who are the participants in the activity system? For example: University managers, educational developers, quality staff. (5 minutes)
- Rules and norms: What rules or norms of behaviour influence the process? For example: institutional requirements, accreditation requirements, cultural norms. (5 minutes)

- Division of labour: How are responsibilities divided between participants? This might include vertical and horizontal division of responsibilities, workload allocation, and so on. (5 minutes)

To conclude, there will be a general discussion on the potential of CHAT to identify tensions and contradictions within the curriculum design process (15 minutes)

References

Anakin, M. et al. (2017). The contextual nature of university-wide curriculum change.[Online article] International Journal for Academic Development. Available (via subscription) at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1360144X.2017.1385464 (Accessed 15 May 2018)

Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. Journal of education and work, 14 (1), 133–156.

O'Neill, G. (2010). Initiating curriculum revision: exploring the practices of educational developers. International Journal for Academic Development, 15 (1), 61–71.