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Challenges for Curriculum Leadership in Contemporary Teacher Education

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Abstract: This paper outlines the complex contemporary milieu of Australian teacher education within which curriculum leaders responsible for designing teacher education programs must make their program design decisions. Particular attention is paid to the collision of vertical ('hierarchical' or 'academic rationalist') and horizontal ('flat' or 'student-centred') curriculum discourses as a program design problem that has emerged within the current context; how it is intensified by an unexpected alliance between progressivist and new managerial curriculum discourses; and how this problem may be amplified in graduate entry teacher education programs. This paper concludes with a provocation to see the curriculum tensions and conditions outlined as offering a challenging design problem for the current generation of curriculum leaders responsible for the assembly of teacher education programs.

Introduction

Today's curriculum leaders in teacher education find themselves in 'interesting times'. No teacher education program is ever designed in a socio-historical vacuum, and the curriculum leader's milieu inevitably affords them both specific opportunities and unique challenges. This paper aims to provide a description of the complex contemporary milieu of Australian teacher education within which curriculum leaders responsible for designing teacher education programs – typically mid-level managers within departments, such as Program Convenors or Coordinators, and Deputy, Assistant or Associate Deans – must make their program design decisions. Throughout the paper I use the term 'program' as synonymous with the curriculum of an entire degree or award, and I use 'unit' to refer to the individual subjects or semester courses that make up a program. Particular attention will be given to an exploration of the collision of vertical or 'hierarchical' and horizontal or 'flat' curriculum discourses as a program design problem that has emerged within the current context; how it is intensified by an unexpected alliance between progressivist and new managerial curriculum discourses; and how this problem may be amplified (or at least becomes a more obvious issue) in graduate entry teacher education programs. The paper neither makes any attempt at a conclusive answer or solution to the challenges outlined, nor a call for the problem to be resolved by appointment of a heroic leader. Instead, it concludes with a provocation to readers to see the curriculum tensions and conditions outlined as offering an intriguing design problem for the current generation of curriculum leaders.

Before exploring the issues I seek to raise for curriculum designers in contemporary teacher education, I should note something about my own interest in these matters. For four years, I was the Deputy Head of School in a large regional university in Australia. During my two consecutive two-year terms of office, my portfolio responsibilities included overseeing the teacher education curriculum, including its internal and external accreditation. This

regional university was at the time (and probably still is) one of the biggest providers of on-campus initial teacher education in the country. With over 4,500 teacher education students enrolled, the effect of changes coming from new internal university policies and procedures, or changed external accreditation policies and standards, were intensified during the period explored in this paper, such that even when only a small percentage of students felt affected by a policy change, the fallout (in terms of vocal student dissatisfaction and complaints) was experienced in dramatic fashion by faculty. Thus, it is worth noting that the curricular tensions I am identifying, particularly those concerning vertical and horizontal discourses, may be felt more acutely when the teacher education provider operates at scale; they might be ignored as a minor nuisance, or masked by the unrecognised interventions of individual agents, within the operations of small scale providers. During the first round of State-based accreditation through the NSW Institute of Teachers, I was also responsible for communicating major program changes to students, and conducted a number of forums for students in every teacher education degree affected by changes brought about as a result of the new accreditation processes. It was during this time that I became aware of many of the tensions outlined in this paper, in the Teaching and Learning Committee meetings I chaired within the School; in discussions with individual program convenors; through feedback I received from students; and in the meetings I participated in at a Faculty and University-wide level. My contribution to discussions around these issues included being recruited by the President of Academic Senate to write a discussion paper on unit levels, which I completed with a colleague (Parkes & Petersen, 2010), and which was presented at a national conference, distributed widely among faculty within the institution and subsequently discussed at Academic Senate. In that paper, we argued that contemporary higher education operated as a site of competing curriculum discourses that presented challenges for higher education program design in general, and for graduate entry professional degrees in particular, such as one finds in teacher education. Aspects of the argument in this paper owe a debt to that earlier attempt at theorising the 'problem' of contemporary curriculum design in higher education.

The Contemporary Context of Teacher Education Curriculum Design in Australia

Sitting at the heart of a complex assemblage, teacher education has always been an inherently political exercise, and appears to be an enduring public policy problem in Australia (Louden, 2008), a situation mirrored internationally (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2006). According to a study by May, Holbrook, Brown, Preston & Bessant (2009, 160), since 1965 there have been no less than 146 government reviews, reports and official statements constituting a relentless series of investigations into, or attempts to reform, teacher education at both State and national levels; and the implementation of yet another State review (Queensland Government, 2010) – largely in response to Queensland's poor performance on the national literacy and numeracy tests – after the May et al. (2009) report was released, suggests that teacher education remains an object of sustained concern. This 'sustained concern', as Louden (2008, 357) argues, 'reflects the importance of the enterprise of teacher education to the social and economic development of Australia', via the anticipated production of a highly skilled teaching force tasked with the development of a highly literate and capable citizenry (Green & Reid, 2002), who will 'preserve the [state or] nation's position in the global economy' (Cochran-Smith, 2008, 271). The 'escalating criticism of university-based teacher education across the world' (Cochran-Smith, 2004, 193), and ongoing 'concerns about declining recruitment standards and the continuing scepticism of practicing [sic] teachers about the impact of teacher education' (Louden, 2008), when

coupled with the 'worldwide focus on providing enough qualified teachers in schools' (Zeichner & Ndimande, 2008, 334), situates the teacher education curriculum at the centre of scrutiny in the growing knowledge economy.

Tied as it is to the production of the national citizen, the productive worker, etc. (Green & Reid, 2002), the teacher education curriculum operates as a site of struggle in which competing discourses about what it should be, how it should be conducted, who should be recruited for it, and who should engage in it, seek to find traction. Enduring theory/practice debates that contrast 'academic' study with the 'real world' of the professional experience placement, highlight 'internal tensions within teacher education institutions' (Zeichner, 2010, p. 90), that have been argued to compromise attempts at reform, and the coherence of the teacher education curriculum (Gore, 2001). The curriculum, which acts as 'a disciplinary technology that directs how the individual is to act, feel, talk, and "see" the world and "self"' (Popkewitz, 2001, p. 152), has become a primary object of contestation. While teachers are increasingly positioned as responsible for the learning outcomes of the nation's children, teacher education is increasingly considered to be directly responsible for the quality of the nation's teachers. As each new demand enters the school curriculum, backward pressure is exerted upon the teacher education curriculum to ensure graduates have the requisite skills to deliver on policy promises. In these debates, the teacher education curriculum is rarely conceived as a learning journey that continues for years into professional life. Instead, the intention to produce 'work-ready' graduates, rightly or wrongly places almost the sole responsibility for the development of teachers on the university teacher education program.

Teacher education is, and always has been, a highly contested activity (Barcan, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2006), with at least some level of criticism coming from within the field itself (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Gore, 2001; Gore, Griffiths, & Ladwig, 2004; Smith & Weaver, 1998; Wideen & Grimmett, 1995; Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). However, over the past few years teacher education has been the point of intersection for an impressive range of policy transformations that have had either direct or indirect impact upon the authority of teacher educators and the substance and structure of the teacher education curriculum, resulting in a time of intense change and heightened tension within the sector not seen since the era of the Dawkins Reforms – a period with enduring legacies for teacher education (Barcan, 1995), during which teacher preparation moved from its location in teacher training colleges into the poorly funded (Labaree, 2008) and sometimes ambivalent place it holds in universities today (Brennan & Willis, 2008).

These recent and historic policy transformations that have affected teacher education have arisen at three levels: (1) national reform of school education (including high stakes testing and the development of a national curriculum); (2) changes in higher education policy and practice (including the formation and implementation of the Australian Quality Framework); and (3) the movement towards professional standards for teachers and teacher education programs (seen in the formation of State teacher accreditation institutions, and the emergence of a national teacher registration authority, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership). Each of these transformations has appeared as State or national responses to global policy flows and imperatives and manifests forms of 'policy borrowing' (Lingard, 2010; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) that reflect issues of domestic and internationally significance for teacher education.

With the establishment of State and national teacher registration authorities, and the increasing institutional force given to the satisfaction of students (including pre-service teachers), 'new players' have entered the struggle for the teacher education curriculum. Where teacher educators once had the authority to engage in relatively autonomous

university-based curriculum development, a new settlement is emerging in which the power to determine the teacher education curriculum appears to reside largely with regulatory authorities; and those aspects of the curriculum that can be decided by teacher educators are being driven progressively toward responsiveness to student satisfaction ratings.

Given the majority of teachers graduate from Commonwealth-funded universities in Australia, and the considerable cost of the teaching workforce to the public purse, governments understandably want to know that their substantial investment in university-based teacher education will pay dividends. On the assumption that 'education and the economy are inextricably linked . . . [an] unprecedented emphasis on teacher quality' has emerged 'with extremely high expectations for teacher performance' (Cochran-Smith, 2008, 271). According to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003, 1) '[t]he concern with teacher quality has been driven by a growing recognition, fuelled by accumulating research evidence, of how critical teachers are to student learning'. A growing body of local research has developed that supports this finding (Hayes, 2003; Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2005; Ladwig & Gore, 2005; Lingard, Hayes, & Mills, 2003; Lingard et al., 2001). Appealing to governments eager to make education work for the economy, these findings underpin some of the recent push towards 'professionalization', through the formation of new State registration institutes, and the establishment of professional teaching standards used to evaluate both the performance of graduate teachers, and the suitability and quality of teacher education curricula (see for example, NSW Institute of Teachers, 2007).

Anticipated by the historian Alan Barcan (1995, 60) as 'a tortuous form of indirect control', it would appear that through audit mechanisms such as professional teaching standards and long lists of mandatory program requirements, the determination of the teacher education curriculum has shifted in substantial ways (at least in some States) from teacher educators to government bureaucracies, constructing a situation in which 'a list of auditable competencies can become the whole rationale of a teacher education programme' (Connell, 2009, 218), and where the idea of 'teacher-generated curriculum becomes an absurdity' (Connell, 2009, 218). Sharing this concern, Taubman (2009, 1) argues that current approaches to standards, quality, and accountability encourage what he disparagingly calls 'teaching by numbers', risking the disenfranchisement and deprofessionalisation of teachers and teacher educators as their autonomy as curriculum workers is threatened, precisely at a time of serious concern for workforce renewal. The loss of independence for teacher educators, in which authority to determine the teacher education curriculum is no longer their exclusive purview, parallels broader trends in higher education in which academic autonomy is increasingly seen as being under threat (Newson & Polster, 2001; Toma, 2006). The formation of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in 2010, and the imminent movement toward a national registration system for teachers and teacher education programs based on a system of professional teaching standards that follows the pattern of States on the eastern sea border, moves the potential for the weakening of the role of teacher educator as curriculum designer to a national level. The emerging political fancy for short teacher education courses for high-achieving graduates, in the form of Labor's *Teach for Australia* program, established with the endorsement of Prime Minister Gillard, further challenges the teacher education curriculum, effectively rejecting the need for one or two-year graduate or four-year undergraduate teacher education programs (the norm, and now official standard, in Australia), and reinforcing a view that the problem with teacher education is the quality of the students it attracts and the curriculum it enacts.

A Design Conflict in Teacher Education: The Collision of Vertical and Horizontal Discourses

Despite the potential challenge to their curriculum-making authority within the complex contemporary policy context, curriculum leaders in teacher education institutions are still faced with the prospect of designing effective teacher education programs. In this section, I outline a particular 'design conflict' that arises within the current context when academics engaged in the planning of programs underpinned by the idea of 'developmental' progression, are faced with students (and sometimes university administrators) desiring the immediate 'accessibility' of units. I understand this conflict as a collision of vertical and horizontal curriculum discourses (inspired by, but not limited to, the use of such terms by Basil Bernstein, 1999; and William F. Pinar, 2007). These vertical and horizontal discourses have specific effects in terms of the principles applied to curriculum design in higher education (including debates over the meaning of unit levels, and the existence or otherwise of pre-requisites), and account for some of the frustration experienced by university program convenors and course coordinators (and sometimes their students) when the latter fail to follow desired pathways through their degree programs.

It is obviously important to begin by making clear what it is that I mean by vertical and horizontal curriculum discourses. By using the concept of vertical and horizontal discourses, I am not intending to locate my argument in the structuralist work of Basil Bernstein (1999) whose famous essay on vertical and horizontal discourses is undoubtedly invoked by mention of such terms. There are perhaps resonances between my description of a vertical curriculum discourse and Bernstein's (1999, 161) notion of the vertical as 'a coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised . . . [including] a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation'; but less so between the notion of horizontal curriculum discourse I mobilise in this paper and Bernstein's (1999, 159) concept of the horizontal as 'everyday or 'common-sense' knowledge . . . segmentally organised', unless one thinks about student preferences as operating out of an everyday common-sense view that units should be available on demand (and thus are 'segmentally accessed'). While there may be some superficial similarities that connect these conceptual frames, I am not using the vertical and horizontal to mark any absolute curriculum structures, but rather, using them as a way to map the curriculum imagination, identifying particular *trajectories of thought* demonstrated in higher education curriculum design. However, before I provide further articulation of this concept, I also need to acknowledge the influence of, and distinguish my approach from that of Pinar (2007) and his use of the vertical and horizontal as methodological framing concepts.

Pinar (2007) proposes that the concepts of verticality and horizontality should structure the disciplinarity of curriculum studies. For Pinar, verticality symbolises the historical study of the curriculum field, while horizontality describes the analysis of present circumstances. Pinar's schema, proposed as an alternative to Schwab's (1978) syntactic and substantive structures of the disciplines, intends to provide a new framework to guide curriculum inquiry; one that takes account of the past and the present on the way to articulating alternative possible futures. While I find Pinar's proposal useful, it is important to note that I am using a different, design-oriented understanding of vertical and horizontal curriculum discourses in this paper, albeit one influenced by, but not at all restricted to, Pinar's dissection of disciplined approaches to curriculum inquiry. If for Pinar verticality represents an understanding of the historical, then we might argue that in curriculum design terms, this might best be understood as a sense of 'the developmental'. For Pinar this might involve looking at the development or course of curriculum thought (albeit not in the teleological way such a term as 'historical development' may be typically understood); but

for my purposes, it involves identification of a discourse that sees curriculum design as properly the building of knowledge upon prior learning and sound intellectual foundations and tending ultimately toward greater specialisation.

If Pinar constructs horizontality as an exploration of the present circumstances, then from the perspective of today's students, the horizontal manifests through the desire for 'flexibility' of course offerings in the immediate present, and results from the flattening of curriculum that occurs when students base their enrolment decisions on current interests or immediate timetable concerns, often ignoring the carefully-mapped pathways that appear in published program grids. Anyone who has been involved in academic administration during periods of transition between old and new programs will be only too aware of those students who take up a great deal of program convenors' time when they have to provide such students with individualised program grids because they had failed to follow the official recommended pathways in the first place, and now may face longer or problematic progression as new programs supplant the old, and some units they would have done are discontinued, while others they have completed do not count for the new award. This problem became very evident in my own institution during the transition from the Department of Education and Training's TQAP (Teacher Qualifications Advisory Panel) to the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) accredited programs, where innumerable hours were spent by faculty in providing this individualised support for students who had taken units out of any recognised sequence because they fitted their lifestyle (to the greater extent) or evoked their immediate interest (sometimes), rather than units in the sequence recommended in the program handbook. Thus, many students demonstrated that for them, the curriculum was a flat structure, a smörgåsbord from which they could pick and choose whatever was available to them, mixing mains with entrées, or, to continue the metaphor, taking desserts before mains.

Clearly, in their different orientations to curriculum as 'the course of study', vertical (hierarchical or developmental) and horizontal (flat or flexible-accessibility) discourses are at odds. This collision of competing curriculum discourses parallels much longer-term conflict between rival curriculum ideologies, well recognised in studies of schooling (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995; Schiro, 2008), but rarely applied to, or explored within, higher education, the result of an acknowledged schizophrenia in the curriculum design field in which curriculum theorising and instructional or educational design remain related but rarely connected activities (Petrina, 2004). It is to the link between these contemporary discourses and longer-term competing curriculum ideologies or philosophies that we now turn, before examining how this collision becomes a particular 'problem' through the confluence of progressivist and neoliberal learner or student-centred discourses, and becomes exaggerated in graduate entry professional programs, as offered in teacher education.

Academic Rationalist Curriculum Discourse

For many academic curriculum designers it is self-evident that good program or curriculum design means having academic units build upon each other, so that as a student progresses through their degree, they will develop increasingly specialised and sophisticated disciplinary knowledge and understandings. This widely-shared and common-sense view of curriculum imagines that 'university curriculum is complex and abstract . . . [and] becomes increasingly complex and abstract as students progress through their degree programs' (Cantwell, Scevak, & Parkes, 2010, 16). Or, put another way, that a key feature of university learning is that 'it's hard, and it gets harder' (Cantwell et al., 2010, 16). Within this view,

university curricula becomes more demanding as students move through their degree, partly because in many disciplines they are required to demonstrate increasingly complex and abstract levels of understanding, but also because 'university learning involves a process of increasing specialisation' (Cantwell et al., 2010, 18). In practical design terms, this view leads to a curriculum design process in which it is likely that university programs begin with first year 'survey' units that introduce the intellectual (and sometimes technical) foundations of a discipline, and move in the later stages of a program to units that are more highly focused on specific areas of professional competence or disciplinary knowledge. Such an orientation might be described as a signature curriculum structure in higher education, and may properly be called the 'Scholar Academic Ideology' (Schiro, 2008, 13-50), or 'Academic Rationalist' curriculum perspective (Eisner & Vallance, 1974, 12). It constructs curriculum hierarchically, with highly specialised knowledge at its apex (Schiro, 2008). It has, for a very long time, been the dominant view of curriculum in the academy, and the curriculum ideology that would appear to be the prevailing or default perspective held by university academics.

Certainly during my time as a deputy head of department, faculty colleagues across the university met any suggestion that there might be an alternative to hierarchical curriculum design with incredulity. This should not be surprising, as it is clearly the perspective that historically guided the construction of university curricula (including the distinction between first year, second year, and final year units, for example). It is certainly entrenched in North American notions of the freshman, sophomore and senior; and we can find it mirrored in the structure of academia itself, with its scholarly hierarchy in which researchers are superior to teachers, and professors sit at the pinnacle as representatives and gatekeepers of a highly specialised discipline; a position professors have traditionally held based on their level of disciplinary knowledge, and their 'ability to contribute to the extension of the discipline' (Schiro, 2008, 25). In Deleuzian terms, this 'academic rationalist' curriculum might be said to operate from an arboreal (tree trunk and branch) perspective, and certainly presupposes that some forms of knowledge necessarily proceed others (the trunk and its roots form a base from which the branches spring). Structurally, it is best supported by the use of pre-requisites that control a student's path through a degree, ensuring that they have sufficient foundational knowledge (breadth) before moving on to areas of specialisation (depth). This trajectory of thought is so naturalised in the academy, and perhaps in education more generally, that it is difficult to argue against its 'developmental' logic without sounding ridiculous or incoherent. Further, it is simply assumed to be 'business as usual' by many academics who are often surprised to learn that their students may have an alternative view of the curriculum.

Student-Centred Curriculum Discourses

While elements of a Techno-Rationalist ideology (that aims at *efficient* and *effective* delivery) can be found in some forms of higher education (particularly what was no so long ago called 'distance education'), and some academic units may be explicitly or implicitly oriented towards a form of Social Reconstructionism (that seeks to use education as a vehicle for transforming social inequality), the curriculum perspective that has gained the most currency in higher education in recent years has been what Schiro (2008, 91-132) refers to as the Student or 'Learner-Centred ideology'. However, as Lea, Stephenson, and Troy (2003) have noted, there are competing definitions of student-centred learning in the higher education literature (notwithstanding any differences suggested by the use of student or learner descriptors for the ideology in question: a debate for another time). As a curriculum philosophy, it has its roots in the work of Hayward, Dewey, Piaget, and even Carl Rogers

(O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). Following Biggs (1999), Lea et al. (2003, 322) argue that student-centred learning ideally involves:

> Reliance upon active rather than passive learning, an emphasis on deep learning and understanding, increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student, an increased sense of autonomy in the learner, an interdependence between teacher and learner . . . mutual respect within the learner–teacher relationship, and a reflexive approach to the learning and teaching process on the part of both teacher and learner.

From this perspective, knowledge is understood to be 'constructed' by the learner, through processes of assimilating and accommodating new ideas. Learning is seen to have a personal significance.

The description provided above is undoubtedly a desired goal rather than a perfected method, for it makes many assumptions about the relationships between lecturers and students that may often be challenged in practice. Certainly, in some approaches influenced by this ideology, curriculum is driven by student interest (less so in the discipline-centric academy, but more so in progressivist early years education). The 'learner-centred' curriculum operates from a perspective that presupposes students will make their own meaning from any knowledge they encounter, following lines of logic that are idiosyncratic (Schiro, 2008), and perhaps more importantly, and neither ideally nor intentionally, may be underpinned by concerns that are far away from the perspectives of their lecturers (such as timetable issues, or the desire, occasionally with some sense of urgency or at least bureaucratic disregard, to follow personal passions). Within this learner-centred curriculum philosophy, the teacher shifts from being 'the sage on the stage' to 'the guide on the side', and 'functions as a facilitator, assistant, aid, advisor, and consultant to people during their learning' (Schiro, 2008, 122), marking a significant philosophical break from the role of the teacher as 'transmitter', apparent in the lecture-centric academic rationalist tradition. The adoption of the learner-centred curriculum philosophy is often accompanied by the eradication of pre-requisites, especially when it has become aligned with new public management discourse (a point I will return to shortly). The historically-recent reduction in pre-requisites in many universities actually opens the possibility for students to advance in a program through pathways of their own choosing, causing student practice (ignoring assumed knowledge and commencing advanced units before foundations have been mastered because a 'senior' course fits better into their weekly schedule) to collide with academic belief (in a disciplined hierarchy of knowledge). The learner or student-centred philosophy is frequently promoted in University Teaching and Learning programs, units and policies as the most virtuous form of higher education pedagogy (as can be seen in the published teaching and learning missions of most contemporary Australian universities, for example). However, the learner-centred approach has a much longer history as a progressivist philosophy, particularly as it was taken up in schools. Interestingly, this philosophy has recently found itself in an unlikely (and often unrecognized) alliance with new managerialism and its concern with the student as a consumer of higher education services.

An Unexpected Alliance: Learner and Market-Centred Discourses

Recent reports indicate that tertiary education services are now one of Australia's largest export industries (Baird, 2010; Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008), a result of momentous changes in the sector taking place since the late 1980s, including the embracing of neoliberal new public management discourses that are actively refashioning academic

identities and practices (Davies & Petersen, 2005; Lambert, 2007; Marginson, 2000). This transformation of the university has been a direct result of government interventions in the sector, designed, as Ramsden (1991) noted at their inception, to increase the academy's accountability for the public funding it receives. The existence and growth of an audit culture in higher education, concerned with the quality of teaching and research, has been subject to significant debate (Biesta, 2010; Shore & Wright, 2000), as 'quality' in higher education is clearly multifaceted, value-laden, and contested (Barnett, 1994; Harvey & Green, 1993). Through the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2000, and its regime of high-stakes on-site review, higher education institutions are held 'accountable for adherence to the institution's internally defined mission and objectives' (Ingvarson, Elliot, Kleinhenz, & McKenzie, 2006, 76). Such audit and accountability measures have affected all areas of academic work. For example, publication performance quality measures, such as the recently implemented Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative, provide the basis for comparative assessment of a university's research performance, as does a growing number of international university ranking tables. The results of such league tables, when favourable, frequently appear in an institution's advertising, and reflect the current competitive environment in which higher education institutions operate. Further, the implementation of graduate attribute profiles constructs teaching staff as accountable for the learning outcomes their students achieve (Chanock, Clerehan, Moore, & Prince, 2004). Unit satisfaction surveys have become the norm in most Australian universities, and are increasingly tethered to performance management mechanisms and academic promotion regimes (Leckey & Neill, 2001).

Complicating the current situation, the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008) and the government's policy response, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), require universities to enter into individual compacts with the government to encourage greater diversity (read 'specialisation') across the sector. Given the requirement that universities must take a larger number of students from low SES backgrounds and coupled with the Australian Government's voucher system for student fees that commenced in 2012, competition for students is increased significantly, as is the pressure upon tertiary educators to enact teaching as a service (in order to capture and maintain market share, essential in a climate of diminishing government support). With growing emphases on attracting and retaining students, some of who may not previously have earned a place at university, audit mechanisms such as student satisfaction surveys are an increasingly important element of the audit culture of the enterprise university. Despite significant debate over the existence and growth of an audit culture in higher education (Biesta, 2010; Shore & Wright, 2000), concern with student satisfaction has enshrined a co-opted version of student or learner-centred curriculum ideology as the default mode of pedagogical operations.

Student-centred curriculum discourse is reinforced by the focus on 'student satisfaction' surveys as a measure of the quality of academic units and programs, and situates the learner and their needs as the central drivers of curriculum development and reform. Once the hallmark of progressivist education and its concern with assisting students in achieving their individual potential, the learner-centred curriculum discourse not only places emphasis on making learning significant for the students, and recognising knowledge as construction, but has also become intertwined in the enterprise university with increasing pressure upon tertiary educators to see students as clients, to enact teaching as a service, and to modify their curricula decisions and pedagogical practices on the basis of results from student satisfaction surveys, providing students with a newfound claim on the higher education curriculum. Further, in the interests of making enrolment processes and continued progression through degrees easier for students – particularly when failure generally results in delayed

progression through any program that is burdened by pre-requisite structures, and thus a loss of predictable income for the enterprise university now dependent on student fees for its continued operation – this learner-centred ideology often underpins discourses of 'flexibility' that result in the eradication of pre-requisites (as noted earlier). The result is that the learner-centred philosophy operates as a flat or horizontal curriculum discourse, where many, if not all, units may be open for selection (enabling a predictable income stream from student fees, not disrupted by student failure in pre-requisite units).

There is some danger here of a situation in which intellectual advancement becomes a secondary curriculum goal to student (or client) satisfaction, which may be at odds with the development of increasingly complex and abstract levels of understanding (the goals of the 'traditional' university course of study). Or, as Biesta (2006, 15) argues, the increasing focus on 'learning' (and one could add 'learners'), has been coupled with a declining focus on 'education'. This 'threat' to the academic rationalist curriculum doesn't only come from student-centred or client-service discourse. Perhaps more than any other type of academic program, the graduate entry professional degree presents a particular problem for the academic rationalist curriculum ideology, one that is not resolved easily in the current climate of increasing focus on student-centred curriculum reform. Graduate entry teacher education programs, taking students from a wide range of disciplines into typically unfamiliar education sciences, undoubtedly offers a particular challenge for curriculum designers.

The Problem of The Graduate Entry Professional Degree in Teacher Education

Students studying to be teachers in Australian universities typically complete a four-year undergraduate bachelor degree program, or are now required by AITSL to complete a three year undergraduate program in a relevant discipline, followed by a two-year teacher preparation graduate diploma or masters program. While each form of the teacher education curriculum presents its own challenges for the curriculum designer, the graduate entry degree presents a very particular problem, as is evident when looking at the new government regulations outlining the requirements for university awards.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is Australia's evolving national policy that incorporates regulated qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive framework (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013). In its current version it will undoubtedly serve to eliminate confusions in the sector, particular with regard to the requirements of degrees at the graduate level; and could be read as an Australia-wide response to the European Union's Bologna Accord, providing support for students and graduates to move with relative ease between qualifications, sectors, and institutions, throughout Australia. All qualifications offered by an education institution operating in Australia must be compliant with the AQF by 1 January 2015. The AQF sets out guidelines with regard to the expected duration of different qualifications. In what is probably the most complex section of the AQF, the 'Volume of Learning' component of a Level 9 Masters Degree (Coursework) states:

> *The volume of learning of a Masters Degree (Coursework) is typically 1 – 2 years; in the same discipline 1.5 years following a Level 7 qualification [Bachelor Degree] or 1 year following a Level 8 qualification [Bachelor Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, or Graduate Diploma]; in a different discipline 2 years following a level 7 qualification or 1.5 years following a Level 8 qualification. (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013, 17)*

However, more important that any *quantitative* differences between Level 7 and Level 8 programs outlined in the AQF framework are the equally significant *qualitative* differences between qualifications that it specifies. For example, the qualitative difference between a Level 7 and a Level 8 qualification is described with a strong attempt at clarity by the AQF when it states that graduates of a Level 7 qualification 'will have *broad and coherent* knowledge and skills for professional work and/or further learning' (2013, 18); while graduates of a Level 8 qualification 'will have *advanced* knowledge and skills for professional *highly skilled work* and/or further learning' (2013, 18, emphasis added). Such a distinction would appear to be common sense and easy to execute in a three or four year bachelor degree, where study is stretched out over six or eight semesters. However, this type of distinction presents a particular problem for the postgraduate initial professional qualification program (such as those that exist in 'teaching', where a student commences their professional studies as a graduate of a discipline-focused degree).

The construction of units that are both 'advanced' (in the hierarchy of knowledge) and 'introductory' (to the profession) has inherent challenges. Many units in a graduate entry teaching program will actually be foundational (that is, introductory to the discipline) rather than advanced units of study (as suggested by their designation as '400', '500', or '600' level subjects). The solution of offering fundamentally the same course to undergraduate and postgraduate students, but requiring the latter complete 'more sophisticated' assessment tasks is the typical design solution to this problem. However, when one considers that the same teacher accreditation standards must be met by graduates of a Level 7 or Level 8 teacher education program, a tension is revealed here between AQF principles (anchored in graduate attribute profiles) and Teacher Education accreditation standards. While this tension may be largely ignored by teacher educators, it is never-the-less a design tension that represents another layer of intensification of the conflict between vertical and horizontal curriculum discourses.

Conclusion

Designing curriculum for teacher education is no easy task, and the complex conditions of the current millieu have tended to move many design decisions away from curriculum leaders in teacher education and place such authority in state bureacracies; at the same time, the adoption of new public management practices in universities has led to a stronger (indirect) student influence upon curriculum design through the increased status given to the results of student satisfaction surveys. Not including the 'classic' problems of theory versus practice, or subject-specific instruction versus general education, there is clearly a great deal of complexity involved in making design decisions for today's curriculum leader in teacher education.

Some Australian universities respond to the inherent contradiction of a student-centred academic rationalist curriculum by offering the same unit twice each year, on campus in one semester, and via distance in the other. This cycle aids students who fail a course, enabling them to immediately try again. It allows a university to maintain an academic rationalist curriculum philosophy supported by a continued use of pre-requisites, while supporting flexibility for students (allowing them to maintain the pace of progression within the program through maintaining course availability in one form or another). It supports an academic teaching cycle in which a unit is first taught on campus so materials can be developed, and then used to form the distance 'package' in the following semester. Such an approach may also provide a natural balance to academic teaching workloads. So there are structural alternatives to the tension between a student-driven concern for flexibility, and an

academic concern for the systematic development of increasingly complex professional competence or disciplinary knowledge. However, this cyclic model does pose problems in terms of the 'cost' of workload involved in its adoption, and requires an unchanging staffing profile from semester to semester (which is not always possible due to important study leave provisions, for example) and therefore may not be viable or desirable for all institutions. An alternative involves practising the academic hierarchy of knowledge in curriculum design to the extent that it becomes impossible to pass units at a higher level without having successfully completed foundational studies, despite the absence of pre-requisites. This would require a firming up of the distinction between the academic demands of units at different levels (such as the AQF provides for academic awards), but this still presents some potential problems for graduate programs, and the maintenance of student enrolments, as outlined earlier.

Certainly the Australian Government's current push for more students to do university study requires a rethinking of the traditional academic rationalist approach, or at least the pedagogical support structures that will sit within it. Perhaps more radically, in a truly learner-centred educational economy, it may be that principles other than the hierarchy of knowledge (or other than a developmental logic) must be applied when designing programs, given the likelihood that students will pursue a rhizomatic rather than arboreal path through the degree. This would suggest the need for units to follow an internal rather than program-level logic; or to connect together in more flexible ways (as one finds in a Bachelor of Arts program); and perhaps most importantly, the need for some form of introductory orientation unit that would provide students with the knowledge and understanding they need to navigate the various components of their academic program. This is also important in the context of the graduate entry teacher education program, and some of the tensions outlined between introductory and advanced specialty units can be resolved by adopting an overarching framework that makes clear the relationship between parts (units) and whole (program). One such framework that is already implicit in national teacher education standards is the enduring 'Pedagogical Content Knowledge' model of Shulman and his associates (Shulman, 1986; Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987). This framework provides a basis for understanding undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education students as different kinds of learners with different curricular needs. Following Shulman's logic, undergraduate students are learning content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge at the same time, while postgraduate students bring content knowledge with them to their study of pedagogy. This suggests a clear distinction in the way in which curriculum method units in teacher education programs need to be organised in undergraduate and graduate-entry programs, and the type of knowledge development such units should be encouraging through their assessment regime. In the former, the unit coordinator cannot assume any knowledge of disciplinary content, and therefore must address that area as much as the other domains of knowledge; in the case of the graduate entry program, however, teaching graduate students how to use and select the most appropriate pedagogies to represent (to their future students) the disciplinary knowledge they already have, becomes paramount. What is certain is that curriculum leaders in teacher education will ignore the design tensions outlined above at the risk of frustration for students and faculty down the track.

In summary, this paper has provided an outline of aspects of the complex contemporary context within which curriculum leaders in teacher education must make their program design decisions. In the enterprise university, competing curriculum philosophies have found purchase, with the result that conflicting ideologies sometimes coexist, coalesce or collide in unexpected ways. Within this complex context, curriculum leaders would do well to give careful attention to the problem of horizontal and vertical curriculum discourses (particularly in programs with large cohorts) if implementation frustrations are to be avoided;

undoubtedly approaches to curriculum design may be found that achieve the challenge of meeting the needs of students and commitment to the development of highly specialised academic and professional knowledge equally well, but this remains a difficult and challenging task for the current generation of curriculum leaders in teacher education, and one that deserves to be recognised as a 'design problem' in all its complexities.

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