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## Freedom and Constraint in Teacher Education: Reflections on Experiences over Time

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*Abstract: Teacher education programs in Australia increasingly comply with new and narrowing accountabilities so that they can be approved by diverse regulatory authorities and accredited. This is an auto-biographical narrative study which draws upon the memories of a teacher educator who contrasts her experience of learning to teach in the early 1980s with her recent experience as a Program Leader working with colleagues to design a new Master of Teaching program. She interviews Professor Bernie Neville who was responsible for the design and implementation of the teacher education program she completed in 1983. He reflects on the principles guiding his practice at a time when greater freedoms were possible. She contrasts this with an interview her colleagues conducted with her during the program accreditation phase and highlights tensions in the current process of program design related to an increasing performance-orientation, greater levels of compliance, and managing an over-crowded curriculum.*

### Introduction

Time froze. The boy with the chair over his shoulder was fuming. The girl at the next table cowered. A disordered array of possible actions swept through my mind; I couldn't settle on one. I caught his eye and we looked at one another. Perhaps there was something in my expression that pleaded with him to stop; maybe he felt a connection in that moment because he dropped the chair and stormed toward the door. Then we were asked to freeze like statues: the boy, the girl and me. I was prompted to articulate my feelings and thoughts. There I was again reliving every pre-service teachers' (PSTs') worst nightmare: responding to an angry student and responsible for the welfare of others. I spoke about the mad mental search through possible approaches and the weight of needing to make the right decision. I tried to articulate what I felt in that moment when I looked into the fiery eyes of the boy: certainly fear and confusion, and also empathy. I wondered whether it was the good will I had naturally built with the boy over the three weeks of my professional placement that had influenced his decision to back down. We were then asked to trade places and I stood in the shoes of the boy; anger brewing over a petty incident, and finally in that moment, the chair above my head and deciding what to do. In the boy's shoes a stream of muddled images jostled for space in my head: an early morning argument, a look of disdain from the year level coordinator, words in the novel swimming, taunts from the boy behind. I'd had enough and wanted out. I felt desperate, alone and judged. My response, as the boy, was to let the chair fall and my exhausted body crumbled to the floor.

I was studying to become a teacher and it was 1983. At that time La Trobe University in Victoria, Australia, offered a range of postgraduate Diplomas in Education for those who wanted to teach in secondary schools. The program was structured so that students could

choose between a number of courses and each one had a different emphasis depending on the interests and expertise of staff. The course I chose, Course D, had a focus on experiential learning and socio-dramatic approaches to teaching about teaching. It was taught by Professor Bernie Neville. Classes took place in a large, flexible space. There were chairs but no tables. Mostly, we sat on the floor. I don't recall reading anything. Or writing anything either. I completed my discipline studies in English and Media Studies and professional placement blocks in a range of schools, and for the rest of the time I was tucked away in Course D thinking deeply about teaching and learning interactions through experience. This was learning through imagination, embodiment, problem-solving, intuition, emotion, collaboration and deep reflection. It was learning, through experience, that the work of teachers is not about remembering single solutions but understanding that making informed, ethical and purposeful judgements in complex and challenging situations, is central.

We completed one major assignment in Course D and I remember it vividly. I was required to spend an extended period of time in a learning context outside of a school. I would observe and also participate. I chose to attend writing classes at the Footscray Women's Learning House, a neighbourhood program in a working class suburb for migrant women. The classes focused on writing autobiographical pieces which were published in a book at the end of the year. My assignment required me to capture what I had learned in a dramatic performance that would involve other students in the course. In the end the piece I created was also performed by the women at Parliament House in Canberra. I remember the performance well; it sits in my mind's eye as a vivid memory that intertwines the personal and professional. The practice of telling, writing and rewriting personal stories seemed central to a growing sense of empowerment, self-understanding and critical thinking in the women I closely observed. I developed through this and other experiences that year, a disposition to closely and critically attend to acts of learning and teaching and a fascination with complexity and possibility as well as a strong passion for working with people. As a young English teacher I continued to explore the use of writing not only as individual expression, but as a means, through critical pedagogies, of locating voice as participation (Kamler, 2001). Giving careful attention to experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and life history (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2014) continue to be central in my pedagogies as a teacher educator and to my focus as a researcher. In the current context of teacher education where measuring impact is linked to accreditation, I think frequently about the impact of my teacher education experience and how it shaped the teacher (and teacher educator) I would become.

According to Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis of 50,000 research papers, teacher education rates poorly on the scale of factors said to have an influence on students' achievements at school. In a list of 150 factors, teacher education rates 134 (p. 253); as influential, Hattie's study suggests, as diet, gender and distance education. In current times, teacher educators are increasingly required to demonstrate the impact of their programs. As in countries like the US and the UK, regulations have been intensified in Australia through national teaching standards and a tightening of program components through national accreditation (Gore, 2016). What Bernie Neville and his colleagues did at La Trobe University in the 1980s is not now possible. In the 1980s in Australia, teacher education was largely self-governed by the institution (Mayer et al, 2012). Now regarded as a 'policy problem' (Cochrane-Smith & Fries, 2005), teacher education is increasingly controlled by bureaucratic, standards-driven accountability processes. As the program leader of a Master of Teaching program I am intimately familiar with accreditation procedures which become more stringent each year. Through increasingly technical processes built upon a causal model of professional action (Biesta, 2010), where there is a focus on what is done in order to produce specific outcomes, we can lose sight of the integrity of experience and its rich complexity. This study uses personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) to

examine key tensions in contemporary teacher education related to increasing levels of regulation. I investigate, by examining my own teacher education experiences, the notions of freedom and constraint and the tenuous links to impact.

### **Auto/Biographical Narrative Research in Education**

The study of experience leads to the study of narrative and auto/biographical storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994); to methods that enable us to represent and examine what happens to us. Narrative, as a means of human sense-making, enables me to express and understand my most vivid and compelling experiences and to examine the “intersection between individual experience and the social context” (Griffiths & Macleod, 2008, p. 123). Bruner’s (1990) notion that we have an inborn tendency to tell and understand stories highlights the significance of experience-centred narrative research where narrative not only allows access to human experience but enables us to communicate powerfully as social beings who share and co-create constructions of what occurs in particular socio-cultural contexts. As Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2013) point out, narrative researchers often frame their research in this way in order to “see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change” (p. 2). In the context of living in the ‘what works’ age of educational research and policy there is a narrowing of what counts as evidence (Oancea & Pring, 2008) and a focus on research that primarily plays a technical role (Biesta, 2010, p. 44). This has led to a disregard of the complex, contextual experience of teaching and to what Hammersley (2002) suggests is a focus on solutions rather than understanding.

Auto/biographical research must be more than anecdote (Griffiths & Macleod, 2008). According to Griffiths and Macleod (2008, p. 136), auto/biographical research must take into account accuracy and sincerity, representativeness, representation, how the matter at hand is reframed, genre, literary quality and reflexivity. Ethnography that focuses on authorial voice and narrative occupies a “literary borderland” (Van Maanen, 2011, p. xiii) where a degree of experimentation is involved in representing social realities. It is most suited to research in teacher education which should aim to represent a complex view which resists simplification (Cochrane-Smith, Ell, Grudnoff, Haigh & Hill, 2014) and is tentative (Hammersley, 2002). Indeed, as Van Maanen (2011) suggests, we are probably more in need now than ever before of “concrete, sharp, complex, empathetic, and politically sensitive portraits” (p. xvii). Griffiths and Macleod (2008) argue that autobiographical educational research should have a significant influence on policy-making because it captures the practical knowledge of those who work in the field (p. 139). In teacher education in Australia, the voices of politicians painting a picture of education in crisis, dominate. Louden (2008) identified 100 state and national reviews into teacher education had been conducted in Australia between 1979 and 2006. The most recent review by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) produced the report *Action now: Classroom ready teachers* (2014) which includes 38 recommendations for immediate action. While dominant voices currently perpetuate the view that education is in crisis, there has been a marked absence of teacher and teacher educator voices represented in the public commentary and on review panels (Bahr & Mellor, 2016).

In response to this marked absence, in this paper I examine aspects of my personal experience as a teacher educator, particularly in relation to responding to various regulations imposed by government authorities. I began the paper by going back in time and constructing an autobiographical narrative based on memory, which enabled careful attention

to experience (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2014). In the next section I present a narrative account (Clandinin, 2013) of a dialogical interview I conducted with Professor Bernie Neville which focuses on his experience as a teacher educator at La Trobe University at the time I attended his classes. The conversation was audio taped and transcribed. Using Bernie's actual words, I carefully constructed a narrative account as an interim research text which was then read by Bernie and approved as an accurate representation of his "lived and told stories" (Clandinin, 2013). Bernie's story intersected with my own narrative memories in evocative ways. I was taken by the alignment between his intentions and my experience knowing that such alignment does not always exist in teaching and learning interactions.

Intrigued by the changes occurring in teacher education, particularly in relation to curriculum design, in this paper I also examine an interview that was conducted by two of my teacher educator colleagues with me as interviewee at the time I was leading the collaborative design of a new Master of Teaching (Secondary) program and working through multiple accreditation requirements. The interview, which was semi-structured and conversational was conducted in 2013 and captures a pastiche of stories related to my experience at that time. The interview was conducted as part of a larger collaborative research project, which was approved by the university's ethics committee, devoted to capturing the curriculum design process as the new Master of Teaching program took shape, was accredited and finally implemented. We tracked the design process as it occurred over the course of two years and the interview with me as Program Leader took place at the time the program was being accredited by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) who were applying new national regulations.

Using Bernie's account of practice and my own autobiographical memories as his student, I relocate the personal into a space where critical engagement with experience occurs (Kamler, 2001, p. 1). As I move to recent narratives told in my role as a teacher educator, there is not only a sense of "lives in motion" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 207) but of how our professional lives are increasingly shaped by external forces. Based on an identification of key threads in the interview conducted with me in 2013, I examine tensions related to curriculum design in teacher education in our contemporary context. Tension exists in the framing of assessment tasks away from more open and contextually relevant tasks to those bound more explicitly to standards and other priorities largely identified by politicians. A second tension relates to the challenge to create, in the day-to-day life of programs, coherence and connectedness when faced by an overcrowded curriculum and the requirement to respond, in technical ways, to a growing list of isolated imperatives. In the midst of working in an increasingly constrained space, I am also intrigued by the lack of interest accrediting authorities' show in the more profound pedagogical and curriculum design work that teacher educators do. In concluding, like Lingard (2009), I suggest more intelligent accountabilities are required to enable and value the sophisticated, creative and collaborative work teacher educators engage in; intelligent accountabilities, as O'Neill (2013) argues, which are based on trust and clear, jointly held educational aims.

### **Returning to my Experience as a Pre-Service Teacher**

Writing, for me, is also a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994). Returning, through narrative, to my own experience of teacher education has enabled me to reflect on my identity as a teacher, on what matters most to me and how I grapple with change and concerns. This perspective can only perhaps be gained over time. It seems strange that we ask PSTs, who haven't yet graduated, to create teaching philosophies and articulate, in sophisticated ways, what they do and why. I have found that clarity about practice reveals itself gradually, often

in surprising and unexpected moments – and is only possible when layers of sediment, gathered together and juxtaposed over time, can be seen and examined. Perhaps, only from this longitudinal perspective, can significant impact also be judged.

Looking back through a career in teaching that spans over 30 years, I believe my teacher education experience impacted significantly on the teacher I became, although I acknowledge that this may not have been the case for all PSTs in my cohort. While I say this with some confidence, I also hesitate in my use of such certain language knowing that some will want proof; proof that is virtually impossible to provide. The term ‘impact’ as it is used in relation to evidence-based practice in education implies a linear, causal relationship between teaching and students’ learning (Biesta, 2010). It also suggests that there are shared understandings of what counts as learning (Diez, 2010). It demands a link between investment and outcome and shows an enhanced emphasis on numbers in educational policy (Lingard, Creagh & Vass, 2012). Of course a person’s professional learning cannot be tracked and quantified in such a way; but when I look back at my first couple of years of teaching, I believe I was ready. In my first year I was ready to tackle teaching outside of my field and to teach Drama in an abandoned portable classroom (away from the main centre of the school) with fixed furniture and a group of year 9 students. I was ready to deal with the excitable and often naughty behaviour of two year 7 English classes in a large multi-cultural school. I was ready to teach year 11 English in my first year and year 12 English in my second. I was ready to design a new course in Creative Writing in my second year and to lead an English faculty of over 20 staff in my third year. I was ready to mount an argument with other colleagues against a principal who demanded female staff wear dresses because, according to him, some of us looked like elephants from behind when we walked down corridors to classrooms. I was ready, from day one, to support students who had challenging home lives to find joy and relevance in learning at school. I was also ready, in these early days, because I saw purpose, creativity and dignity in teaching, to devote myself to a life-long career in the profession.

Wanting to check how my memories sat with actualities from the past, I contacted Bernie Neville who has now retired as a teacher educator, and arranged to meet with him to discuss his teaching during the 1980s. I met Bernie at the Royal Society of Victoria (RSV) in Melbourne where my university has meeting rooms. When he walked through the door I almost didn’t recognise him. He moved more slowly and had lost weight, he looked older, but when he smiled I saw the man I knew as a student over thirty years ago. Something in his person, a mingling of kindness, honesty and a relaxed sense that he had all the time in the world for you, had not changed. We walked through the library at the RSV, all dark Victorian timber and leather bound books and it seemed like a strange post-modern joke that we were here to talk about change as though it occurred in objective, linear, neatly arranged chunks. We sat in a non-descript meeting room that contained one table, two chairs and a Fujitsu air conditioner and prompted by my questions, Bernie talked about his career as a teacher educator and his thoughts about changes occurring in the profession.

*My entry into educational theory and my PhD study was based on Carl Rogers’ work and the relationship between the student/teacher and the quality of learning. It was empirical research which overwhelmingly showed the notion that the better the relationship the higher quality of learning. It wasn’t just between teacher and student, it was between student and student as well. People claimed to learn more from people who they independently categorised as more empathic and respectful of them. It was so obvious it didn’t seem worth saying. That was one thing: the importance of the student/ teacher relationship and the learning climate, the interpersonal climate in the group.*

*The other two prongs in my practice are imagination and experiential learning. Starting with peoples' concrete experience is what I've always done. We played out critical episodes from teaching practice. Or we'd go into a school and shadow a particular student all day and come back and be that student and be interviewed by other people. Another thing we did was ask students to paint a picture of their teaching round. And to make it as abstract as they could. Then you'd pair up with someone else and talk about it as though it was your own experience.*

*We didn't have content. We only had process. The content derived. There was a sense that people left you alone back then. And we left them alone. It's really about control now. They don't trust people. I did that Dip Ed for 20 years or so and it was about the best thing I've ever done. I got an enormous amount of satisfaction and it was exciting. We didn't have content but there was always something exciting happening.*

*The first session was usually about transformative teaching and transformative learning; something that changed you. I asked students to look back and find something that had actually changed them in some way. We'd get into groups and tell stories to one another. Don't discuss, describe I would say. Then we'd choose a story and play it out for the whole group. Some of them are strongly in my memory. A couple of Palestinian refugees played out this thing where they were trying to enrol at university and were treated in quite a racist way. You could see everyone getting a bit uncomfortable. At the end we talked about where this happened and they said that it happened in Saudi Arabia. It could just as easily have been here. There's another story that has stayed with me. We started off with a drama exercise and there was a Thai girl in the group. When she stood in the centre of the circle she started using an imaginative rifle to shoot everyone. She burst into tears and then made her way back to the circle. Eventually we asked her about what was happening and she said that when she stood in circle it made her remember being in a government demonstration in Thailand where some of her friends were shot. It's bringing tears to my eyes just thinking about it. Now she's a professor of Psychology in Thailand.*

*All of this innovative stuff has gone. We had a group of staff who used to meet under the banner of holistic education in the early 2000s and they've all gone off to other places now. They couldn't get research funds. They wouldn't get supported for promotion. So I don't know. I imagine we're heading to a place that's not as interesting. I'm sure, if we live long enough though, we'll head back to a people-centred focus.*

*The people who are responsible for these moves aren't educators. They are accountants and business people. They think that this is the best way to do things. They are motivated by where we sit on the lists and the whole principle that when something isn't working you just have to do it harder. Instead of doing something else.*

*Quality is about caring about kids. But that's not enough. Teachers need to be aware of what's going on in themselves and in their students. They use their imagination and stimulate the imagination of the kids. They know stuff. They trust the children and know how to get the children to trust them. They don't patronise, whatever age they're working with. They are aware of the games people play in order to avoid getting to something real and meaningful. Kids collude in some of the games that teachers play. We're playing the numbers game in teacher education. We know it doesn't work. The ranking game. That*

*doesn't work. It doesn't improve anything. But things aren't going to change because people who are making decisions haven't been in classrooms.*

Bernie argues in his book *Educating Psyche: Imagination, emotion and the unconscious in learning* (2014, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) that indirect and experiential methods enable learning that is more permanent because amongst other things, they involve emotion, conscious and unconscious processes, and dialogue (p. 19). He suggests that “instruction directed at complete ignorance and disinterest raises no ripples at all” (Neville, 2014, p. 19) and argues that learning begins in the experiences of the learner. Effective teachers, he suggests, ensure that through spontaneous explorations, young people develop “the knowledge and skills that will enable them to appreciate and contribute to that culture” (p. 15). As a teacher educator Bernie designed carefully constructed social experiences that enabled us to engage holistically in significant educational moments. Another layer in his teaching was the probing of that experience, not through telling, but through questioning. He enabled exploration through deep understandings of learning and by skilfully knowing when to foster connection-making. There was a deep respect for the learner modelled at all times; faith and trust that people would flourish because they had so much to give. I think again: what was the impact of this way of teaching on my ability to teach? And is it even possible to answer this question? I came to postgraduate study in education with deep understandings and skills within my discipline formed not only through university study, but through a lifetime of passionate immersion in reading and writing. I had family members who taught. I went to a western suburban state high school where I mostly had passionate teachers who were free to experiment and at a time when there was little competition to enter university. In some ways Bernie's teaching confirmed notions that already partly existed in me, however, what his course did was extend, clarify and embed, in meaningful ways, understandings about the social and experiential nature of authentic learning and the need for teachers to be thinkers. I saw Bernie model, daily in his practice, dispositions for thinking that focused on imagination, relationship building, curiosity, problem-solving and emotional intelligence. I came to understand, more than anything else, through my experience of teacher education, that it was dispositions such as these that were central to effective teaching. And I was excited by the prospect of establishing a career in a profession where these ways of thinking were called upon and developed in ongoing, challenging ways over time.

### **My Recent Work as a Teacher Educator Juggling Program Design with Accountability Demands**

In 2013, as a teacher educator, I was interviewed by two colleagues at a time when our new Master of Teaching (Secondary) program was being accredited by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). As we phased out the one-year Graduate Diploma of Teaching (GDE) qualification, a Masters level program offered us the opportunity to create an extended experience which could potentially better prepare PSTs for the complexity of teaching. Ours was one of the first programs to be accredited under national regulations developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). It was also one of the first programs in our regional university to be aligned with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) launched by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in 2012. Prior to the program being approved by external agencies, it needed the support of three groups within the university: the School of Education Programs Committee, the university's Curriculum Committee and the university's Academic Board. At the time, as part of an OLT National Teaching Fellowship, Lloyd (2013) conducted an audit of agencies impacting on course design and suggested that there were a number of tensions



created by multiple agencies seeking authority. Lloyd's (2013) analysis suggests inherent challenges for course designers who aim to "create coherent bodies of knowledge and practice" so that students are prepared as scholars and practitioners (p. 74). An examination of the interview, where I was encouraged to narrate my experience of program design and accreditation, highlights some of the key challenges and tensions I experienced in the practice of juggling the processes of design and collaboration with the need to meet external accountability demands.

As a team of teacher educators and school teachers we began the design process of the new Master of Teaching (Secondary) program not with program and teaching standards outlined by external agencies, but with the question: *What sort of teachers do we want our graduates to become?* Based on our own extensive and broad knowledge and experience, we brainstormed ideas individually and then clustered ideas into categories looking closely for interconnections, gaps and effective ways of articulating what we knew to be important. What we noticed in the responses was that our notions of good teaching had a focus on capacities like the ability to learn, collaborate, reflect, think critically, observe, lead, imagine, strategize, communicate, empathise, problem solve and so on and that these capacities seemed just as important as knowledge and skills related to learning, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and working with young people. In the interview I spoke about our starting point in the design process and how a focus on building capacities was largely absent from the accreditation requirements.

*We decided to start with a dreaming process, to start with the big picture of the sort of teachers we are trying to develop through the program ... I remember us re-clustering and rethinking over time and changing our minds about certain things. Those discussions were very organic, but there was also debate and lots of heartfelt personal stuff in there too: peoples' personal and professional histories were embedded in those conversations.... I think it was a powerful thing to do. What's interesting is that the stuff around building personal capacities is not what's required in relation to accreditation. They don't ask for it to be documented ... it's not present visibly or explicitly in any of the policy material because it can't easily be measured I suppose. For us the personal capacities or qualities are important and we want them to sit within the design of assessment tasks and learning experiences.*

Even though it is not required, we have independently decided to focus on this area in our work as teacher educators and have come to call the capacities we referred to at that time 'thinking dispositions'. We have now designed a Dispositions for Teaching Framework which informs all levels of what we do in our program and research projects are linked to examining the activation and assessment of these dispositions in carefully constructed school partnership initiatives. While we consider this work to be worthy in relation to the preparation of PSTs for teaching, there will be no place to report on it in relation to future re-accreditation because it sits outside of and in extension to the standards required by AITSL.

A key frustration expressed throughout the interview is that matters of quality related to pedagogy, moral purpose, and people-centred innovations linked to community are not highly valued. As Luke (2013) and others suggest (Ladwig, 2010), policy discussions and accreditation requirements are slipping away from matters of value related to education and its purpose toward politically driven agendas focused narrowly on performance. While we understand that "learning to think, to learn, and to innovate requires more than orderly implementation of externally mandated regulations," our practices in relation to policy and regulation, suggest otherwise (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 48). This contradiction between what we know and what we do, creates confusion and frustration during the process of preparing for accreditation. In the interview I discuss some of the key components interwoven into the

fabric of our program which largely sit outside of the compliance measures: a focus on practitioner inquiry; PSTs, teacher educators and teachers working together in professional learning communities; critically reflective practice; embedded, on-site school partnership activities; emotions and relationship building; autobiography and self-study. In the interview I say:

*One of the things that I was really interested to see was that a lot of the ideas and practices in the program that were really meaningful to us and linked to the nature of what our program is really about weren't required by VIT. I remember saying to a staff member at VIT, there's a whole load of stuff here that's our story and that's linked to important features of the program that we believe are examples of effective teacher education practice - and they are not required or directly relevant to what's expected. The staff member at VIT said, well the standards are a baseline. We're not trying to assess the worth of your program, she said, only whether it meets base standards. I find that really hard to understand and accept. What's the point of doing all this work for accreditation when the only body who collects data from all universities doesn't care about what happens beyond meeting, at a base level, the standards?*

A key priority for us was to develop our already strong partnerships with schools and to enhance theory/practice connections through meaningful, contextualised learning experiences that had a degree of openness and flexibility to allow PSTs to be responsive to their own interests and needs and to a school's culture. The accreditation system, with its aim to ensure that certain bodies of knowledge and skills are embedded in programs, makes designing assessment tasks based on learning experiences that are open and responsive increasingly difficult. I discuss this tension in the interview:

*There was a time when it dawned on me that having to demonstrate that all students were learning certain things meant creating fairly tightly framed assessment tasks. The power of this didn't actually dawn on me until I started writing courses.... The term 'demonstrate' was more loosely defined in the past. You could demonstrate something was in your program through your content, through it being mentioned within your knowledge and skills. Now that's not enough because it's not considered to be 'evidence'..... The assessment tasks become very influential... There's an implication that what is collected from students, assessed and graded has a higher status than pedagogy, curriculum and formative assessment.... Let me give you an example. We had a range of assessment tasks in our old GDE course that provided rich opportunities for the students to do things within the school context. One example is a youth festival our students organised linked to the youth culture course.... Our students would spend time in a particular school which has high numbers of disadvantaged kids and lots of kids opting out of school in years 10 and 11.... Our students go there and run focus group interviews identifying concerns and questions that kids have around schooling and around their lives more generally. We equip our students to ask questions and run activities with kids and to get conversations happening. They identify issues and these become their research questions. Our students conduct an inquiry related to the concerns and design a workshop for a full-day conference. Kids in the school opt into workshops. You know, it's a fantastic thing that starts from listening to kids and moves from there. Tasks like these enable the building of knowledge and skills around wellbeing and schooling - and they also build those important capacities like leadership, empathy, communication etc. The students share with one another too. Some develop expertise in a particular area and through the connections that students have*

*with one another, they share that expertise. We had to cut this task out of the new course because there wasn't room for it because there were more discrete bodies of knowledge that had to be taught in that course – and had to be demonstrated through formal assessment. The festival task doesn't ensure that everybody is developing the same knowledge ... as if that could ever be assured.*

High-quality learning must be the goal for any level of education and one of the barriers to this suggest Kirby & Lawson (2012) is overcrowded curricula (p. 368). An overcrowded curriculum can affect the integration of ideas and the level of understanding gained of key concepts (Kirby & Lawson, 2012). Kirby and Lawson (2012) suggest another issue related to adding new information to old: sometimes the 'new' and 'old' can be in conflict which leads, they suggest, to "separate representations" and "incomplete or inaccurate understandings" (p. 369). A key challenge for us as teacher educators is to ensure, in ongoing ways, that the interconnections and principles built into our programs are understood by students, teacher educators and school partners and that these principles live in dynamic ways in practice. A key tension that program designers grapple with is how to avoid overcrowding and ensure that student learning is not compromised in the midst of being required to include more.

Highly regulated accreditation processes foster a design process that deals with knowledge and skills in discrete chunks. While we aim to teach PSTs how effective learning, in all its complexity, occurs, our curriculum is increasingly chunked into discrete topics so that we can show clear evidence that we are covering the required bases. It becomes increasingly difficult to model and engage in sustained conversation about constructivist approaches and evidence-informed decision-making when curriculum is shaped in this way. The discourse of standards is frequently taken up in curriculum and policy documentation so that clear lines can be made between the regulators' requirements and course outlines. Because we see what language allows us to see, term selection and the placement, frequency and prominence of words impact on thinking and action (Bullough, 2014). Using terminology taken directly from policy documentation (eg 'classroom ready', 'quality assurance', 'transparent selection processes') makes auditing more streamlined and the use of tables and checklists easier. Performance-oriented language such as this, Bullough (2014) argues, devalues "processes and relationships in favour of products and things" and, due to "fear of human agency" places an emphasis on what ought to be done (p. 191). Not only is abidance to official knowledge (Apple, 1990) increasingly expected as we align our teaching to national and state curriculum documentation; but the impact of a rigid and fragmented system of accountability around program standards, means that curriculum design becomes a stilted, artificial process driven by practical rather than conceptual and moral concerns. While my colleagues and I started the process of program and curriculum design by dreaming and with collaboratively created constructions of key concepts, what is shown in the interview transcript is that as we move through the lengthy accreditation process and gradually comply with the requirements of each authority using their mandated templates, the program is reshaped and there is less space for the design process to be collaborative. Some of this reshaping occurs during the process as, in good will, we attempt to align ourselves to standards while still trying to faithfully hold onto the innovations and the uniqueness inherent our program. Another layer of reshaping occurs once feedback is received from the authority who will not approve the program until requested changes are made. At this point, as a Program Leader forced to comply with tight deadlines and busy with a range of other responsibilities, I make changes to the program independently knowing that discussion is pointless.

Despite my frustration with time-consuming instrumental compliance and accountability processes that do not appear to be strongly linked to principles of good

practice in teacher education, the interview shows me to be largely optimistic. I am excited by the opportunity to create a program from scratch using what we know from research and experience and building on our school partnership initiatives. I have a real desire to share our vision of possibility with others.

*There's still flexibility around what we can do here and there's always a group of people who are willing to dive into things; there's potential to do something really interesting that can be shared with people outside of the university context .... A program ultimately works the way it does because of the people in it, whether they're the students or the teaching staff. They create the experience.*

Our Head of School at the time reminded me that teachers will always do what is important for their students no matter what external authorities require. Once you're over the accreditation hurdles, you go on with the real work. This has largely been the case in our situation. Since accreditation, amongst other things, we have expanded our partnership work, designed a framework for activating and evaluating dispositions for teaching, and embedded diverse opportunities for educators and PSTs to learn collaboratively in professional learning communities through practitioner inquiry. However, in more recent times and since the completion of the latest national review into teacher education conducted by TEMAG (2014) there are a raft of new requirements linked to accreditation related to selection of candidates, measuring impact, and assuring that PSTs are classroom ready through externally moderated performance assessment. As re-accreditation comes up for us in the next year, we are beginning now to position ourselves, and therefore, our program, to meet more highly rigid and demanding regulations.

### **That was Then, This is Now**

Returning to the level of freedom Bernie Neville and his teacher educator colleagues had at La Trobe University in the eighties is not likely. Globalisation and the ascent of neo-liberal ideology over the last 30 years or so has seen the promotion of marketization, competition, regulation and individualisation in schooling (Lingard, 2009). It seems unlikely, as educators continue to grapple with ways to build a strong profession that can meet global challenges that a focus on bureaucratic controls will go away. That said, Neville's comment that "all that innovative stuff has gone" can be contested. Despite the increasing pressure of external policymakers both in Australia and the US to influence teacher education (Pullin, 2017), teacher educators continue to create new and improved approaches for preparing contemporary graduates through experiences that are less fragmented, more closely connected to young people and schools, and which produce teachers who are highly informed, strategic and disposed to continuous improvement (Gore, 2016). Darling-Hammond and Leiberhan (2012) suggest that a central challenge for educators internationally is to create robust processes for self-regulation and "to learn from each other about what matters and what works in different contexts" (p.169). This is a call for 'intelligent' forms of accountability.

Accountability in education has always been fundamental to professionalism and integrity; we should not confuse accountability with compliance (Spady, 2001, p. 117). Sahlberg (2010) argues that while it is important that teachers and students have clear responsibilities related to their work in schools, it is also important to make a distinction between intelligent and non-intelligent accountability policies (p. 48). There needs to be congruence, Sahlberg (2010) suggests between teaching for a knowledge society that understands the value of thinking, deep learning and innovation and the reforms required from teachers and students (p.47). Lingard (2009) argues for intelligent accountabilities that

do the following: acknowledge the broad purposes of schooling, reject the view that improved results in high stakes tests demonstrate improved schooling and a socially just system, reject the “top-down, one-way gaze upon teachers as the sole source and solution to all schooling problems”, recognise the importance of teacher judgement and effective pedagogies as ways to enhance learning for students, and recognise the need to address poverty in order to address inequity in educational outcomes (p. 14). High stakes, test-based accountability systems, Sahlberg (2010) suggests shifts the focus away from worthwhile learning, risk-taking and creativity (p. 55), the sort of learning I encountered in my own experience of teacher education. As we in Australia continue to follow in the footsteps of our US counterparts (Lingard et al, 2016) and move closer to high-stakes performance assessments in teacher education and judging teacher education programs against the impact graduate teachers have on student achievement, we risk moving further away from intelligent forms of accountability. In such an environment it is important for teacher educators to be optimistic, imaginative, critical and caring as they continue to construct, reconstruct, research and identify powerful teacher education experiences; and to foster and advocate the dispositions enculturated in me in my own teacher education experiences.

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