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Teacher educators mediating curricular reform: anticipating the Australian Curriculum.

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Abstract: Many education systems are experiencing a re-scaling and consolidation of governance through rolling national agendas of standardisation and centralisation. This paper considers the case of Australia as it moves towards implementing its first national curriculum, to explore how teacher educators plan to retain pedagogical space for debate, diversity and contestation of such systemic curricular reform. This paper reports on an interview study conducted with nine teacher educators across the four curriculum areas included in the first wave of the Australian Curriculum: English, Science, Mathematics and History. The analysis reveals how teacher educators reported professional dilemmas around curricular design, and planned to resolve such dilemmas between the anticipated changes and their preferences for what might have been. While different curricular areas displayed different patterns of professional dilemma, the teacher educators are shown to construe their role as one of active curriculum mediators, who, in recontextualising curricular reforms, will use the opportunity to reinsert both residualised and emergent alternatives in their students' professional value sets. The study also identifies a new set of dilemmas

emerging around the politicisation and standardisation of curriculum,
and its impact on the teaching profession and teacher educators.

Introduction

It is perhaps axiomatic that teacher educators will share their critique of any curriculum they are preparing their students to deliver and shape their students' professional value sets, this work so taken for granted that it need not be explicated. This paper takes another approach, and argues that the space and capacity to do so may be shrinking in the emerging conditions of more centralised governance of education, and standardisation of knowledge. It reports on an interview study that explored how teacher educators across different disciplines anticipate the work that must be done to produce critical professionals to teach the new Australian Curriculum. Using a synthesis of Bernstein's theory of recontextualisation and Berlak and Berlak's language of dilemmas, it documents how and why teacher educators aim to mediate curricular reform in their work, and identifies new professional dilemmas in the current politicised climate.

While the US is coming to terms with a state-driven movement towards standardised curriculum, Australia is coming to terms with reconfigured governance through top-down curriculum reform, as it prepares to implement its first national school curriculum in 2013. The newly constituted Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has thus far developed the first series of curricular documents for the four learning areas of English, History, Mathematics and Science for the pre-school year to Year 10. Constitutionally, schooling has been the responsibility of eight individual States and Territories, each operating their own curriculum and associated assessment (see Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011, for more detail). However, the idea of a national curriculum in Australia, that is, a single curriculum implemented consistently throughout the country, has been on and off the federal political agenda for at least two decades (Reid, 2005; Seddon, 2001). Arguments against a national system have seen two previous attempts at a national curriculum fail, largely due to the state's and

territory's fear of losing their autonomy (Grundy, 2005). This current attempt has similarly attracted vociferous debate, with powerful lobby groups conducting their critique, conjecture and influence over draft documents through the public media (for example, Ferrari, 2010; Healy, 2010).

Teacher educators, their work and their expertise more generally have been the subject of public ridicule in the conservative press. For example, in 2008 Brendan Nelson, then the conservative Leader of the Opposition, accused education faculties in Australian universities, of being 'little more than quasi-sociology departments' (AAP Australian National News Wire, 1 September 2008) with low entry standards, lacking any rigour, while teacher educators themselves were considered to lack classroom experience. His preferred solution was to spread teacher 'training' between disciplinary faculties and seconded classroom practitioners as the solution, thus bypassing the teacher educator completely. Snyder (2008) reviews the 'literacy wars' played out in Australia's media which stoked a moral panic around school children's literacy while caricaturing teacher educators' expertise as 'educababble' (Donnelly, quoted in Snyder, 2008, p. 60). Cochran-Smith and Demers (2008) report similar 'critical and sometimes hostile perspectives about collegiate teacher education' in the US political realm, with the result that teacher education is now 'highly publicized and politicized' (p.267).

With such public smear campaigns as context, Brennan (2009) describes three recent 'waves' of change in educational governance in Australia that have produced the current state of play, 'gaining overall control of the norms and operating practices of the education sector' (p.341). The first in the early 1980s was characterised by increasing managerialism at the school level. In the second phase from the mid-1980s, the focus shifted to 'consolidating a national role in education' (p.342). The Hobart and Adelaide declarations of shared goals are evidence of this growing national coherence (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1989, 1999). Brennan characterises the third and current phase of governance, since the 1990s, as 'codification of knowledge' (p. 342). This refers to increasing standardisation of knowledge, including: a national curriculum; national standardised tests; 'national standards for the teaching profession, and policy to develop national accreditation of teacher education programs according to national standards' (p.342).

This suite of convergent agendas re-scaling governance has parallels elsewhere, such as England's National Curriculum. In the United States, its decentralised education systems and deep-seated suspicion of federal control 'makes it much more political' (Schmidt et al., 2005, p.526).

Nevertheless, the *No Child Left Behind* legislation used funding mechanisms to progress a federal agenda in schooling reform, and the escalating adoption of Common Core State Standards across US states (Porter et al., 2010), and their 'new generation assessment' (Darling-Hammond, 2011) are aggregating and snowballing curricular reforms on a larger scale.

In addition, federal governments have started experimenting with school-based teacher education (as in *Teach for America, Teach for Australia*), potentially minimising and devaluing any interface between the university-based teacher educator and the pre-service teacher. Zeichner (2009) considers this 'deregulation' agenda to be circulating a caricature of teacher education in higher education settings as 'indoctrinating students into student-centred teaching methods ... and overly concerned with political correctness' (p.14). Their solution of alternative fast track certification of teachers favours content knowledge and verbal skills over any critical professional sensibility. What experience or expertise the teacher educator may have to offer is thus dismissed or devalued (see also Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008). As politicised centres consolidate more power over education sectors on a larger scale, we need to understand those spaces of leverage that remain and how they might serve to reinvigorate and inform curricular debates. The role of the teacher educator as curriculum mediators should no longer be taken for granted.

In the public domain, the current effort towards a national curriculum for Australia has been justified in terms of five key imperatives: global integration and globalisation; the business-related need for Asia-literacy; technological change and ICTs; environmental pressures; and population mobility (National Curriculum Board, 2008). These justifications unapologetically reference the discourse of new capitalism (Sennett, 2006) making curriculum reform no less than a matter of national economic competitiveness. Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.16) consider

this a global trend: ‘in most countries now, economic restructuring has become the metapolicy framing proposals for education policy reform.’ With such high stakes, discussions around curriculum reform elicit fierce competition between the ideologies and interests of different stakeholders. The questions of ‘which’ and ‘whose’ knowledge, skills and values are to be legitimated in any curriculum become a subject of social and political debate (Bernstein, 2000; Levin 2008), and such debate will be further heightened when existing local orthodoxies of State departments and their vested interests are at risk (Deng & Luke, 2008). Though trying to work towards a national consensus, these rolling federalist agendas have increasingly politicised educational matters and mobilised diverse interest groups and alliances. For example, the Australian Curriculum Coalition was formed as a combined voice of key national education associations, including principal associations across sectors, academic associations, educational research associations and deans of education faculties. As a coalition, they issued a public letter late October 2010 raising concerns with the pace of reform, the need for stronger theoretical coherence, less curriculum crowding, equity considerations and other matters.

The prospect of a national curriculum has thus created a historically rare space of possibility to rethink school curriculum, and many groups will have an opinion about what should or shouldn’t be included, including teacher educators. Periods of curriculum reform offer an opportunity for teacher educators to reflect upon what of the new curriculum they will pass on, mitigate or absorb in their teacher preparation programs. The current debates around Australia’s curriculum thus provide a rare opportunity to research teacher educators’ wants, fears and agency in curricular reform. To this end, this paper reports on an interview study with nine Australian teacher educators preparing pre-service teachers in the curriculum areas involved in the first wave of the Australian Curriculum – English, Science, Mathematics and History. This paper will firstly review empirical literature regarding teacher educators as players in curricular reform. It will then present the methodological design and analytical

process. The analysis reveals how teacher educators described professional dilemmas around curricular selection, sequence and pacing, and sought to resolve such dilemmas between the anticipated changes and their preferences for what might or should have been. While the different curricular areas foreground different types of dilemma, the teacher educators construe their role as one of active curriculum mediators, who, in recontextualising curricular reforms, have the opportunity and intention to critically shape their students' professional value sets. The conclusion reflects on how this space could be more politically mobilised to counter the complacent convergence of standardisation agendas.

Literature Review

Teacher educators in Australia are well positioned to act as both contributors to, and critics of, curricular reform, given their expertise and relative independence of operational aspects of educational systems. However, there is limited empirical literature to date exploring teacher educators' roles or influence in such processes. Previous studies have more typically asked questions around the role of classroom teachers in curricular reform, using observations and interviews to explore teachers' implementation of new curriculum. Hacker and Rowe's (1997) study in UK secondary science classrooms found teachers compromised on the new national curriculum's design to teach the mandated content in the time allocated. Spillane's (1999) study of maths teachers' practice in the US identified 'zones of enactment' (p. 143), being the 'space where reform initiatives are encountered by the world of practitioners ... in which teachers notice, construe, construct and operationalise the instructional ideas advocated by reformers' (p.144). Neves & Morais's (2001) Bernsteinian study of educational reforms in Portugal similarly identified teachers' limited but active 'space of change' (p. 451). Swann and Brown's (1997) study of the implementation of UK's national curriculum found that its hurried implementation contributed to minimal change to teachers' practice. Jephcote and Davies' (2004) study of two British national curriculum bodies explored the relations between meso-level (e.g. government agencies) and micro-level (e.g. teachers and schools) actors in terms of their influence over curricular interpretations. This collection of studies confirm that

curriculum implementation is never a straight-forward process; teachers will mediate how the curriculum is enacted in individual classrooms (Ball & Cohen, 1996).

The teacher education curriculum has long been an object of study and debate over preparing teachers as professionals, apprentices or change agents (Zeichner & Flessner, 2009), not just 'cookie cutters' (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 5). There is however little parallel exploration of teacher educators' work addressing school curriculum change per se and how they prepare the next generation of teachers for new curricula yet to be operationalised. This is despite the context of rolling reforms, growing public scrutiny of their work and increased accountability for producing highly qualified and competent teachers (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008). Teacher educators have been recognised as having their own 'zones of enactment' (Spillane, 1999) or 'space of change' (Neve & Morais, 2001, p.451). Ensor (2004) used a Bernsteinian frame to study the influence of teacher education on the reproduction of pedagogy in the classroom in South Africa. Ensor found that different approaches to teacher preparation impacted on the pedagogy that pre-service teachers chose to eventually use in their classrooms. Morais, Neves and Afonso (2005) also used Bernsteinian theory in an action research study to explore the role that teacher educators can play in the professional development of in-service teachers. While addressing the larger effect of teacher educators' work on the profession, neither study specifically addressed the role that teacher educators play in mediating curriculum per se. In contrast, Johnston (2007) used participant observation, surveys and semi-structured interviews to research the role of teacher educators in a new 'Study of Society and Environment' (SOSE) curriculum in Tasmania. She describes a more provocative role for teacher educators in curricular matters, arguing that teacher educators need to develop a critical awareness of curricular discourses as a competence in pre-service teachers and 'the need for ongoing interrogation and critical analysis of blueprints by teacher education students' (p. 362). This argument would scope a more provocative role for teacher educators in curricular reform.

The limited literature related to teacher educators' role in educational reform suggests that teacher educators have the opportunity and expertise to mediate curricular reform as it works its way through

the field of teacher education, as well as through schools. The political complexities of the current curriculum reform in Australia warrant further research given its implications for state and teacher autonomy, and we would argue, the relative freedom of the teacher educator, which has been largely taken for granted till now.

Conceptual Frame

This study will use Bernstein's theoretical concept of recontextualisation to understand processes of curricular interpretation across fields by a variety of players. This will be synthesised with selected aspects of Berlak & Berlak's (1981) typology of professional dilemmas, and Labaree's (1997) account of historically-competing curricular values to understand the surplus of alternative frames and generative potential that teacher educators have at their disposal.

Recontextualisation and its discursive gap

Bernstein offers a framework for understanding how knowledge is translated, distributed and evaluated in pedagogic processes (Singh, 2002). His conceptualisation of the 'pedagogic device' allows macro scale systems to articulate with micro scale classroom interactions, to theorise 'the distribution of, and constraints upon, the various forms of consciousness' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 25). Of particular interest to this study, the recontextualisation principle inherent in any pedagogic discourse 'selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order and orderings' (Bernstein, 1990, p. 184). That is, recontextualisation's potential can account for how differing curricular interpretations diversify as a curricular knowledge is passed from one group of curricular agents to the next. Agents within the pedagogic device are understood to constitute two distinct fields: the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF) 'created and dominated by the state and its selected agents and ministries' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33) and the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF) being constituted by 'pedagogues in schools and colleges, and departments of education' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33). In Australia, the ORF now includes ACARA as well as the state education departments, while the PRF includes the micro contexts of curricular enactment, for example, teachers

in their classrooms. While the ORF recontextualises knowledge from its site of production by selecting and sequencing it within the official school curriculum, the PRF can similarly exercise its own degree of agency and discretion in how the official curriculum is ultimately interpreted and enacted in local settings. When curricular knowledge is relocated from the ORF to the PRF, it is said to have undergone a recontextualisation. Figure 1 shows this process as arrows between fields. In these terms, Brennan's (2009) waves of 'consolidation' and 'codification' in educational governance could be reinterpreted as a re-scaling of the ORF up from state to a national scale, accruing and centralising power, with perhaps less autonomy for the PRF under the various standardised curricular, assessment and teacher registration agendas.

To consider how teacher educators contribute to the distribution of knowledge, the present study would situate teacher educators within a secondary PRF which operates between the ORF and primary PRF, as indicated in Figure 1. While teacher educators have had opportunities to contribute to the development of the new curricular documents (indicated by the dashed arrow from PRF2 to ORF), and maintain an independent link to the field of knowledge production, they also have the opportunity to interpret and recontextualise the new curriculum in how they present it to pre-service teachers. Thus the model helps distinguish the similar yet different positioning of teachers in PRF1 and teacher educators in PRF2. Given the new scenario of a nationalised ORF, this study is interested in how teacher educators view their capacity to 'disorder' (Singh, 2002, p. 573) or disrupt its agenda of standardisation in their work of recontextualisation.

<<INSERT FIGURE 1>>

Figure 1. Teacher educators as an additional recontextualising field

To further explicate this 'space of change' (Neve & Morais, 2001, p.451), this study will focus on Bernstein's concept of the discursive gap inherent in the recontextualisation rule of pedagogic discourse:

(In) taking a discourse from its original site of effectiveness and moving it to a pedagogic site, a gap or rather a space is created. As the discourse moves from its original site to its new positioning as pedagogic discourse, a transformation takes place ... because every time a discourse moves from one position to another, there is a space in which ideology can play. (Bernstein, 2000, p. 31)

The discursive gap thus offers a space of possibility in which alternative interpretations, discourses and values can intrude. In the case of the Australian Curriculum, the discursive gap opens because of the indirect relationship between ACARA and teacher educators. Through their local process of curricular selection and de-selection, teacher educators' own interpretations can thus be presented to agents and legitimated in the next field along the chain of recontextualisations. This study is thus interested in how teacher educators intend to exploit this discursive gap in their recontextualisation of the Australian Curriculum.

Dilemmas and patterns of resolution

Berlak and Berlak's (1981) work was a response to similar periods of public debate in the UK, US and Canada around the nature and content of schooling and distils a typology of dilemmas 'for examining the macro in the micro, the larger issues that are embedded in the particulars of the everyday schooling experience' (p.4). They describe three sets of generic dilemmas: the Control set (over the 'locus and extent of control over students'); the Curriculum set ('contradictions and controversies over transmission of knowledge'); and the Societal set ('contradictions in schooling pattern related to equality, justice and social relations') (pp. 135-136). Berlak and Berlak further describe how teachers develop 'patterns of resolution,' both exceptional and dominant, which can be 'consistent with one or the other horns of the dilemma' (p133). With this 'dilemma language', Berlak and Berlak aimed to overcome simplistic readings of educational complexity, and to account for both the constraints on educators and their capacity to contribute to change. By bringing together Bernstein's concept of recontextualisation and Berlak and Berlak's dilemma language, we offer a

richer analytical vocabulary to describe both the process, dimensions and scope available for educator's agency and preferences by means of the discursive gap.

For the purposes of this analysis, this paper will focus on Berlak and Berlak's curricular set of dilemmas, though it is acknowledged that these are only part of their frame and necessarily entangled with other dilemmas. Table 1 summarises the four curricular dilemmas from this set which were evident in the data, and will be exemplified in the analysis below.

<<INSERT TABLE 1>>

Teachers and teacher educators alike can experience dilemmas around these dimensions when required to address a new curriculum (Campbell, 2008). Teacher educators will orient pre-service teachers to a curriculum and its relationship to what has gone before. Like teachers, they may encounter some degree of dilemma if the stipulated design does not reflect the educators' own professional beliefs about what should be taught (Tom, 1984), what constitutes good curricular design, and what education is for, and will form their patterns of resolution of the professional dilemmas they encounter. Teacher educators' patterns of resolution can thus insert and legitimate their own professional values in the discursive gap as they recontextualise the official curriculum through PRF2.

Competing curricular value sets

To further elaborate curricular dilemmas, Labaree (1997) outlines three broad value sets that typically compete for dominance in curricular reform. *Democratic equality* values focus on education as a common good and a public resource to be distributed equitably to prepare students to become competent citizens. *Social efficiency* values operate from the more instrumental perspective of the taxpayer and employer, centring on education for preparing students as human capital to fulfil important economic roles. *Social mobility* values emphasise the importance of education as a private commodity that can be used to prepare students for social competition. Labaree suggests that curricular reform is ultimately a political compromise between these competing values, which decides which value set becomes dominant. We argue that though one set may become dominant, and

legitimated in the official curriculum, alternative values will still be present in the professional community.

Here Williams (1977) offers a distinction between ‘residual’, ‘dominant’ and ‘emergent’ status to explain how alternative frames can coexist in processes of social change as ideologies/practices wax and wane in relative status over time. This description of social change allows its incoherence at any point in time to be understood: ‘the fact of emergent cultural practice is still undeniable, and together with the fact of actively residual practice is a necessary complication of the would-be dominant culture’ (p. 126). Figure 2 visually represents the co-existence of competing value sets at any point of time, and a trajectory for any such frame over time from emergent to dominant then residual status. Traces of the previous dominant frame continue to exert their presence, while the emergent paradigm can also assert itself in opposition to the dominant.

<< INSERT FIGURE 2 >>

Figure 2. Modelling the movement of value sets through William’s residual, dominant and emergent status over time.

To pull these theoretical elements together, the ideas of recontextualisation, dilemmas and competing values sets all serve to highlight the excess of possible frames and the potential for their expression in pedagogic practice. In the context of the centralisation of the ORF, and its standardisation agendas producing a powerful dominant frame, we are interested in how the teacher educators situated in a secondary pedagogical recontextualising field plan to use the discursive gap at their disposal to insert professional value sets that they feel have been overlooked in the new curriculum to resolve their curricular dilemmas. The potential is there for both the (re-)insertion of residualised values, that were dominant in the past, or the insertion of fresh emergent values that may compete for dominance in the future.

Methodology

The research question informing the broader study was: “*How will teacher educators prepare pre-service teachers to teach the national curriculum?*” The research design used semi-structured interviews to explore the teacher educators’ approach to the new Australian Curriculum. Participants were experienced teacher educators involved in the Phase One Australian Curriculum subject areas from public Australian universities. Two lecturers working in each of the history, mathematics and science curricular areas, and three from the English are were interviewed, producing a total of nine hour long interviews. Participants were asked to give a brief overview of their professional history, then outline their reading of the Australian Curriculum, its selection, sequencing and pacing design, any significant changes they anticipated to current curricular practice, and their plans to address the Australian Curriculum in their teacher preparation programs. Table 2 gives an overview of the participants and their expertise. Participant codes indicate their status as teacher educators (TE) and their curriculum area (e.g. TEE indicates a Teacher Educator of English, TEH of History and so forth).

<<INSERT TABLE 2>>

The content analysis of the interview data was driven by questions derived from the theoretical frame that in their synthesis addressed the larger research question. The process of moving systematically from the theoretical frame and concepts to the empirical data is summarised in Figure 3.

<<INSERT FIGURE 3>>

Figure 3. Moving from theory to analysis

The timing of the data collection in early 2010 meant that educators could only anticipate the nature of the Australian Curriculum as indicated by the series of draft documents and public debate. As argued in the introduction, this contemporary moment of heightened debate meant that all

stakeholders were keenly aware of the opportunity to effect change in this rare space of possibility and thus it was considered a valuable and optimal moment to access the hopes, fears and agency of teacher educators.

This is a small scale exploratory study undertaken at an opportune historical moment with the inferential limitations of a small-N study. However, the purposeful sampling to tap teacher educators situated in the same systemic reforms while in different disciplinary communities offers insight into the specificities of their variously constituted hermeneutic contexts, knowledge conditions and curricular politics. This study turns the spotlight on teacher educators in curricular reform and demonstrates how and where they have both opportunity and motive to cultivate counter-discourses in increasingly standardised times. With the theoretical framework of recontextualisation process and competing value sets, educational reform is understood as an open system and these teacher educators are understood as key players therein whose role has been largely overlooked or taken for granted. Speaking to pedagogic agents about their intentions in response to systemic reform gives a valuable empirical window into the ‘unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that work to produce particular realities’ (Law, 2004, p. 7).

Analysis

This section will report on particular and typical professional dilemmas anticipated by the teacher educators in each curriculum area, and how they proposed to use the discursive gap to resolve such dilemmas. Beyond Berlak and Berlak’s (1981) four curricular dilemmas outlined in Table 1, we also identified three additional dilemmas raised by the participants. These are summarised and exemplified in Table 3, and further discussed as they arise in the summary of participants in each subject area below. These additional dilemmas are understood to stem from the current reform climate in which growing public accountability and political expediency, that is, increasing control by the ORF through centralising assessment and curriculum, were considered to be displacing efforts by the profession to sustain student-centred education.

<< INSERT TABLE 3 >>

English curriculum teacher educators

All three English educators expressed particularly strong concern around the ‘education as professionalised versus deprofessionalised’ dilemma. For example, TEE1 was concerned that the autonomy given to teachers based on their professional abilities would be at risk through an overly prescriptive national curriculum, for example: *‘If it’s very high-definition and tries to really up the ante of structuring teachers’ lives and what they can do and can’t do then I think it will be something that will actually deprofessionalise teachers and systems’* (TEE1). TEE2 was similarly concerned that the Australian Curriculum may not allow teachers to use their professional knowledge base:

If you offer up something that doesn’t allow people to use their full potential and knowledge in implementing a curriculum, if it’s so watered down... it’s a deprofessionalisation of English teachers. It’s like saying you don’t need all that knowledge. (TEE2)

In their projected resolutions, these educators invoked an expanded conceptualisation of curriculum, for example: *‘I will see them [curriculum documents] as one part of the curriculum ... I would actually say that the curriculum is the complete set of things that come to a classroom... Curriculum for me is a broader notion’* (TEE1). By considering other dimensions of curriculum, pre-service teachers were to be prepared to judiciously use professional knowledge to determine the needs of specific students, cohorts and contexts. TEE2 proposed to resolve this de/professionalised dilemma by continuing to teach underpinning theory that pre-service teachers could use to inform their use of curriculum: *‘I continue in my pre-service preparation to teach the theory. If they don’t know the underlying theory, how can they question what’s coming in? How can they translate that into practice?’* (TEE2). By foregrounding the importance of disciplinary theory to interpret curriculum, TEE2 aimed to instil a more professional view of teaching in her pre-service teachers. The resolutions to these educators’ dilemmas upheld the view of teaching as **professionalised**, which they felt was at risk of being residualised in the current wave of standardising reforms.

The 'education as politically-driven versus student-centred' dilemma emerged for two English educators through strong opinions about the political impetus behind the national curriculum, for example: *'I guess as a political move it looks like it's doing something'* (TEE1), *'It's fairly clear that politics, both big P and small p politics plays a part in syllabus development'* (TEE3), and *'Everything that you think is important and politicians and parents and media [think is important], that's all in the syllabus'* (TEE3). These teacher educators felt that the Australian Curriculum development was first and foremost a case of political expedience. To resolve this dilemma, TEE1 suggested that a balance should be struck between addressing the ORF's intended curriculum and developing professional knowledge to inform teaching:

You certainly have to take account of it [the Australian Curriculum] but I think we also have to keep it in focus of what it really means and certainly not throw out any kids with the bathwater and understand that we know what we need to be preparing students with. (TEE1)

TEE3 proposed to resolve this dilemma by exposing the political considerations of the Australian Curriculum's design in his pre-service programs:

Universities also owe it to students that pre-service teachers will eventually be teaching, to actually be taking a much bigger look at a national curriculum saying well yes, that might be what's in the national curriculum but we have to realise that the national curriculum is driven by politics as much as anything else. (TEE3)

These resolutions represent a preference for a **student-centred** view of curriculum and suggest that these teacher educators will use the freedom in the discursive gap to promote professional knowledge and skills of the discipline that they considered important but that might not have been selected into the Australian Curriculum.

The critiques of political expedience by these English educators could be interpreted as indicating their sense of a missed opportunity for positive rigorous change in this curriculum reform. Instead, the conservative political agenda surrounding this curricular reform was considered to be the dominant value set, which risked residualising the discipline's own educative priorities.

History curriculum teacher educators

The two History educators expressed a range of professional dilemmas facing them in the current reforms. TEH1 was however, the only participant to identify the dilemma 'knowledge as given versus problematical'. TEH1 was concerned whether critical thinking skills and cultural understanding would be included, for example, *'Intellectually, I think students need to develop critical thinking skills,'* and, *'It underplays cultural understanding, a very typical Western, white, Anglo-Saxon male take on that. It doesn't take on some of the post-colonial critiques'* (TEH1). In resolving her dilemma, TEH1 planned to exploit her own space of freedom in recontextualisation to put forward her own value in treating knowledge as problematical: *'There will be freedom to interpret that national history curriculum... You need to kind of take an initiative and turn it around to make it align with your philosophy of teaching... I'll keep the focus on critical thinking'* (TEH1). TEH2 planned to retain what she considered an important critical component from the past curriculum and *'do the cultural studies through Indigenous studies because we have to embrace that'* (TEH2). These resolutions indicate that these History educators privileged **knowledge as problematic**, and intended to instil that attitude in her students, regardless of its eventual status in the Australian curriculum.

TEH1 also expressed a degree of dilemma over the pull between assessment imperatives and curricular intent. She was concerned that the enacted curriculum and pedagogy would inevitably be driven by the operative assessment regime, for example: *'What will happen is that teachers will teach the test, a) to survive so they look good, and b) so they can try and push kids through but they will just be filling them up with content that they regurgitate'* (TEH1). In resolving this dilemma, TEH1 said

that she would recommend a workable balance between maintaining an approach that fulfilled the assessment requirements but also maintained a student-centred approach to teaching curricular intent:

We need to come to some way of meeting the requirements of that assessment agenda but not sacrificing the intellectual integrity and the opportunity to make this a valuable and worthwhile project for our students. So I will be very explicit with them about that. (TEH1)

TEH1's position represented a willingness to strike a balance between the two 'horns' of the dilemma by engaging in professional give and take.

Both History educators were concerned about the integrity and nature of the knowledge selected into the curriculum, and that their discipline's intellectual values not be compromised by what they anticipated would be the ORF's more conservative take on historical knowledge. They planned to use their relative independence in PRF2 to mitigate and mediate the curriculum reforms through the discursive gap.

Mathematics curriculum teacher educators

Only one of the two Mathematics educators expressed any professional dilemma. TEM1 was an educator in the early years curriculum and reported considerable consistency between the State and Australian Curriculum that did not bring any particular dilemma to the surface:

They're just breaking them [the content areas] up in a slightly different way to the way that [State curriculum authority] breaks it up ... but I thought, we've got that [same content]. Actually it sits really nicely... (TEM1)

In contrast, TEM2 spoke with regard to the secondary curriculum. When speaking about the type of mathematics selected into the curriculum, TEM2's comments reflected a 'personal versus public knowledge' dilemma, for example: *'There's so many things that the only reason we do them is*

because we've always done them' (TEM2). This comment shows a clear opposition to the unquestioned selection of canonical curricular topics. Instead, the educator expressed a desire for more contemporary and relevant content to be selected, for example, more 20th century mathematics which *'is actually really easy to see how it's applied in the real world'* (TEM2). TEM2 instead suggested a more subversive way of resolving the dilemma:

I'll say to the students, I don't believe these things are particularly relevant, and I would ask the question: does the syllabus actually say that you have to do this? Because if you put the test on most of these things, the answer is no it doesn't. Why are we doing it? Because we've always done it. (TEM2)

TEM2's pattern of resolution prioritised **personal knowledge**. This resolution was justified in terms of social and economic need (Labaree's social efficiency value set), arguing that the public knowledge traditionally selected *'doesn't develop any appreciation of maths [for students] ... so they don't choose to do mathematics... we don't have enough mathematicians, scientists, we don't have enough engineers coming out of universities and that is economically serious'* (TEM2). This Mathematics educator was most concerned with the nature of content selected into the curriculum but was willing to utilise his space of possibility in the discursive gap to promote his own professional values and resolutions. He was keen to divest the curriculum of its residual elements and energise the dominant frame with more emergent frames that addressed future needs.

Science curriculum teacher educators

The two science educators expressed a combined total of four professional dilemmas. TES1's comments presented a 'knowledge as content versus process' dilemma. She was opposed to the more didactic pedagogy that could result if a greater amount of content was mandated in the national curriculum:

I think they'll mandate things like "you need to know in chemistry this core body of knowledge" ... they'll probably try to make us teach more content which means teachers in science will go back to that transmission, didactic [pedagogy]' (TES1).

In this educator's opinion, overly didactic pedagogy would not allow space and time for process learning experiences. TES1's pattern of resolution favoured **knowledge as process** and she planned to advocate process, context-based science: *'I'd like to see kids go out into the real world and link their science with the community, so they have a real application and love of science'* (TES1).

TES2 expressed a 'knowledge as personal versus public' dilemma similar to TEM2 when discussing her fear that decontextualised public knowledge would be selected into the Australian Curriculum, rather than knowledge related to students' lives, indicating her preference for **personal knowledge** over public. In this instance, this educator had the opportunity to formally participate in the curriculum design process. The Australian Curriculum has since legitimated a more personal approach through its design of a 'science as a human endeavour' strand. Therefore, TES2's personal/public dilemma would seem to have been addressed in the ORF.

More generally, eight of the nine educators expressed the opinion that they considered it their job to address larger dimensions and settings beyond the Australian Curriculum. For example:

I think that part of the role of universities is not just to be slaves to a particular authority or a particular organisation or a particular educational fad. Universities also I think have to have a larger picture of things which has traditionally been their role in society. (TEE3)

TEM1 echoed TEE3's outlook, suggesting that she will equip her pre-service teachers with the more general skills of curriculum use that apply in contexts beyond the Australian Curriculum: *'I would expect the students to be able to go to any curriculum document ... and then if they have to teach*

within a certain system, know how to use the document in their teaching' (TEM1). This perception reinforces the relative independence of PRF2 from ORF.

Discussion

The introduction argued that Australia, like other nation-states, is heading down a process of centralising governance of the educational sector and pursuing a variety of standardisation agendas including curriculum, assessment and teacher registration processes under a discourse of new capitalism. This has heightened public debate and political sensibilities around curriculum selection as Australia prepares to implement its first national curriculum in 2013. We argue that teacher educators have a unique and key role to play in these processes, both contributing to the curriculum's drafting and shaping its interpretation by the next generation of teachers, thus in but not of the schooling sector. Given the inherent processes of recontextualisation, they retain the space and opportunity to offer a critique and mediate curricular reform. This space of possibility, we argue, should not be taken for granted as other opportunities for contestation and for imagining alternatives are fast drying up under standardisation agendas. Where these current reforms were understood to privilege political expedience and economic imperatives, teacher educators were shown to be reluctant to let go of previous priorities such as social justice, student-centred approaches and critical disciplinary dispositions, which they fear were being residualised. On the other hand, curricular reform on this scale offered a rare opportunity to re-think and renovate with fresh emergent frames and one teacher expressed regret that this opportunity had been missed.

The findings of this study suggest that curriculum reform creates a climate in which foregone decisions about what a curriculum 'should' be are re-opened for debate. The analysis of the interview data found that the teacher educators were critical readers of the Australian Curriculum documents, monitoring its development and implications closely. Eight of the nine teacher educators expressed some degree of dilemma when their own expertise and curricular values did not align with the dominant values shaping the new official curriculum. Accordingly, they planned to resolve these

dilemmas via the discursive gap and its generative potential. The series of resolutions described indicate the active role and tactics these teacher educators proposed adopting as curriculum mediators in their own pedagogical recontextualisations. Their experience and expertise can resource teacher education with more than the officially endorsed or ‘dominant’ product, which may explain why some political commentators have been keen to exclude or bypass teacher educators in their plans for more instrumental teacher ‘training’.

These teacher educators perceived their role as responsible for preparing pre-service teachers for global contexts and careers, for settings beyond the immediate political concerns of here-and-now. However, as standardisation and international benchmarking efforts snowball, it may be the case that curriculum beyond the here-and-now may no longer offer strong contrasts that might extend the pre-service teachers’ professional imaginary. Curriculum will become a less historically and locally responsive product and it may become harder to imagine how it might be otherwise. Increasingly technicist modes of teacher preparation as espoused by the deregulation advocates will not sustain robust well-informed debate around competing value sets to inform curricular reforms. The growing dominance of a standardised curricular orthodoxy can be challenged or tested against historical sensibilities (that which has been residualised), and prospective imaginaries (that which could be emergent). This we argue is a key role for the teacher educator, to expose pre-service teachers to how curriculum settlements are brokered politically, then how they could always be otherwise. This retains the educator’s academic freedom and need not force a party line, given the goal is rather to nurture a critical, politically alert sensibility in the next generation of teachers for whom the curricular palette may be much reduced. The challenge is whether teacher educators can cultivate such a critical sensibility in the pre-service teacher without being accused of being ideologically driven by hostile, vigilant media.

The study also described additional dilemmas the educators expressed around political expedience, professionalism and assessment imperatives which could be considered products of the times with common standardisation agendas, and the political consolidation of educational governance. To

borrow a phrase, the professional is now political, more so than ever, and educators can no longer afford to be naively 'apolitical' or 'antipolitical' (Levin, 2008, p.8). These experienced teacher educators were wary of these trends and their impact on the profession and were motivated to offer some resistance, problematising and counter-discourse in their teacher preparation courses. Their quandary warrants further research in settings where the teacher education field may not enjoy the relative autonomy and academic freedom that Australian university-based teacher educators do. There is more scope for teacher educators through professional organisations to mobilise a stronger, more coherent campaign against poorly designed, politically expedient reforms. If the official curriculum field is rescaling on a national level, perhaps professional organisations in the teacher education field need to overcome parochial rivalries and do the same. This is an argument for teacher educators to engage with the increasingly politicised times, rather than bemoan them.

To summarise the differences indicated across the four curriculum areas sampled: English teacher educators seemed mostly concerned about political interference in educational matters; History teacher educators seemed mostly concerned about the status of knowledge in the proposed curriculum; a Maths educators had concerns around the rationale for selection of curricular content; and Science educators were concerned about personal relevance and the pedagogical implications of over-selection of content. English (or study of the national language) and History are well recognized as controversial subject areas prone to moral panics and public debates, which may explain their educators' willingness to defend hard won turf. Maths and Science are fighting different battles in the public arena, to do with falling enrolments despite growing demand for such knowledge. These educators had been working on different fronts: the emergent focus on personal relevance and process over content coverage in science; and the potential for an emergent focus on future, economic relevance in maths. Given the small scale of this study, any patterning needs to be tested with a larger sample, but the study suggests further lines of enquiry. Educational research often over-generalises issues across subject areas, or remains focussed within the one subject area. We suggest that a comparative perspective across subject areas can help articulate how the knowledge conditions, curricular politics, dilemmas and disciplinary values within subject areas can create similar yet

different responses and fractured perspectives on systemic change. What is 'dominant' in one area may still be 'emergent' in another, so not all battles will be fought on the same front.

The educators' expression of conscious agency reinforces the relative independence of teacher education from the official curriculum field. These teacher educators expressed concern about the overt political motivations of the Australian Curriculum and about the shrinking power of the teacher education field under a singular, more powerful, centralised official curriculum. Whereas the previous eight state curricula made it possible to entertain some diversity and national dialogue around curricular alternatives, they anticipate that with one more powerful official curriculum, education will be more exposed to political interference and whim, **but less amenable to professional debate**. This will become a familiar problem as educational systems scale up in other nations. We would argue that in such a scenario, teacher educators, through their work as curriculum mediators, are well positioned to play a more prominent and conscious role in resourcing professional debates around curricular values and alternatives, in terms of what could be and what should be.

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