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Three perspectives on a collaborative, whole-of-program process to support curriculum change

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Abstract

This qualitative case study reports on an emerging four-stage process of support for curriculum change using reflective data which highlights three perspectives: that of the Academic Developer, the Head of Program, and the Discipline Leader. The aim of the change process was to enhance employment outcomes of Creative Arts students by aligning the program curriculum with disciplinary Threshold Learning Outcomes. Successful features and areas for further attention are identified. The findings indicate that key features of the support process, such as its collaborative, situated, action-learning approach, have resulted in positive outcomes for participants. These include opportunities for reflective practice, peer and *in situ* learning as well as the development of participant engagement and leadership as part of the curriculum change process. Furthermore the process mirrored actions and emphasised concepts related to the employability of graduates of the program under review.

Keywords: academic development, curriculum change, collaboration, employability, situated, Threshold Learning Outcomes

Introduction

Universities in Australia and elsewhere must increasingly account for the learning outcomes of their graduates as evidenced by the recent focus on employability skills, graduate attributes and disciplinary Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). A key driver of this increased accountability is stakeholder expectations and feedback. Employers and other stakeholders such as government agencies continue to place pressure on universities to develop in their graduates specific attributes or employability skills. Yet there is little acknowledgement of the complexity of renewing program curricula to better develop specified learning outcomes (Green, Hammer & Star, 2009). Engaging in this type of curriculum renewal process is complex because it requires specialised, functional knowledge to be learned by discipline academics, as well as significant capability in interpersonal and leadership skills. Not only does program-wide curriculum change represent a significant time impost on already busy academics, it may also require normative or cultural change: this is because adopting a whole-of-program view may result in changed perspectives or ways of working amongst participants.

This paper outlines a qualitative case study that explores an emergent curriculum change process developed in an Australian university. The focus of this process is on aligning a Creative Arts program curriculum with disciplinary TLOs, thereby enhancing the employment prospects of graduates. To address the challenges inherent in curriculum change a collaborative, situated, action-learning process was developed, which aimed to leverage the

specialist knowledge of an academic developer, as well as the discipline knowledge of the curriculum 'owners'. The background to this case study is followed by a review of the relevant literature and a broad outline of a four-stage curriculum change support process. This is followed by an evaluation of the effectiveness of the support process from three different perspectives including the Academic Developer, the Head of Program, and the Discipline Leader. Analysis of reflective data from each perspective highlighted agreement about the positive aspects of the support process such as the reflection and review activity, and the collaborative, situated, action-learning approach used by the Academic Developer. It also highlighted positive individual and interpersonal factors that emerged as a result of the process, such as staff engagement, the emergence of leaders and mentors from amongst Creative Arts academics and a renewed focus on curriculum alignment as fundamental to the development of graduate outcomes. Finally, reflective data focused on unfinished business related to the evaluation stage of the process, and some aspects of the curriculum change process that require more work, including: greater recognition of challenges faced by those assuming leadership roles; more purposeful support for the implementation stage of the process; and tighter integration of the curriculum change support process with institutional procedures, such as accreditation and re-accreditation.

Background

Key terms used in this paper require definition due to different naming conventions. In this paper 'program' is used to define a wider program of study, such as a bachelor of business, while the term 'degree' refers to a major within a program of study and a 'course' is a single subject or unit within a degree. The institution in this case study uses the term 'course objectives', (also referred to as learning outcomes) to describe desired forms of student learning at the course level. These terms will be used interchangeably at times during this paper, whilst acknowledging that they can also be seen as distinct from each other (Biggs, 2003).

Three perspectives are represented in this paper: the Academic Developer; the Head of Program, and the Discipline Leader. Academic developers are responsible for enhancing academic performance in learning and teaching within a higher education institution with the overarching goal being to improve student learning. They may contribute to staff development, curriculum development and to relevant institutional policy and procedure development (Chang, Wahr, De Pew, Gray, Jansz-Senn & Radloff, 2004, p.2). From this perspective, the paper examines a professional development and support process, which is deliberately designed to align with a 'discipline specific' orientation and its related graduate outcomes (Land, 2001) by organising 'situated learning' episodes that leverage a disciplinary 'learning' or 'professional community' dynamic (Land, 2001, p.6; Sergiovanni, 1998; Boud & Brew, 2013).

The roles of the Head of Program and Discipline Leader are to lead and facilitate a curriculum change process as part of an institutional, program re-accreditation procedure. From this perspective, aligning the Creative Arts curriculum with Creative and Performing Arts TLOs enhances the student experience by sharpening the focus on developing specific learning outcomes that will contribute positively to graduate employability. However, this alignment process can also be used as a 'trigger' for more holistic curriculum enhancement aimed at offering a better quality program that will develop capable graduates and attract more students.

Model of curriculum development

An outcomes-based or 'backwards design' approach to curriculum development at the program level is well-established as an effective model (Biggs, 2003; Hubball & Burt, 2004,

p.52; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Beginning with outcomes enables a purposeful approach to curriculum design that is focused on the desired results.

An outcomes-focused approach to program design is also well aligned with the educational theory of constructivism, which begins from the premise that students construct knowledge and understanding through relevant learning activities. From this perspective learning and teaching activities should provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate the desired learning outcomes (Biggs, 2003). By logical extension, such desired outcomes should be identified prior to the development of these learning and teaching activities. This view of curriculum design challenges both the curriculum as 'content' paradigm, and the development of a program that is unreflectively derived from, *the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p.14). Wiggins and McTighe identify three stages in what they refer to as 'backwards design':

1. Identify desired results.
2. Determine acceptable evidence.
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction (p. 18).

In the case explored here, an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design was deemed appropriate given the goal of aligning the curriculum with the Creative and Performing Arts TLOs. However, as the process focused on the *re*-design of an existing curriculum the process might be more accurately represented as:

1. Identify desired results.
2. Ascertain whether there is any evidence of their current development, including learning and teaching activities and support.
3. Re-design aspects of the curriculum that do not achieve desired results.

Curriculum outcomes and employability

An outcomes-focus for curriculum design is also a logical model to adopt where desirable outcomes, such as the employability of graduates, are a goal of the change process. The Creative and Performing Arts TLOs were chosen precisely because of their agreement with desirable graduate outcomes identified by program stakeholders, such as employers and graduates.

Relevant design concepts and principles

A key design concept in outcomes-based curriculum development is 'curriculum alignment': that is, assessment, teaching and learning activities must align with intended course and program outcomes. In this instance, ensuring internal consistency or 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 2003) of the curriculum within each course is an important prerequisite for the achievement of intended program-level outcomes, ensuring that learner activity and achievement are embedded within the curriculum design.

A further critical consideration when designing an outcomes-based curriculum is that of transparency in assessment. There is a need to ensure that teacher and learner expectations of learner performance are clear, and that assessment tasks are valid (Biggs, 2003; Sadler, 2005). In particular, the development of explicit assessment criteria and grade standards, as shown in Table 1 below, enables stakeholders, including reviewers, to ascertain whether an assessment task is valid and whether stated learning outcomes, including TLOs, are developed. Furthermore they clarify for students the knowledge, skills and understandings expected of them.

Table 1: Sample Assessment Criteria and Grade Descriptors

Learning outcome	Pass level descriptor for evaluation component in assessment
Research and critically evaluate political and economic theory	Evaluation of at least one position on an essay topic in the light of research undertaken Evaluation may not be fully justified by the research

Comparing assessment criteria and standards against stated course outcomes also enables the reviewer to identify instances of the 'hidden curriculum': forms of learning that are tacitly intended or assessed but are not made explicit to students (Biggs, 2003). Finally curriculum developers can use these explicit assessment criteria to relate the curriculum to institutional graduate attributes or capabilities.

Good practice in curriculum mapping and alignment

Although curriculum mapping originated in American secondary schools, more recently it has been adopted by higher education practitioners. Plaza, Draugalis, Slack, Skrepnek and Sauer, (2007) define curriculum mapping as *a consideration of when, how and what is taught; as well as the assessment measures utilized to explain achievement of expected student learning outcomes* (p.1).

In the Australian context, curriculum mapping has been most strongly associated with the graduate attributes agenda (Spencer, Riddle & Knewstubb, 2012). Noteworthy published examples outline a range of approaches to curriculum mapping (Oliver, Jones, Ferns & Tucker, 2007; Plaza et al., 2007; Spencer et al., 2012; Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004).

In one example, Sumsion and Goodfellow (2004) designed a 'checklist', including a range of development indicators, based on their university's generic skills and distributed it to all teachers for completion. Academic developers then consulted with each teacher, and asked them to provide a rationale for particular skill indicators they had checked. Their findings highlighted the issue of differing staff interpretations, philosophies, and positions on what could or should be assessed, and the need to generate shared understanding around the desired forms of learning (Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004). This study also emphasises the requirement to support staff in unpacking outcome statements and developing a discipline-wide consensus around their meaning. This is echoed by Hubball and Burt (2004) who argue that implementing change to university curricula requires, amongst other things, an inclusive approach to design, supported by outside specialists and relevant professional development.

Oliver, Jones, Ferns and Tucker (2007) outline a systematic, five-phase, curriculum mapping support model, nested within a comprehensive program review process. The aim was to deliver an authentic experience for students that sequentially developed graduate attributes. A curriculum map of the existing program was produced by an academic development team and used, along with other evidence such as stakeholder feedback, to determine required changes for a given program. Subsequent to a group feedback session each course teacher used the information to reflect on and revise components of their curriculum design as required. While this process targets the program team, the focus of the work by Oliver et al. (2007) is pedagogical and procedural and does not explicitly address participant experiences, or the significance of collaboration or leadership.

Leadership and change management are key factors in facilitating institutional change. As Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008, p.xiv) argue:

> *Desired change is not an event but a complex learning and unlearning process for all concerned. It is a learning process because if something new has to be implemented those who are to deliver it… have to **do** something new. To do something new requires them to **learn** a 'gap' in their expertise. Such learning for change does not just happen – it must be directly assisted and deftly led.*

Adopting a strategic whole-of-program (or indeed sectoral) perspective may require significant changes in awareness, attitudes and practice on the part of those involved in curriculum change (Hubball and Burt, 2004). Examples of the ideas and concepts that are potentially unlearned and learned as part of a whole-of-curriculum change process in the current context are listed below:

Table 2: Unlearned and Learned Concepts

Unlearned	Learned
Single course perspective of the curriculum	Whole-of-program view of the curriculum
• Course outcomes, activities and assessment as expressions of course-level teacher intention	• Course outcomes, activities and assessment as expressions of teacher, program, discipline and sector intention
• Assessment enables students to demonstrate course outcomes	• Assessment enables students to develop program-level outcomes
• Curriculum change as an individual activity.	• Curriculum change as a collaborative activity.

The design of the curriculum change process reported in this paper was intended to both leverage and foster leadership and collaboration to make this unlearning and learning process less difficult.

Method

Kolb's experiential learning theory and the cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation aligns well with the curriculum change process outlined in this paper (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 1999). However, as critics, Desmond and Jowitt (2012) point out, experiential learning tends to be interpersonal rather than solely individual and participants' experiences are situated in their particular disciplinary and institutional context.

Written reflections from three different participant role perspectives were used to evaluate each stage of the process and to draw some preliminary conclusions about what has worked, what needs more work overall and how effective the process was in terms sustaining the focus on graduate outcomes. The three perspectives of the Academic Developer, the Program Head and the Discipline Leader were chosen for the following reasons:

- They are broadly representative of the range of participants directly involved in the facilitation of the curriculum change process.
- Their different levels of operation enabled reflection on the process, including the emergence of leadership and collaboration, from different angles.

To enhance the 'dependability' of the reflective data it was collected and analysed according to the following procedure (Jasper, 2005, p. 256). Each participant individually wrote a reflection focusing on each stage of the support process including what worked well and what needed further attention. Reflections were structured as responses to open-ended questions about the usefulness of the support process and what, if anything was learned. The reflections were collected and analysed thematically, identifying key themes and

concepts and whether there was agreement or points of difference between the varying roles, perspectives, experiences and interpretations throughout the process. To validate the analysis the results were returned to the participants for confirmation and further comment. Finally, connections were made between themes or concepts emerging from the data and relevant concepts, theories and studies from related fields such as education or change management that may offer wider, secondary support or interpretation of the experiences.

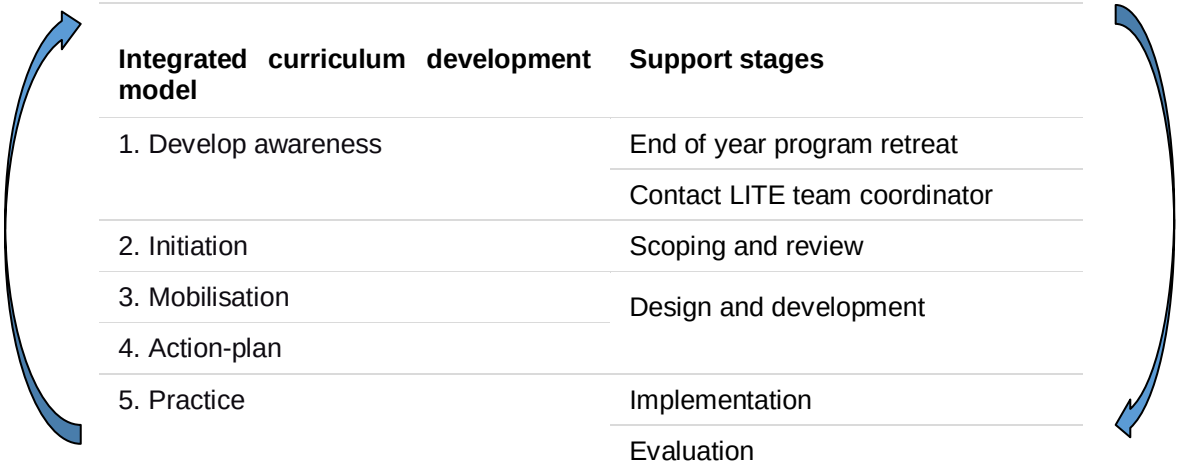
The curriculum support process

The support process that was developed used a collaborative, situated, action-learning method, nested within a two-year, structured, inclusive degree re-accreditation process. The approach taken marries outside 'specialist' support from an academic developer with the expertise of the discipline community to stage purposeful, facilitated, collaborative peer-to-peer activities, followed by group and one-on-one support as required. To drive this approach a broad-brush, project management methodology was used. This was facilitated by the Academic Developer, after consultation with Creative Arts colleagues to develop a project plan including aims, activities, a schedule and deliverables.

Consciously staging collaborative sessions such as discipline meetings, planning and design activities, and tailored professional development as a means of achieving project aims addresses three issues highlighted in the academic development literature. The first is a requirement to develop a shared understanding amongst academic participants about the meaning of particular program-level outcomes, and how they might be developed (Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004). The second is the requirement for specialised support for curriculum renewal (Hubball & Burt, 2004) and in this case renewal with a focus on accreditation and graduate outcomes. The third is to align academic development activities with good practice (Boud & Brew, 2013) by tailoring them to disciplinary and professional requirements and locating them within required processes for implementing curriculum changes.

The curriculum change process adopted was made up of four discrete stages based on a project-management-type cycle analogous to a 'plan-do-check-act' sequence. It included Scoping and review, Design and development, Implementation and Evaluation. These stages can be associated with a wider process model, such as the 'integrated curriculum development model' proposed by Hubball and Burt (2004), as represented in the diagram below.

Table 3: Integrated Curriculum Development Model (Hubball & Burt, 2004)



Integrated curriculum development model	Support stages
1. Develop awareness	End of year program retreat
	Contact LITE team coordinator
2. Initiation	Scoping and review
3. Mobilisation	Design and development
4. Action-plan	
5. Practice	Implementation
	Evaluation

Pre-support stage: feedback from program stakeholders on graduate employability

The first, pre-support, stage of the program review and re-accreditation process included the solicitation of written feedback from stakeholders, including Creative Arts graduates, practitioners and employers. The common consensus amongst stakeholder group respondents was that proposed changes would enhance a program with an already strong focus on graduate employability within the sector. Each group respondent emphasised the value of a program that focused on the development of graduates' capacity to perform at a professional entry standard by being able to:

- Demonstrate adaptability and function in diverse contexts.
- Demonstrate flexibility and inter-disciplinary skills and knowledge, including use of technology.
- Develop independence and resilience, including the ability to be 'self-starters'.
- Develop leadership skills and collaborate effectively with other artists.
- Critically engage with their practice.

These capacities are echoed in the Creative and Performing Arts Threshold Learning Outcome (TLO) statements (Australian Learning & Teaching Council, 2010). This made aligning the program with disciplinary TLOs a logical focus for re-accrediting Creative Arts degrees.

Stage 1: End of year retreat

Developing awareness took the form of an end-of-year retreat for academics in the Creative Arts program. The issue of re-accreditation for the program was discussed, along with the parallel requirement to ensure that disciplinary TLOs were developed. An outcome of this retreat was that the Head of Program contacted the Academic Developer to request support for the process of mapping the existing curriculum and working to align it with the TLOs.

Stage 2: Scoping and review

At this stage of the process the Academic Developer met with discipline leader(s) and other stakeholders, such as the Head of School and Learning and Teaching Coordinator, to clarify project aims and agree upon possible activities to support discipline members in meeting them. Aims incorporated the pragmatics of curriculum design principles, such as subsequent changes to course and program documentation. A set of support deliverables was agreed upon. This included curriculum maps, design and co-facilitation (with the School lead) of Tailored Professional Development and/or Planning and Design retreats. A needs analysis based on stakeholder feedback had been developed by the program team as part of the official institutional re-accreditation process. The Academic Developer conducted a desktop review of the program in consultation with disciplinary colleagues by mapping key elements of the curriculum through the lens of disciplinary TLOs.

Feedback addressed issues such as: the alignment of course objectives with assessment, teaching and learning activities and materials (Biggs, 2003); the alignment of course curricula with desired program outcomes and professional expectations; assessment of the appropriateness of learning standards for each course, based on its position in the program; and the overall alignment of degree or program with desired outcomes, such as TLOs. In the final step of this stage, the Academic Developer met with discipline leader(s) to discuss findings and agree upon a plan of dissemination to the wider discipline group.

Stage 3: Design and development

At the beginning of this stage, the Academic Developer met with each discipline group who discussed and reflected upon findings of the desktop audit and identified potential

professional development needs for an upcoming program-level retreat. These meetings also functioned as a review of mapping results since discipline colleagues were able to correct any misrepresentations or misunderstandings. File copies of the review were then sent to each discipline member.

Following this, the Academic Developer and the Head of Program organised a Planning and Design retreat. These events offer a combination of dissemination, planning and professional development activities of between half a day and two days in duration that are co-facilitated by an academic developer and a faculty leader. Sessions are usually structured as follows:

1. Facilitators disseminate program outcome review findings, including common, program-wide themes, gaps and course level issues.
2. The review is unpacked for participants, including underpinning learning and teaching principles, such as curriculum alignment, who are invited to critically engage with the process.
3. This is followed by an activity that guides participants through different stages of implementing curriculum change, starting with the redesign of course objectives. These two sessions serve as *de facto* Professional Development for participants.
4. The final stage of the Planning and Design retreat consists of discussion and action-planning of both course and broader degree level strategies to address alignment gaps and introduce new assessments or units as required.
5. Further support required of Learning and Teaching or other support staff is also noted for actioning. Follow-up support might include some other form of tailored professional development, such as short-hands-on workshops of two hours or less designed to address a specific aspect of curriculum change or development.

Stage 4: Implementation

During the implementation stage, academic participants worked individually or in discipline groups to implement agreed-upon actions according to a schedule that was developed in planning and design stages. Progress was monitored by the Program Head, and work within disciplines was coordinated by heads of discipline, or appointed discipline leaders. As part of this stage there was follow-up review of individual components of course and program design by the Academic Developer, including course objectives, assessment, or assessment criteria and rubrics. Follow-up review was conducted both on an individual and a group basis as required.

Stage 5: Evaluation

In the final incomplete stage, the curriculum change project will be evaluated based on the following dimensions:

1. An anonymous survey to evaluate the effectiveness of support provided by the academic developer and other support team members.
2. Evaluation of the project by assessing attainment of stated project aims and deliverables.
3. Assessment of its impact on participant practice, six months and one year beyond the end of the project through random sampling of curriculum artefacts such as course specifications, assessment and assessment guides, and learning and teaching activities.
4. Assessment of the impact of changes to the curriculum on the student experience based on relevant good practice principles such as transparency of teacher expectations about what is to be learned (Biggs, 2003; Sadler, 2005), and relevance to graduate outcomes.

Findings: reflecting on the process

The first cluster of themes emerging from reflective data includes positive features of the curriculum change process such as: a disinterested third party view of the curriculum; a cycle of reflection and review; and the collaborative, situated action-learning approach designed by the Academic Developer to support the change process. A final theme in this cluster related to identified areas for improvement.

Reflection and review

The provision of an external or 'disinterested' review of the Creative Arts curriculum as part of the Scoping and review stage was valued by School respondents. The Discipline Leader's perspective was reflected in the following comment;

> *The mapping [process] did, however, reveal the importance of having these documents 'stand alone' for the eyes of the external reviewer…eg., was it obvious on the face of the course documents how the course was assessed and how this assessment aligned with course and program objectives*?

This was affirmed by the reflection of the Academic Developer who referred to the mapping process as *a disinterested survey of the curriculum that becomes a de facto 'test' of curriculum transparency.*

However, the Head of Program identified the iterative cycle of review and reflection connected to the Scoping and review stage of the curriculum change support process as a positive feature:

> *Staff had 'hunches' on courses that were not performing because they had never genuinely been aligned with original goals for the program…These hunches came to the surface as the diagnostics applied by the Academic Developer delivered a disinterested review linked directly to the overall objectives of renewal.*

Collaborative, situated, action-learning

There was also broad agreement about the positive impact of the collaborative, situated, action-learning approach adopted by the Academic Developer. For example, the Head of Program commented:

> *Because a rapport between the Academic Developer and staff had already been established…staff perceived the feedback as advice (rather than correction or punishment) to be applied using their own hunches as the bedrock from where the changes needed to occur.*

For the Discipline Leader, collaboration was also a key factor in the success of the curriculum change process:

> *In my view, collaboration is the key to dynamic, robust, transparent, and innovative curriculum design, development and alignment. This collaboration must take place both between the AD and the discipline reps, and also between discipline staff. This was key to the success of the entire process…This attitude really helped to manage the change that was occurring in a way which kept everyone focussed on the task at hand, rather than stressing about the fact that 'things were changing'. In other words, the change was managed extremely well and I feel the collaborative approach was key here.*

The 'in-situ' context of the curriculum change support process was flagged as an explicitly positive feature by School respondents and tacitly by the Academic Developer. From the Discipline Leader's perspective:

> *Each discipline area received tailored and individual advice [based on the curriculum mapping]. This was a time saver for academic staff, as they didn't need to be concerned with advice that wasn't relevant to them.*

The Head of Program noted that support provided accounted for participants' disciplinary and individual situations:

> *Most importantly [for this stage] is the desire by the Academic Developer to design a process that was not only "fit for purpose" but fit for the varying personalities and discipline specifics in Creative Arts – [this] was highly effective.*

The attention to specific context is evident but less explicit in the reflection of the Academic Developer:

> *My role is to…design learning and action-planning activities for participants to achieve their specified goals and provide specialised advice or information as required.*

Finally, the incorporation of professional development into the support process, so it became a form of action learning, was acknowledged by the Discipline Leader:

> *This certainly acted as de facto professional development for me. I consider myself to be a very junior academic, one who has no formal training in higher education learning and teaching. Many of the concepts that I had encountered purely through my involvement in teaching courses were made much clearer and explicit to me as a result of this process.*

This view was affirmed by the Academic Developer's reflection about the support process, which referred to the provision of *hands-on, tailored professional development.*

Areas for Improvement

The final theme in this cluster related to suggested improvements in the curriculum change process as identified by the Academic Developer. The first suggested improvement was for support of the Implementation phase:

> *…providing collaborative support as part of this process has made me aware of the possible need to have a range of suggested activities or methods for implementing agreed upon changes*.

The second suggested improvement cited by the Academic Developer related to the need for a whole-of-institution approach to program design and redevelopment:

> *Accreditation and re-accreditation have certain consultation, marketing and basic curricular requirements but the alignment between this largely administrative process and a whole-of-curriculum design/change process is not explicit. This suggests a need for closer integration between this and the curriculum review and design processes supported by Learning and Teaching Services such as the one in this case.*

The second cluster of themes emerging from the reflection data relate to individual and interpersonal factors that had a positive impact on the process, such as engagement, leadership, and peer mentoring amongst discipline participants.

Engagement, leadership and peer mentoring

According to the Head of Program, one effect of the change process was staff buy-in and engagement:

> *Staff genuinely bought into the program renewal/reaccreditation tasks as directly related to the attraction and retaining of quality students into the Program, and this has meant that staff have begun to discuss and action deeper layers of commitment*.

Another positive effect cited by the Head of Program was the emergence of informal leaders and mentors amongst discipline colleagues within Creative Arts:

> *In this [close geographical] context, leaders emerge from among staff who might not have otherwise offered their insight…the leaders actioned ideas and proactively brought colleagues together to ask questions and further 'future thinking' on the curriculum and how it shapes students for Honours, Masters and PhD studies.*

From the perspective of the Discipline Leader, informal leadership was not without its challenges:

> *It was challenging to find myself essentially in a leadership role for the discipline (and having to institute change) without any official recognition of that leadership. I needed to learn 'on the fly' how to negotiate from this somewhat nebulous position. At times, this diverted energy away from the main task at hand.*

Despite the challenges inherent in her own leadership position, the Discipline Leader valued learning from her peers as part of the curriculum change process:

> *It has also been a chance for [my Theatre colleague] to act as informal mentor to me in terms of learning and teaching (he would probably be surprised to hear me characterise it as such, but it's true!)*

From the reflective data, it is clear that staff engagement, leadership and mentoring at the program and discipline level generated positive outcomes as well as challenges that, on balance, contributed to the success of the curriculum change process.

Unfinished business

Emerging from the data is the importance of embedding program evaluation processes at the curriculum design or, as in this case, redesign stage. Through consideration of accreditation documentation in developing program evaluation strategies, the interrogation of data from all stakeholders, including students and recent graduate and the establishment of benchmarking activities, curriculum developers will not only ensure ongoing quality appraisal, but also contribute to the cumulative achievement of graduate outcomes leading to enhanced graduate employability. The Head of Program commented:

> *A key aspect of the reaccreditation process at our institution is the specific detail on how a program will be evaluated throughout the course of its approved period of offer (five years). So one way of ensuring the evaluation is completed for the learning and teaching support [side] is that it is indeed embedded in the reaccreditation documentation. .. The inclusion of data from students who can extrapolate on their experiences, as well as data from course monitoring reports and reviews… will triangulate the perspectives of how effective the changes are and what needs to be tweaked for future offers…. Other strategies will involve requesting external bench-markers from similar institutions to visit and review our program on an annual basis.*

While there was also broad agreement about evaluation requirements, it was also noted that some contributions to the curriculum review process are less visible than others. For example the Academic developer commented:

> *Academic developers] are often 'silent partners' who may have influence or input. However, this often is not discernable to students and can also be difficult to 'unpick' from the warp and weft of ongoing learning and teaching enhancement cycles practiced by many teachers in higher education.*

Reflection about this upcoming stage of the curriculum change process highlighted a common perception of the need to incorporate evaluation into 'business as usual' processes and, in particular, the requirement to establish some form of external moderation or benchmarking process to assess the holistic quality of the program (Stake, 2004).

Discussion

There was broad agreement by participants on the successful features of the curriculum change support process examined in this paper, and research in the field also evidences their efficacy.

For example, combining a third party review with a process of group reflection for individual disciplines was a successful element of the curriculum change support process identified by respondents. One possible reason is that this stage arguably acted as a *de facto* peer review of the curriculum. This has been shown to be an effective means of improving teaching practice (Harris, Farrell, Bell, Devlin & James, 2008) through a process of review and reflection. The key difference in this case is the existence of a discipline peer group and external reviewer rather than a dyad of reviewer and reviewed.

Similarly, the curriculum change process offered multiple opportunities for peer learning and interaction including the implementation phase, where corridor conversations and spontaneous working groups enabled participants to learn from each other. Boud's (1999) documentation of two case studies from his own institution affirms the value of peer learning in groups where, amongst other things, *development is seen as an intrinsic part of academic work* (p.7).

Indeed, another successful feature of the curriculum change support process identified by respondents was the opportunity provided for learning *in situ* (Boud & Brew, 2013; Prebble, Hargreaves, Leech, Naidoo, Suddaby & Zepke , 2004). This is expressed here by the Discipline Leader:

> *This entire process also provided focussed opportunities for reflection on learning and teaching practice. These opportunities can be few and far between for busy academics. It also provided insight into the reflections of others which was very valuable…This opens up learning and teaching to scrutiny and transparency, and allows as to adopt a scholarly approach to learning and teaching (Boyer, 1990) rather than a reactive, survivalist, or 'business as usual' approach*.

Lave and Wenger (1991) echo this idea when they argue that learning occurs best for individuals when it occurs within the culture and context of their everyday environment and practice.

Aspects of the support process that were reported as requiring tightening included the provision of further support for the implementation phase, and the need for a whole-of-institution approach to support for quality program enhancement and assurance. Whilst the idea of targeting academic development support at the program level was mandated by the institution in this case, there was no thought of how this support would be integrated with relevant institutional procedures to ensure a consistent program quality. As a result, solicitation of academic developer input into program development and redevelopment is voluntary and largely *ad hoc*. This is significant if one considers that program accreditation is

a major element of institutional Quality Assurance systems in higher education (Bernhardt, 2012).

Staff engagement, leadership and peer mentoring were also successful outcomes that emerged as part of the process. The value of leadership at all levels of the university for leveraging positive change has been explored in detail by Scott et al. (2008). In particular, peer mentoring for quality enhancement in the workplace is affirmed by the work of Sergiovanni (1998) and his concept of the 'professional community', and Wenger's (2004) concept of a 'community of practice', where a group of people who share a concern interact regularly to learn how to do it better. Discussion of leadership and peer-mentoring outcomes suggest that the process examined here was successful as a vehicle for cultural change (Hubball & Burt, 2004) notwithstanding that there are facets of the process that require further attention and improvement.

For example, the Discipline Leader's reflection on her role in the process highlights the need to more carefully consider intra-disciplinary and interpersonal dynamics and how these may impact on desired change:

> *Buy-in from all staff at the disciplinary level is absolutely necessary for the collaborative approach to work to its fullest potential.*

In addition to the potential lack of intra-disciplinary engagement, there was a perception that her status relative to her colleagues may also have had an impact. This experience highlights the unavoidable interpersonal and political nature of any planned change to professional practice. Boud and Middleton (2003) suggest that negotiating the political is a form of learning in itself (p.198). Nevertheless it adds to the inherent complexity of change processes and places demands on leaders of change to demonstrate particular leadership skills (Scott et al., 2008).

Key ideas raised in connection with the evaluation stage included the implementation of a quality-improvement cycle and the issue of impact, particularly as it relates to the effectiveness of academic development work. Kirkpatrick (1998) proposes four levels of evaluation, including satisfaction, learning, application and impact. However, according to Gray and Radloff (2006), academic development work is most often evaluated according to participant satisfaction and learning. They argue that *a key question that must be addressed is whether and to what extent student learning has been enhanced as a result of the work of academic development* (p.87). In this case a key evaluation question will be more specifically related to the impact of the curriculum development on student learning through teaching and learning activities and environments which foster the development of graduate outcomes.

Employability outcomes

This curriculum change support process has, so far, successfully engaged Creative Arts academics in achieving transparency of teacher expectations and whole-of-curriculum alignment with desired program outcomes. This focus will provide direction for and greater assurance that employability outcomes will be realised for graduates. It will also ensure that their development is made explicit and transparent for students. This level of transparency will enable students to develop a vocabulary with which they can highlight the demonstration of employability skills to potential employers (Allen consulting group, 2010).

Conclusion

The aim of this curriculum change support process was to focus staff effort on aligning the Creative Arts program with disciplinary TLOs. This was to ensure that a key focus of the

curriculum, the development of employability skills, was not undermined by a lack of clear focus on the development of key capabilities, or by their remaining a tacit component of a hidden curriculum.

The support process has succeeded, to date, in achieving this aim by developing academic capacity in good-practice program and course design. This has been achieved through support activities including situated professional development, and by ensuring genuine ownership of the change process, deeper engagement and reflection by colleagues about their teaching practice, and the development of a shared understanding and clearer, more outcomes-focused, whole-of-program view amongst participants. These outcomes were the result of creating a collaborative space for discipline colleagues that has fostered different levels of leadership, intra and interdisciplinary collaboration, and peer learning. Assuring the development of employability skills by learners will require the implementation of evaluation processes and business-as-usual practices to assess the impact of curriculum changes on student outcomes. Better integration of design and development processes, as evidenced in this study, with institutional accreditation and re-accreditation procedures will ensure better alignment of course and program curricula with specific, desired program learning outcomes, such as employability skills.

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