

MIXING PEDAGOGICAL COCKTAILS: Juicing Apples, Oranges and Limes

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Cocktails of any sort involve the experimental juxtaposition of ingredients – sweet and sour, tart and tangy, astringent or smooth and creamy. The aim is to strike a complex experiential balance of flavour sensations, worthy of a second, third or fourth sip that entices you to consider partaking of a second glass. The more subtle, sophisticated and satisfying on the palate, the more likely it is the mix will win favour with prospective patrons.

In education, a similar principle might be said to involve devising strategies for developing curriculum that stimulates a lingering thirst for knowledge, skill and understanding – initially triggered in pre-school or kindergarten and sustained throughout the continuum of school, college and university experiences. To deliver desired graduate results, such strategies need to be available, appealing and relevant for the learner. Most importantly, such curriculum strategies need to first raise then address the expectations of students from differing backgrounds to continue with their studies.

One way is to set about engendering a personal taste for meaningful learning experiences that hopefully lingers throughout life. Ideally, the pedagogical ‘sweet spot’ involves custom designed study sequences, which recognise and redress conceptual or practical barriers to learning, characterised by Meyer and Land (2003) among others as ‘troublesome knowledge’ or ‘threshold concepts’. Educational programs can build on and fill gaps in foundation learning, whilst boosting the enabling attitudinal capabilities underpinning all academic achievement in terms of learner interest, confidence and commitment. Scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) is a pedagogical principle for building on past experience, to help and support students as they grapple with the task of internalising new knowledge and struggle to raise themselves from one academic level to the next with understanding and application. As a syllabus strategy, scaffolding holds a vital clue for developing curricula in tertiary education that intentionally seeks to build coherent learning pathways and bridge sectoral divides.

This paper considers the tertiary education challenge and some associated national policy and regulatory issues for reconciling structural disjuncture between art and design curricula across Australian schools, vocational colleges and universities. It argues that in an increasingly nationalised environment, with centralised curricula governing schools and pre-packaged competencies in vocational education and training, independent pedagogical discretion to design innovative curriculum at the institutional, program or discipline level now survives only in higher education. Hence, if tertiary education has any hope of rendering sectoral barriers more permeable for low SES applicants, mature age learners and other domestic and international students, the task of generating relevant and lasting pathways rests primarily with self-accrediting universities and, to a lesser extent, non-university higher education providers.

Schools

Commonwealth Government moves are well under way via the Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA) to fast-track National Curriculum development mandated in all Australian schools from 2012. This long anticipated centralised 'quality standards' initiative seeks to overtly subsume current State prerogatives over K-12 course design, development and maintenance in schools. Hopes that improved national recognition would increase scope and support for creative disciplines in schools have been subverted using a carefully orchestrated stakeholder consultation strategy. For the sake of national consistency, curriculum standardisation will further distance, deskill and disenfranchise individual teachers. Ultimately, discipline experts, school authorities and communities will retain little or no direct influence over syllabus purpose, priorities, structure or content in primary, junior or senior secondary school art and design subjects.

Terms of reference for 'The Arts' national syllabus in schools presupposes a composite rather than differentiated dance, drama, media studies, music and visual arts orientation addressing supposedly 'deep' and narrow, rather than broad and diverse, coverage in any specific art form. Dr. Wesley Imms, Art Education Australia vice-president and Melbourne University coordinator of visual art education recently likened the proposal to an unpalatable 'blancmange'. COFA academic and former NSW Board of Studies inspector of creative arts Dr. Kerry Thomas suggests the national curriculum, "dumbs down" rigour and specialised knowledge ... to such an extent that it may prove unrecognisable as visual art' (Ferrari, 2010).

As a countervailing trend that increased diversification over more than a decade, vocational principles and practices have very successfully been integrated into Australian secondary schools. In 2010 the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) reports over 90% of senior secondary schools now offer VET units of competency or entire vocational qualifications. More than 40% of all Australian high school students participate in one or more VET in Schools initiatives, including close to 9% of these students undertaking a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship (NCVER, 2010[a]). The popularity and perceived value of VET in Schools in Australia compares favourably with international trends in the UK, Europe and the USA, especially as a mechanism for improving social inclusion, supporting educational engagement and increasing student retention (NCVER, 2010[b]).

Vocational Education & Training (VET)

On a national scale, throughout the 1990s the move to introduce VET into schools was only one aspect of a comprehensive Commonwealth Government plan, initiated by the now defunct Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). The declared intent was to standardise and systemically take national control over content and delivery of vocational education and training. A key tactic was the progressive disempowerment of VET teachers and the enforced alignment of competing constituency interests via legislation and regulation. Public and private VET systems, providers and teachers in TAFE, community education and private institutions were initially invited, then coerced and ultimately compelled by legislation to comply with an increasingly prescriptive quality regime promulgated under the National Reform Agenda now enshrined in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). This regime progressively displaced accredited courses, dispensing with educational curricula altogether in VET in favour of instrumental National Training Packages mandated since 1995.

Training Package development, revision and maintenance became an industry driven process conducted at arms-length from VET providers and the pedagogical expertise of teachers and academics. The design of VET qualifications is now the sole purview of national consortia of Industry Skills Councils working on government contract to address labour market priorities. Minimal concession is made for the educational needs or expectations of learners or the mission of particular institutions. In a conscientious

campaign to redefine and redirect post-secondary vocational education, notions of 'training' replaced teaching, 'competency' replaced learning, 'packaging rules' replaced curriculum and on-the-job performance replaced pre-employment institutional preparation for career and life for those school leavers and others using VET to transition into work. Institutional attempts at college or course levels to enhance the scope or integrity of VET learning through educational 'value-adding' onto minimum training package requirements is frustrated in different state jurisdictions and generally thwarted or explicitly denied, especially in NSW.

Certificate II to Certificate IV employment outcomes in VET, including traineeship and apprenticeship programs, gained precedent over broader and longer term para-professional or academic considerations. Consequently, 2003 – 2007 saw static overall growth and a marked decline in completions of higher level VET diploma and advanced diploma qualifications in key disciplines including Education down 17.5% and Creative Arts down 14.3%. Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reaction was to negotiate a target to double higher VET diploma and advanced diploma completions between 2009 and 2020 (COAG, 2008), specified in a National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development. By 2016 the Monash University Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) predicts a potential shortfall of over half a million diploma and advanced diploma qualified graduates based on anticipated growth in demand in professional and associate professional occupations (Shah and Burke, 2006). Asking 'What has been happening to vocational education and training diplomas and advanced diplomas?' Karmel concluded:

There is no doubt that graduates with diplomas and advanced diplomas do well in the labour market ... on average better than those with lower-level VET qualifications, but typically not as good as that of university graduates ... For a sizeable proportion ... the (VET) qualification is a stepping stone to a degree ... The policy challenge is to ensure that the position of diplomas and advanced diplomas is consolidated, by building up articulation arrangements with degrees where appropriate, and by improving the attractiveness of diploma and advanced diploma graduates for employers (NCVER, 2008).

Interestingly, explanation as to why VET diplomas and advanced diploma programs have declined so precipitously is largely absent from these analyses and predictions. There are many contributing factors. One chief reason relates to a very narrow Training Package interpretation of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) that unequivocally focused operational competencies at the 'supervisory' level in vocational

diplomas, with advanced diploma outcomes predicated upon 'management' rather than specialist or advanced technical functions in industry.

Increasingly, restrictive jurisdictional interpretation of Training Package rules led to a virtual prohibition on qualification nesting, despite often repeated advice to the contrary from both professional and educational stakeholders. At diploma and advanced diploma level, this effectively denied essential underpinning knowledge and enabling skills being carried forward from lower VET awards. Entrenched lack of recognition undermined the development of higher order applied conceptual, aesthetic and technical capabilities required to achieve para-professional outcomes in fields such as design and digital media for example.

Consequences impacted earlier were more pronounced in private rather than public VET provision. But after fifteen years attrition across the board of specialist curriculum, content has impoverished and threatened to irrevocably undermine the occupational relevance of diploma and advanced diploma qualifications. That it should have taken fifteen years for the marked decline in diploma and advanced diploma graduates from VET to become apparent is simply a function of how long it took for previously accredited content-rich, curriculum-based diploma and advanced diploma programs in specialist fields to be systematically refused reaccreditation and work their way out of the VET system to be replaced (or not) by more narrowly defined training package qualifications. Accompanying this attrition of high level VET curricula, many previously robust and mutually productive articulation agreements between VET and higher education institutions were retired, with the notable exception of those continuing to operate internally within dual sector universities.

Higher Education

From 2001 commitment to preserving and building upon unique para-professional curricula at AQF diploma and advanced diploma levels gave impetus in both public and private registered training organisations in VET to seek re-registration as non-self-accrediting higher education providers offering their own externally accredited degrees, many with nested diploma and associate degree awards. Growth in the number and profile of dual VET and higher education providers followed, along with the motivation to forge and safeguard meaningful pathways between general outcomes-based learning in

schools, applied competency-based training in VET and merit-based academic studies in higher education.

In this context, serious difficulties persisted around articulation, recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and advanced standing between different programs, institutions and sectors. The crux of these difficulties is likened to trying to compare 'apples' and 'oranges', where the apparent similarities are confounded by the inherent incompatibility of different pedagogical constructs and outputs. The educational challenge of establishing 'equivalency' of learning outcomes involves finding ways and means of juicing the different fruit from each sector, in order to mix an appropriate splash of school sweetness with a twist of vocational tang, adding just the right amount of higher education zest to sustain adult learners and ultimately deliver the promised graduate attributes to individuals, industry and the community at large.

Enthusiasm for bridging sectoral divides in education has generated various transitional models such as those mapped for the federal government in a report on University Credit for School Students. This survey reviewed options open to Australian senior secondary students to study university units at school for credit. It reflects '... a world-wide trend towards framing all of education in terms of lifelong learning with a concomitant blurring of boundaries between educational sectors ... recognising that able Australian school students need, and deserve the stimulation of challenging advanced study' (Figgis, Parker, Bowden, Money & Stanley, 2002). The 'demonstrable benefits' of school to university affiliations were found to be '... available to some students but denied to most', indicating a need for '... sustained (learning) conversation and information sharing within and between higher education and school education sectors'.

As a case in point, Deakin University is currently engaged in dialogue with seven Victorian schools over a proposed extension of its associate degree programs in arts, business or science to be offered from 2011 in two purpose-built school-based learning centres. Learning and teaching in these centres is intended to facilitate student engagement and support retention in the transition between school and university. Satisfactory achievement of part or all of an associate degree via 'Year 13' studies conducted by university staff at school centres located in low SES districts will guarantee entry to a Deakin degree program with credit and up to 18 months advanced standing (Trounson, 2010).

For transitioning between VET and higher education, and delivering more coherent and productive learning pathways, dual sector providers are considered best placed to reconcile the inherent disjuncture between the dictates of competency-based training and the goals of higher level outcomes-oriented programs of further education. Dual sector providers are thought to have the internal insight, experience and incentive to not only make informed pedagogical comparisons between different learning and teaching modes, course content and assessment requirements, but also the expertise to devise 'reasonable adjustments' for accommodating differences in purpose, scope and level of student achievement. In theory, dual sector providers have the organisational capacity to readily identify and fill gaps, incorporating additional support and mentoring of students from various backgrounds who are attempting to navigate between quite different VET and higher education learning demands and teaching expectations.

Pointing to 8% fewer VET graduates entering higher education in 2009 as 'a real worry', Lisa Wheelahan of the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership at the University of Melbourne confirms that distinctions between the sectors are indeed blurring. She highlights the crucial function of the diploma and advanced diploma level qualifications in facilitating school and VET student aspirations to access higher level studies. She also commends the demonstrable capacity built up by dual sector university providers since 2001, doubling their enrolments from 9% to 18% by 2008 compared to a rise of only two percentage points from 7% to 9% in single sector universities for the same period. Better performance of dual sector university providers is attributed to their wider institutional remit and structural advantages over single sector VET and higher education providers whereby '... they can accredit their own qualifications ... [offer] guaranteed places ... [and] support student transition by facilitating collaboration ... over curriculum and teaching and learning ... getting staff together and reworking curriculum in both sectors so it is more coherent' (Wheelahan, 2010).

June 2010 saw the release of a discussion paper on Dual-Sector University Cohesion, prepared by the University of Ballarat and Swinburne University of Technology (UB & SUT, 2010). This is part of the Dual-Sector Collaboration Project funded by DEEWR from the Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund. The paper very clearly outlines a number of curriculum and logistical strategies for better correlating tertiary education study options, albeit discussed in the context of five (5) combined public university and

TAFE entities. Referring to the International Standard Classification of Education framework used by the Organisation for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD ISCED), this analysis of tertiary education corroborates the importance of AQF diploma, advanced diploma and associate degree qualifications noting, ‘...significant overlap in either or both the academic content and intended outcomes of these awards ... (aligned) within the first one or two years of the Bachelor degree’.

Before reflecting on how curriculum redevelopment of diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate degrees might underpin a healthy tertiary education sector, it is worth noting that dual sector activities involving some combination of school and/or VET with higher education programs, pathways, articulation and credit transfer are by no means predicated upon or indeed restricted to the public sector prerogatives of TAFE or the universities. Overarching national standards now govern all tertiary education curriculum development and accreditation encapsulated in three primary regulatory instruments including:

- Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)
- National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (National Protocols)

For national recognition purposes of both public and private providers, the AQF differentiates all senior school, vocational and higher education qualifications in Australia. Similarly, the AQTF mandates training packages (in lieu of curriculum) in VET, while the National Protocols determine parameters for Higher Education. Within these interlocking frames of reference vocational and higher education providers can, and do, offer a wide range of certificate, diploma and degree qualifications in various non-TAFE and non-university contexts. These include private, not-for-profit, community, enterprise and corporate providers, all with vested interests in the future shape of tertiary education. This suggests many more organisational models and diverse curriculum options are available for stimulating ‘...creative development of new forms of tertiary education’ as described by the University of Ballarat and Swinburne University of Technology. However, the critical difference to be kept in mind is that non-universities are also by definition non-self accrediting institutions. Therefore, non-government providers are somewhat more constrained than the universities when it comes to the

development and delivery of customised programs of higher education at diploma or associate degree levels.

Nevertheless, for all concerned with tertiary education, the trick is to identify the most fruitful approach for dealing with what can be extremely challenging cross-sectoral complications. Dual-sector universities and other providers freely admit the many frustrations and inefficiencies involved in dealing with two irreconcilable external compliance regimes governing VET and higher education. The 'maze' of conflicting goals, competing obligations and duplicated reporting responsibilities persistently threatens to undermine the viability of institutional '...mission and plans, organisational structures, academic board dynamics, administrative and corporate support for collaborative educational programs, as well as staffing, personnel and industrial issues [that] must somehow comply with differing Federal, State and Territory Government requirements' (UB & SUT, 2010).

As such, initial optimism for a single Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) overseeing both higher education and VET is flagging. Scepticism mounts over whether a new, largely inexperienced audit authority at national level can or will even attempt to reconcile cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional regulatory contradictions and dislocation any time soon.

So what is to be done?

Having worked in schools, TAFE, private VET colleges, independent higher education providers and public universities across multi-sector, multi-jurisdictional contexts for the creative industries, I believe the single most direct and constructive way forward into tertiary education is to dispense with sectoral and multi-institutional preoccupations altogether, wherever possible.

Universities have at their disposal an opportunity to take full advantage of their self-accrediting status by focusing on nested, discipline-specific curriculum development of diploma and associate degree qualifications under the AQF. While dissent exists over recent efforts to 'strengthen' the AQF, the diploma and associate degree descriptors clearly acknowledge these qualifications as a legitimate 'pathway to further learning'. By strategically re-evaluating the potentiality of the diploma, and more particularly associate

degree awards in higher education, it seems feasible that the emerging parameters of national school curricula and the shortfall between narrowly defined vocational training packages might be readily bridged. Flexible alternate entry options into coherent higher education qualifications can be generated without universities necessarily needing to change their status or negotiate formal articulation agreements at the institution-to-institution level with any specific VET or school organisation or system.

Curriculum developers inside self-accrediting university faculties could review and map national school curriculum outcomes and those training package components relevant to their field. This contextual research would serve as a precursor to revisiting and/or reinventing undergraduate program design to include specialised nested and/or stand alone diploma and associate degree qualifications for internal accreditation as higher education awards owned by the university. Within the university such awards would offer reliable foundational pathways and guaranteed alternative entry, built on selected school or VET outcomes, which specifically privilege the aspirations of potential students from a wide range of backgrounds. Such students would have a direct sight line into the university's art, design and media degrees using what the OECD considers are custom designed 'short duration tertiary programs'.

There would be little or no need to disrupt the academic coherence of existing three or four year Bachelor degrees. Direct entry on merit via ATAR, TER or ENTER is unchanged. Rather the diploma and associate degree awards would exist as parallel offerings with internal equivalency, coexisting and potentially intersecting with the relevant degree in second year after satisfactory completion or partial credit for up to one and a half years of preparatory study that is customised to suit those targeted applicants not otherwise eligible for direct entry into the standard Bachelor degree. The matter of where or how applicants gained underpinning knowledge or skills, or indeed where or how such university preparation or bridging programs might be delivered then becomes a logistical rather than pedagogical issue, not necessarily contingent upon signed agreements with external school or VET providers.

In future, university-based units or courses from these pathway programs might promote explicit correlation with selected senior secondary school outcomes of relevant subjects in new national school curricula and/or targeted units or clusters of competencies in relevant training packages. Underpinning or enabling units or courses from these

university pathway programs could be open to school age students to complete in or out of school time as non-award studies. Such curriculum components would be clearly identified as designated studies that readily facilitate recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and potential advanced standing for applicants seeking enrolment into the university's own diplomas or associate degrees. Students from any Australian school or VET provider having achieved the relevant national curriculum subjects or national training package units of competency or awards would therefore be eligible to apply for alternate Bachelor degree entry via these tertiary university preparation pathways.

The university retains full control over preparatory pathways and award integrity with relatively open access into its programs using purpose-designed curriculum components that acknowledge relevant prior learning achieved by each applicant. This approach enables university diploma and associate degree coursework to address core academic concerns and applied professional capabilities deemed necessary by the faculty to integrate key threshold concepts – thus ensuring satisfactory transition from pathway programs into final stages of mainstream Bachelor degrees.

There would be no compulsion for a self-accrediting university to become a dual sector provider by registering or seeking to behave as a Registered Training Organisation. There would be no need to deliver training package qualifications, no need to comply with the vocational AQTF and no need to enter into binding articulation agreements with public or private third party providers, in either the VET or schools sectors. Furthermore, an increase in open access to university specific pathways designed along these lines would substantially contain and help manage academic risk, while permitting tertiary education pathway enrolments and advanced standing to be handled through standard university student recruitment and administration channels.

At discipline level, the curriculum development task would involve an extra step to come to terms with the content and outcomes of national school curricula and training package competencies in the field. In-principle advice may be sought from secondary and vocational experts as well as university academics teaching in the degree to inform curriculum design of the specialist diploma and associate degree pathways. Practice-based learning can be aligned with foundation academic, technical and visual literacy units or courses in art, design and media to establish a reliable platform for scaffolding

into the higher order creative and cognate learning required to achieve a Bachelor degree.

Conclusion

This paper looked at circumstances within which tertiary education is mooted for expansion in Australia with particular reference to differing prerogatives in schools, VET and higher education. A curriculum development scenario is outlined that argues particular advantages for self accrediting universities to create 'short duration tertiary programs', at AQF diploma and associate degree levels, as relevant and reliable mechanisms for facilitating improved student access to higher education.

In future such curricula, designed and developed within the university, could readily aim to provide foundation programs and pathways that acknowledge national school curricula and/or national training package outcomes in VET. In doing so, universities could provide leadership and take carriage of tertiary education transition arrangements. Except where it serves clear marketing or logistical purposes, the curriculum approach for higher education diploma and associate degree offerings would largely relieve universities of both the obligations and risks associated with negotiating and maintaining institution-to-institution articulation agreements across multiple organisations and jurisdictions in the school and VET sectors.

Focusing curriculum development on the scaffolding of student learning from school and VET into university suggests that pedagogical tensions between intrinsic values and instrumental outcomes in creative arts education could be ameliorated. Ideally, students from low SES and other non-academic backgrounds may view such alternate entry to university more positively if the enabling programs better accommodated their past experience, current needs and future aspirations and overtly set about inducting them into the adult learning requirements in university. This involves helping to fill identified gaps in prior knowledge and skills, and modelling strategies for successful engagement with discipline specific threshold concepts in supportive learning environments.

The foregoing discussion differentiates 'means' and 'ends' in preparing for tertiary education. From a pedagogical perspective, it offers a pragmatic strategy for satisfying shared educational aspirations designed to benefit individuals, universities and the community. It places value on the principle of tertiary education in terms of what Dewey

called 'ends-in-view' (Hickman & Alexander, 1998). It aims to draw on professional insight into national curriculum in schools and competency-based training in VET to bring informed 'practical judgement' to bear on the scaffolding of foundational creative arts curriculum development in the university. Action taken to create higher education diploma and associate degree pathways indicates a need for flexible and customised learning and teaching strategies that recognise the merit of improving school and VET student access to higher education outcomes, while avoiding unnecessarily subjecting applicants to mediation or compromise of their futures by competing sector prerogatives or interests.

By potentially alleviating cross-sectoral complications and hopefully limiting potentially negative consequences for university administration or governance, this approach provides valid 'means' for increasing the participation of low SES students, thereby boosting potential Bachelor degree achievement by more adult learners. These 'ends' are immediately achievable and relevant for tertiary education, notwithstanding ongoing sectoral uncertainty and delay around Commonwealth policy, regulatory and compliance frameworks for national coordination of senior and post-secondary education.

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