The dilemmas inherent in curriculum design: Unpacking the lived experiences of Australian teacher educators

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Abstract

Teacher educators often find themselves struggling to enact a continually shifting teacher education reform policy agenda in relation to increasing standardisation and more strident accountability measures. This has to be balanced with best trying to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in different community settings and to be well prepared for current and future challenges. We are three teacher educators who use narrative inquiry to interrogate these dilemmas and the ways in which they play out in teacher education curriculum design work. We analyse the stories and identify the three themes of contexts, currency, and connection. We offer a number of pro-active strategies to help teacher educators to make an agentive response to the task of curriculum planning. We suggest a variety of ways in which teacher educators can use their knowledge of place, policy, and working in partnerships to navigate through this highly regulated space.

Keywords: curriculum design, initial teacher education, teacher educators, dilemmas

Introduction

For many countries affiliated with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it is acknowledged that the marketisation agenda has led to the widespread diversification of initial teacher education (ITE) programming in these settings (Whitty & Power 2000). As a direct result of this agenda, educating future teachers now occurs in many ways and across a multitude of learning sites. When this reality is coupled with significant worldwide teacher shortages, the result is the accretion of further demands on an already stretched system (McLean Davies & Watterson, 2022). Unsurprisingly, given the current climate, debates about who should take responsibility for preparing and educating teachers and about the best place in which to do this, have been rife and are gaining further traction. In Australia, our context, teacher preparation remains the central responsibility of universities. There has been, however, great pressure to share the responsibility of preparing teachers by using school-university partnership models (White et al., 2018).

Of note, Australian ITE providers have experienced three distinct waves of partnership policy reform over the last 15 years with each underpinned by increasing calls for pre-service teachers to spend more time in schools (Mayer et al. 2017). To date, the Australian Government has mandated school-university partnerships as part of its ITE accreditation requirements (Craven et al., 2014) following the lead of England and the United States (Menter et al., 2010). More recent reform has included the formalisation of internships (Universities Australia, 2022), including the return of accelerated ITE programming, and granting final year pre-service teachers with *permission to teach* status (Paul et al., 2022). These rapid shifts in policy requirements and community expectations have left ITE providers grappling to define what it is that they are preparing future teachers for and how best to achieve this within a higher education context that brings with it a certain academic rigour along with budgetary obligations. With this issue comes a series of considerations on how to design ITE programs that best meet the needs of all students and prepare teachers who are both classroom ready and future focused. In this paper, we examine these considerations from the perspective of curriculum design and, as teacher educators, we explore a number of dilemmas that relate to the challenges and opportunities they afford.

As teacher educators, we occupy a potential space of influence and agency amidst competing demands and external forces regarding the re-design of curriculum for ITE programming. While how to understand the enactment of ITE curriculum reform in practice remains a largely untold story among academics and in the research literature, teacher educators certainly play a critical role as curriculum developers and in addressing curriculum reform dilemmas (Bourke et al. 2022). And, if the emphasis on how to best prepare future teachers remains at the top of policy agendas globally (see Darling-Hammond, 2016), the quality of ITE programs that include the design and delivery of curriculum content will continue to require ongoing introspection and improvement. As a result of this imperative, we three teacher educators who work collaboratively in ITE draw here on narrative traditions (see Parr & Doecke, 2012) to offer and explain our insights in response to the research question: "What

are the dilemmas of curriculum design in teacher education, and how do teacher educators position themselves in relation to these dilemmas?"

Literature review

By means of positioning this study within the broader literature, this review situates ITE in Australia historically, before we use the emergence of the theory-practice debates as a mechanism for understanding curriculum development, design, and delivery. We focus on the notion of dilemma since it allows us, as teacher educators, to problematise curriculum design in teacher education and to consider areas ripe for improvement and innovation.

Teacher preparation: Whose responsibility?

Historically, the preparation of teachers in Australia was situated in what were considered to be second-tier institutions within the Australian adult education structure (Mayer, 2015). Such institutions, often known as Teachers Colleges, were vocational in nature, closely aligned with schools, and were practice-focused and driven. In 1988, ITE moved away from these vocational institutions into the universities (Mayer, 2015). During this time, there was pressure on the profession of teaching to prove its academic legitimacy and intellectual worth, both in the university and in the wider educational research field and community. Accompanying this physical shift and the subsequent pressure to become more academic was also a perceptual shift in those working in schools and in policy makers that a university-based ITE curriculum is highly theoretical and disconnected from schools and, more particularly, from classroom practice (Mayer, 2015).

Such historical changes and the long-held debates about the best place to learn to be a teacher (see Dewey, 1904) have resulted in the perceived dichotomy of theory and practice in ITE that sees universities problematically championed as the contexts that develop theoretical knowledge through their curriculum on the one hand, and schools as the contexts in which practical knowledge is taught and learned, on the other. Loughran and Hamilton (2016), however, warned of the consequence of perceiving theory and practice in dichotomous terms in the preparation of classroom teachers and suggested that this not only restricts thinking, but also limits the possibility of conceptualising and reconceptualising new ways of ITE preparation.

This perceived theory-practice dichotomy has resulted in various criticisms of ITE in Australia over the past few decades, as well as in ongoing calls for teacher educators situated in higher education institutions (HEIs) to bridge the gap (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). These criticisms have often positioned teacher educators as both the reason for, and the solution to, the problem as well as the brokers or boundary crossers working between and across HEIs and school contexts (Green et al., 2020). They have also proved challenging for HEIs that are now balancing and delivering a highly regulated and compliance-driven ITE curriculum while simultaneously provisioning for school-based professional experience and curriculum opportunities.

'Mind the gap': Bridging the theory-practice divide

Over the years, university-school partnerships have been heralded by Australian policymakers as a way to remedy the perceived gap between theory and practice (Green et al., 2020). The notion of work-readiness has also been high on the agenda and "Australian universities have come under increasing pressure to be accountable for the effectiveness of their teaching programmes" (Kenny et al., 2018, p. 13). This has prompted new ways of working in ITE as well as the emergence of several different variants of the university-school partnership model across the ITE landscape.

Both the challenges and benefits of the university-school partnership have been well documented (Heide, 2017; Jackson & Burch, 2019). However, little is known about whether bridging this perceived gap in ITE education in Australia better prepares ITE students for the classroom experience. This poses more challenges for teacher educators who are often left to balance the expectations of navigating the university-school partnership model, while simultaneously attempting to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the enacted curriculum on pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach.

ITE curriculum design and delivery: A balancing act

In illuminating the balancing act required of teacher educators, Simon (2013) got straight to the heart of the key dilemma influencing curriculum design in the Australian ITE context when she wrote about "the need to effectively incorporate compliance and accreditation obligations within innovative and inspiring programs for pre-service teachers" (p. 1). This tension is not reserved, however, for teacher education alone since it plays out in curriculum intentions and development across higher education (Scott, 2018) and is often positioned within a model of rapid contextual change (Forster, 2012). This need for change ultimately becomes the catalyst for significant adaptations to programmatic approaches and structures, while bearing in mind the integrity of the profession as an underlying constant. Teacher education is particularly susceptible to dilemmas such as this because of the highly visible and high stakes nature of learning and teaching in our society. The practice of "bricolage" as adapted by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 4), has been used to describe curriculum development in ITE since it brings together a range of approaches, influences, interpretations, and techniques to represent a whole that is much greater than the sum of its parts.

The curriculum dilemma

A dilemma, by its very nature, is challenging and requires creative problem solving to be resolved. In the context of ITE and curriculum development, Alsubaie (2016) identified that curriculum itself is a "living document that is in constant flux" (p. 107). Alsubaie's research in Saudi Arabia, surfaced the importance of adapting to ongoing change by involving classroom teachers in assisting to ensure curriculum relevance and currency. Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2006), in calling out the contemporary dilemmas facing teacher education particularly in the United States but also internationally, referred to the need for teacher educators to work more closely than ever with teachers and schools to engage in a

"mutual transformation agenda" (p. 302) with curriculum development forming part of this shared work. The successful enactment of curriculum goes hand-in-hand with the support of effective pedagogies of teacher education. These pedagogies have been described by Darling-Hammond and her colleagues (2007) as being intended to "support teacher abilities to learn *in* and *from* practice" (p. 441, emphasis in original), which includes working in collaboration with classroom-based colleagues.

Darling-Hammond (2006) noted that change in ITE is "messy" and can be a "struggle" (p. 302). It can also be political; Plomp (2007) specifically described curriculum development as "complex" (p. 11), particularly with respect to global educational reforms. The notion of dilemma is of interest as a tool for navigating and negotiating messy and complex spaces, such as curriculum development in ITE. Cabaroglu and Tillemaa (2011) recognised that dilemmas can be a useful trigger for supporting teacher educators to think, and, ultimately, act differently in terms of their own educational practices. Importantly, the notion of a dilemma when used as a framework for reflection can lead teacher educators from a place of understanding the beliefs that underpin their practice to engaging with improvement-focused strategies (Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2005). Similarly, Caspari-Gnann and Sevian's (2022) recent study demonstrated that, in fact, contradictions in teaching practice can be conceptualised as sources of change through a framework that considers dilemmas to be conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and/or political in nature. They were able to show that when contradictions were reconsidered as dilemmas there was a change in educators' mindsets from seeing obstacles to seeing possibilities for growth. It was from this perspective that we considered using narrative traditions to uncover both challenges and opportunities for change.

Research design

The subjective states of being and feeling are privileged in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By foregrounding these states, we allow values and perceptions that align with particular social mores, values, and worldviews to surface. In seeking to better understand and gain greater insights into these social phenomena, qualitative research is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 5). Critical qualitative research, however, moves beyond uncovering an individual's lifeworld perceptions to a more politicised stance. Bearing in mind the risk that the voices of critical qualitative researchers will be marginalised and relegated to the periphery (Cacciattolo et al., 2020), engaging in this research approach is an act designed to uncover previously side-lined truths. Within spaces of tension, critical qualitative researchers are committed to paving the way for transformative change. We, as teacher education researchers, adopted a critical research approach as a means of challenging the many agendas that impinge on teacher education.

Participants

As co-authors of this paper, we currently work together in a School of Education at a metropolitan university situated in south-eastern Australia. Collectively, we represent 54 years of experience in teacher education in a variety of roles ranging from Program Coordination to Directorships to Dean. Individually, our time working in teacher education and current roles are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Participant experiences and current roles in teacher education

	Teacher education experience (years)	**Current role in teacher education**
Simone	28	Dean (School of Education)
Wendy	12	Director (Work Integrated Learning)
Angela	14	Director (Initial Teacher Education)

Data creation

We adopted a dialogic narrative-based approach (Parr & Doecke, 2012) for this study as a means of representing and analysing our lived experiences regarding curriculum development in teacher education. To start the data creation process, we each independently developed a written narrative account to document a significant dilemma we had experienced and/or identified in relation to curriculum development. This approach can be defined as a form of case writing (Shulman, 1992); it provided us with an effective vehicle for documenting and critically reflecting on a dilemma identified as requiring further exploration. Schön (1991) identified case writing as providing a method of systematic inquiry that encourages educators to reflect in and on their practice. We chose to collect data in this way because it was an effective way to respond to the research question that prompted us to grapple with dilemmas connected to curriculum development in teacher education. By documenting, interrogating, and sharing dilemmas in this way, new possibilities opened to us for rethinking practices and policies linked to curriculum development.

Data analysis

Once all the narratives had been circulated and critiqued by all of us, we generated initial insights and bundled them together. Ary et al. (2009) use the term open coding to describe this stage of initial coding. The next step is to then make connections between and among each of the open codes. To achieve this, we looked for links between sentences and passages that we extracted from the cases, and we looked for similarities and differences between and among the narratives. This step, known as axial coding, shows the connections between the raw data and the emergent data themes. According to Hawkins (2017), "recognition of a recurring theme can result from a researcher hearing items over and over in interviews relating to views, emotions and ideas" (p. 1757). Once patterns in the cases were identified, we collaboratively established overarching umbrella themes that highlighted similar or

different elements of our curriculum development experiences in teacher education. We identified three umbrella themes:

1. Context
2. Currency
3. Connection

In the section on discussion, we explore and theorise these themes in some detail.

Case studies

Using the medium of narrative, we present the cases in this section as three individually written responses to our key research question: "What are the dilemmas of curriculum design in teacher education, and how do teacher educators position themselves in relation to these dilemmas?" Separately, these cases tease out the nuances of our lived experiences of curriculum development in teacher education. Collectively, they represent an understanding of the shared dilemmas facing teacher educators as they seek to prepare the future graduate teacher workforce in a climate of change, uncertainty, and demand. Through the notion of dilemmas, we problematise notions of place, praxis, and currency in teacher education as experienced through our own pathways as educators.

Simone's dilemma: Forging place-conscious teacher education

While there is a growing recognition of the need to prepare teachers to better understand student diversity in their classrooms, there is still little focus on preparing teachers for the diversity of the contexts or communities in which these teachers might find themselves placed, in particular, in rural, regional, and remote contexts. Yet, knowing place matters particularly when it comes to best serving the needs of students, their families, and community. Preparing teachers to know how to teach in, with, and for place should be a key aspect in any teacher education program but is often not a central curriculum feature. I argue that rurality is a concept that must be understood by all teacher educators, not just those who are geographically located in rural locations and if we do so, we can better address all students' needs.

This is not the first time I have written about this issue. For some time now I have been researching and writing about the staffing needs of rural, regional, and remote contexts and the best ways teacher education can better support these staff members. Like many of our research interests, this focus comes from my own experiences as a child moving from rural town to rural town. Also, in my first teaching position in a small rural community with a high Indigenous population, I did not feel best equipped to teach all the students in my class. The community's gaze on me as a beginning teacher sent me on a quest to better support the preparation of teachers.

After many years of working in teacher education, I now find myself a Dean of Education and hope to leverage this role, in partnership with colleagues at both the

university and schools, to explore how to build a place-conscious teacher education curriculum and to investigate which features of place can be embedded into all aspects of our teaching and learning design. This desire is set against a backdrop of increasing standardisation of the curriculum that has occurred over the past two decades and that produces, typically, what I call a metro teacher education model that is based on the notion that one size fits all and is often urban by default in its response to a set of prescribed standards, rather than framed by concepts such as rurality and place in mind.

Standardisation, testing, and regulation in all aspects of teacher education have increased in Australia, as these have for all OECD countries. So, too, has the dire teaching shortage. Indeed, we are currently experiencing a severe dearth of teachers that has been exacerbated by the pandemic and its aftermath. These crises and the current reforms to address them by moving to school-based teacher education models, following the UK and US, while deeply problematic, might also help enable a greater diversification of models. New models that showcase context could enable place-based and place-consciousness ones to be placed at the heart of teacher education. Exploring school-based or employment-based routes could, ironically enough, support schools that are often further away from universities and could become more visible in teacher education.

Wendy's dilemma: Navigating the theory-practice dichotomy

In Australia, education is in crisis. As I reflect on the shortage of teachers, the declining enrolments in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and the archaic industrial-revolution-borne system that has seen little change since its inception, as a teacher educator I cannot help but feel responsible. For me, this feeling of responsibility centres around the dichotomy of theory and practice found in the teacher education curriculum, and the almost unchallenged notion in Australia that universities are the contexts that develop theoretical knowledge, and schools are the contexts in which pre-service teachers (PSTs) gain their practical understandings.

Over the past decade I have worked hard at developing the theoretical knowledge of PSTs and I have remained silent on my thoughts about the notion that schools prepare PSTs adequately with the practical understandings necessary to be effective teachers in a changed environment. When I reflect deeply on this dichotomy of theory and practice, and my lack-of-challenge of regulatory requirements and curriculum design in teacher education over the years, I know that I have been complicit in preparing people to enter a system that is no longer viable in the current world. Over the past ten years my research has reflected my wrestle with the theory-practice dichotomy evident in curriculum design in teacher education. My research has been pragmatic, situated in schools, and has primarily involved some element of partnership work.

This work has been an attempt to bridge the dichotomy that is so uncomfortable and unsettling for me as a teacher educator, and an intentional attempt to disrupt the

deeply held belief in Australia that schools are the contexts in which pre-service teachers gain their practical understandings. More recently, however, I have become a little bolder in my research work and have actively sought to demonstrate how the university context can develop the practical understandings and skills of PSTs. This work has involved harnessing virtual reality (VR) in the university context and investigating the ways in which the tool can develop, improve, and support risk-taking and innovation, as well as refine classroom practice. Gathering evidence that demonstrates the potential of universities to prepare a new-aged teacher who is equipped to innovate, challenge, and change the system, has provided me with a way to position myself effectively in disrupting the current curriculum separation of theory and practice and push towards system change that allows for an entanglement of theory and practice that travels across and between universities and schools.

Angela's dilemma: Remaining 'current' as a teacher educator

I have a strong memory from my first few weeks back in a secondary school in 2021 that is hard to shake. I hadn't been employed in a school since 2006 and found myself as the Assistant Principal of a rural school dealing with the day-to-day realities captured by the three (unofficial) Ds of the role:

- Dunnies [an Australian slang word for toilet];
- Dickheads [a disparaging term for someone being stupid, irritating, or ridiculous]; and
- Disasters.

I remember thinking that this moment is not meant to be about my past life as a teacher educator, but I had most definitely not prepared the pre-service teachers I worked with for this. And by this, I didn't mean the work of a school leader but the challenging contextual elements of what it means to be a teacher in a school setting right now. There was a deep sense of guilt and disappointment in feeling that I had completely missed the mark.

This feeling was reignited in me when I read *Next Steps*, the report of the Quality Initial teacher Education review (Australian Government, 2022), the latest review of initial teacher education (ITE) in Australia, earlier in the year. In particular, Recommendation 13 grabbed my attention: "[r]equire higher education providers to publicly report the proportion of academic staff in ITE who have substantial recent experiences teaching in schools or childcare centres" (p. 66). This is not necessarily a new or original requirement with current accreditation standards in Australia for ITE requiring an identification of staff recency of school experience where relevant. (See Program Standard 2: Program development, design and delivery (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2015)). In practice, for ongoing academic staff, this recency is often recognised through initiatives, such as classroom-based research and/or work-integrated learning partnerships.

For me, the classroom currency of teacher educators is part of the dilemma that plagues curriculum design in teacher education. Being on the periphery of schools, no matter how frequently, resulted in my thinking that this was not enough. You don't know what you don't know. My experience suggests that it wasn't the content or even the pedagogy that I felt lacking in; it was the context that I didn't have a real grasp on and in many ways context is key. I was lacking a true understanding of the reality of the work of teachers on the ground day in and day out alongside the lived experiences of students, both inside and outside the school gate. In some ways, I think it is not about how teacher educators position themselves within this dilemma but how they engage with teachers via targeted initiatives, such as team teaching and school-based experiences, to bring currency to the ways in which curriculum is designed, developed, and ultimately delivered.

Discussion

As previously mentioned, three umbrella themes emerged from the data analysis phase in relation to curriculum design in teacher education:

- Context
- Currency
- Connection

Each of these themes provides a window into the dilemmas faced by us as teacher educators and the ways in which we position ourselves within them. We recognise that curriculum design in teacher education is located in messy, complex, and culturally situated spaces and that there are a multitude of dilemmas that could be surfaced to respond to this particular provocation. Here, we have chosen to focus on these three themes since they are the ones that became apparent, in relation to the research question, through the narrative writing process. The sections below explore and extend these research findings and offer additional insights into the challenges and opportunities afforded by curriculum design in teacher education.

Context

For some time now many scholars have written about the importance of developing a place-conscious curriculum in teacher education (Azano et al 2019; Green & Reid, 2004; White, 2019; White & Kline, 2012). Place consciousness (see Gruenewald, 2003) acknowledges the importance of getting to know a place and of considering its history, geography, and demography through a strengths-based approach. Context is important. Given that most of the teachers come from suburban places, teachers who are to be successful in a rural/remote context, for example, need to be prepared to teach students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. They need to approach the decision to teach in a rural community by looking at the benefits of the community rather than its apparent deficits (Thompson, 2002). They need to acknowledge and match learning experiences that significantly build on the rich and diverse lives of rural and regional students and must be prepared to teach at

different developmental stages and ages in the classroom setting. Rural teachers also need to know how to work in teams using technology to develop their own professional learning. While all these skills, understanding, and knowledge might arguably be necessary for all teachers, their value is increased for those who work in rural, regional, and remote contexts. These aspects need to be reflected in the curriculum that students experience.

Both Simone and Angela's reflections grapple with the notion that context matters and that ITE programs have a role in preparing future teachers to be flexible and adaptable in their mindsets and practices to enable meaningful engagement with different cohorts in a range of settings (see Herodotou et al., 2019). In reality, the achievement of this goal is a challenge. While first-hand experiences, such as participation in professional placement opportunities in rural/remote communities, are optimal, they are not practicable from the perspective of scalability, sustainability, and accessibility (Vranjesevic, 2014). Curriculum design becomes a key mechanism through which to create space and conversations about diversity and the role that innovative pedagogies can have in empowering learners and valuing where they are contextually situated. A recent report from the Joint Research Centre (JRC, 2022), a subsidiary of the European Commission, highlighted that a flexible curriculum that allows for personal reflexivity, creates communities of practice, and involves educators of different backgrounds and that this can have a powerful influence on the ways in which pre-service teachers navigate and negotiate diverse educational contexts. This approach speaks to the importance of exposing future teachers to all possibilities and equipping them with a set of tools to build their personal attributes.

Currency

While it may seem trivial and perhaps pedantic, language and the words we ascribe to things matter (Fine Marron, 2017). In this instance, it is an examination of the similarities and differences inherent in the terms currency and recency. Recency of school experience in teacher education is in some ways the holy grail since it brings a significant number of kudos and a great deal of credibility that speak volumes to pre-service teachers and school-focused stakeholders (Williams et al., 2022). The notion of recency is especially relevant in the context of curriculum design because it provides a sense of engaging with learning and teaching in ways that directly relate to what it means to be a teacher in the current moment rather than to a potentially dated conceptualisation of the realities of the classroom (Hicks, 2018). Angela's narrative certainly captures a dilemma that caused her to question her own currency despite being someone who has spent significant time in schools and with teachers as a teacher educator. Equally, Wendy's narrative uncovers her own personal tussle with the theory-practice divide in ITE and the potentially inadequate preparation of pre-service teachers for the current school system. Despite their attempts to maintain currency, both Angela and Wendy no longer had recent classroom experience and therefore their attempts to prepare classroom-ready teachers, via curriculum development and delivery, was impacted.

Care does need to be taken, however, since the currency-recency debate in ITE runs the risk of becoming reductionist. On the one hand, to seek only teacher educators with classroom recency may reduce ITE to a series of tips and tricks for managing the daily realities of the

classroom (Loughran, 2010), whereas, on the other, skilled teacher educators who maintain current links to the classroom have the potential to encourage pre-service teachers to engage differently and deeply with what it means to teach and be a teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2016 In reality, this is not an either-or proposition since learning to be a teacher is multi-faceted. Both recency in schools and currency in educational best practice are needed to truly prepare classroom-ready, future-focused graduates. With some ambiguity inherent in the Australian Government's (2022) current policy push for teacher educators to have "substantial recent experiences teaching in schools" (p. x), there is a need for teacher educators to seek out creative ways in which to position themselves within this dilemma. The adoption of a co-teaching model that brings together classroom teachers and teacher educators to develop and deliver the ITE curriculum in collaboration is one such solution (Graziano & Naverrete, 2012). As Murphy and Martin (2015) have pointed out, co-teaching is a particularly powerful way to break down the theory-practice divide in ITE by providing pre-service teachers with a balanced perspective on appropriate classroom strategies that have been interrogated and critiqued from a strong evidence base.

Connection

Ultimately, learning and teaching is a relational activity (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). Through ITE, teacher educators are trying not only to connect with their pre-service teachers but to support them in developing the skills and strategies required to meaningfully connect with their students, families, and school communities in their capacity as future teachers (Graue & Brown, 2003). Equally, teacher educators are also seeking ways for pre-service teachers to engage authentically with an evidence base to inform understandings of quality learning and teaching as a way of connecting theory and practice (Belford et al., 2020). While the practical elements of ITE, namely school placements, certainly enable these connections to be established and fostered in obvious ways, there are still some challenges inherent in how the curriculum implemented through ITE programs is perceived as also preparing graduates for the realities of the classroom. Notions of connection are grappled with in both Wendy's and Simone's narratives. Through her reflections, Wendy details how she has sought to disrupt the disconnections in ITE apparent between not only theory and practice, but also schools and universities in terms of their shared role in preparing future teachers. This disruption led to a reconsideration of the role of ITE and the place that curriculum design has in being more forward thinking in equipping graduates with the resources to innovate, challenge, and change the education system rather than perpetuate the status quo. For Simone, it is an acknowledgement that an understanding of place matters and that if learning and teaching is to be meaningful in any given context then understanding how to connect at an educational level is critical.

Thinking about curriculum design in teacher education through the framework of dilemma supports what Loughran and Hamilton (2016) describes as going "beyond the common rhetoric" (p. 254). Loughran explains that "calm, tenacious and honest reflection on purpose" is not only necessary in teacher educators but that it is and can be an important driver of change in ITE (p. 262). In this study, not only did it provide us with a way to individually

begin this forward movement, but it also provided a way for us to identify the collective dilemmas that might drive such movement. The three umbrella themes of context, currency, and connection that emerged through the three dilemmas provide a useful way of moving "beyond the common rhetoric" (Loughran et al., 2016, p. 262) and repositioning teacher educators within these dilemmas in ways that drive and facilitate change.

Repositioning the teacher educator in curriculum design

Co-design is underpinned by the philosophy of a participatory mindset and the repositioning of the expert as anyone with lived experience of the problem or challenge being explored. Recently, co-design has been championed by policymakers in Australian education as a new way for universities and schools to work together in partnership. However, this championing is problematic, particularly in university-school partnerships that are focused on bridging the gap between theory and practice. It fails to recognise that teacher educators' expertise often spans both theory and practice and repositions teacher educators as having no or little lived experience of schools and the classroom. This positioning can act as a barrier to university-school partnerships, particularly for teacher educators who might feel unseen or unheard by the teaching profession.

Interestingly, co-design of curriculum in ITE programs also poses a significant opportunity to break down some of these assumptions and barriers and can better connect teachers and teacher educators in achieving the shared goal of preparing classroom-ready teachers. It opens potential avenues to shift both language and practice away from gaps and divides to more collaborative partnerships by repositioning teacher educators as academic practitioners who are still very much engaged in the teaching profession.

Similarly, co-teaching offers the same vehicle for teacher educators to reposition themselves within the field of curriculum design, develop their currency, and extend the impact of their research in the modern teaching profession. The process of co-designing *with* a classroom teacher provides teacher educators with an opportunity to place new theoretical understandings and ideas directly into the hands of practitioners while simultaneously learning about new developments in the profession and in the wider education system. When classroom teachers and teacher educators engage in the process of co-teaching, a work-embedded professional development emerges that crosses over both school and university context and opens opportunities for reciprocal sharing and learning to emerge. It not only becomes a vehicle for innovation, change, and unity in the preparation of classroom teachers but it also presents a way of harnessing the expertise of both school and university contexts to talk back to government and the community and generate systemic and regulatory change.

Place, if repositioned at the forefront of teacher educator thinking, also becomes an effective vehicle for enhancing and instigating change in the teaching profession. When place is at the forefront of thinking it becomes the driver of change where regulatory requirements and increasing standardisation in teacher education need to be justified within context, rather than squeezed into places for which they are simply not suitable. Place-conscious teacher

education provides a way for teacher educators to talk back to the regulatory requirements and increasing standardisation in ways that are based on data and evidence. It also provides teacher educators with a way to drive change and address the one-size-fits-all approach that is generally adopted by governments and regulatory bodies. Coupled with place-based models of teacher education, a place-conscious teacher educator can become a powerful voice in provisioning for contextual nuances and ensuring that teacher education students are better prepared for the diversity of the contexts in which they find themselves.

Conclusion

As outlined earlier, contradictions posed as dilemmas can be conceptualised as great sources of change and can enable possibilities of growth. As teacher educators squeezed into an ever-increasing high stakes standardised teacher education landscape, it has been refreshing to use the tools of narrative inquiry to help us think through the opportunities that the current reforms of more employment-based routes pose.

In posing the question, "What are the dilemmas of curriculum design in teacher education, and how do teacher educators position themselves in relation to these dilemmas?" we have not only identified the key themes of contexts, currency, and connection but also identified a number of pro-active strategies to help us in our curriculum planning. The analysis helped reveal a variety of ways in which teacher educators can use their knowledge of place, policy, and working in partnerships to navigate through a highly regulated space.

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