

Developing critical questions from faculty tensions: An approach to collegiality in course teams

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The authors of this paper are academic developers in an Australian university. In this paper, we discuss the outcomes of a small pilot study about value tensions; completed to inform a larger research project about the possibilities of making collaborative collegiality an explicit aim of a curriculum review. After interviewing four course leaders, we were interested in the highly specific nature of the course leaders' challenges. Could a critical enquiry schema based on each course leader's emerging value tensions provide a scaffold for scholarly, critical discourse? Making tensions explicit in teaching and learning development work in university course teams may begin a process of situated, critical questioning and discourse on the curriculum itself. We acknowledge this work can, at times, elicit a form of difficult discourse.

Introduction

In this paper we present a small sample of academics' stories of leading course teams through a period of curriculum review and renewal. These stories were collected as part of a larger ethics-approved research project about course (sometimes called program) leadership and collaborative collegiality during a course review. While we, as academic developers, were conscious of the challenges in implementing broad curriculum change, the course leaders' stories changed our understanding of what actions we could take to support them. What had been imagined useful in terms of strategies for course leaders, such as materials about curriculum design and some generalised professional development about reflective practice, did not match the situational context of course leaders working in the space. What *was* found were value tensions (Di Napoli, 2014, and after this introduction, referred to more simply as 'tensions' for reasons of fluency) by course leaders when undertaking curriculum renewal, and, tensions experienced by academic developers tasked to assist curriculum teams in the curriculum development process.

In the light of this early project finding, we undertook a small pilot (documented here) with the goal of analysing the stories of four course leaders from a tensions perspective. We wished to test our early finding that each course leader could benefit from an academic developer's construction of a set of contextualised critical questions designed to make visible specific tensions that burden individual course leaders. What critical questions could we ask of course leaders that might lead course teams towards scholarly discussions about curriculum? It is important to note that the larger research project will describe how curriculum leaders and their teams, along with academic developers, found ways to proceed with the larger goal of engaging collaboratively (thus collegially) to enrich a course's curriculum. The purpose of this pilot study was to both surface existing

tensions as an important acknowledgement of the complexity of curriculum renewal at a course level, and, to explore the possibility of using the surfaced tensions as a counter-intuitive medium for developing collegiality strong enough to facilitate authentic change. To foreshadow the hoped-for collegiality that might emerge in our larger study, we have included one example of successful collaborative work by a course leader, Chris, in this pilot study, who demonstrated that curriculum negotiation can be successful 'if a somewhat fraught process'.

The issue at the heart of this paper relates to making explicit these, what we call, tensions (Di Napoli, 2014). Academics leading course teams experience tensions particular to their contexts and are unlikely to find that consensus about curriculum values already exists. Fractures (are) evident, within disciplinary communities, particularly regarding views about the contents and organisation of the curriculum and pedagogy (Krause, 2014). We argue that some value tensions are a product of intra-course micro-politics; arising from a decentralisation of accountability that has intensified political activity at all levels, and especially at a micro level (Milliken, 2001, p.75). While some local level micro-politics are a form of tactical manoeuvring of individuals (Worthington & Hodgson, 2005, pp.97-98), tensions about curriculum can reveal nuanced stories of philosophical and pragmatic challenges experienced by course leaders. Making tensions visible applies equally to academic developers. Whose values do academic developers present to course leaders, and how do we navigate the space that is often betwixt and between the desires of university leadership, faculty opinion and our own beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy? The complexity of academic development work is the subject of extensive research (Ball, 2012; Davies, 2005; Davies & Bansel, 2005; Gonzales, Martinez & Ordu, 2013; Manathunga, 2007). We discuss whether academic development work can also benefit by acknowledging the tensions of the actors in order to initiate curriculum debate. We suggest that such an action may lead to a structure, or schema, for critical enquiry to support curriculum teams developing a teaching and learning discourse particular to their context, and one that may facilitate negotiated changes in curriculum.

We suggest the primary focus should be on the site of tensions as the catalyst for change to curriculum, rather than present course teams with specific, pre-determined actions for change. There are two reasons for this primary focus. It may, to some extent, counter the deficit model of academic development that can occur when faculty undertake university-required work (Fanghenel, 2013). Secondly, focusing on the site of tensions in order to make the micro-politics (Milliken, 2001) and diverse curriculum values visible in each course leader's context is a legitimate strategy towards critical discourse around curriculum (and hopefully, collegial consensus). This, we believe, is consistent with a scholarship of teaching that 'delves deeper into the pedagogy of student learning in the discipline through critically reflective practice' (Weaver, Robbie, Kokonis & Miceli, 2013, p. 238, following Brookfield, 1995; Schon, 1987). We note, however, (and discuss later) that activating critical discourse in course teams can be a difficult activity for faculty academics and academic developers. In particular, we suggest that the growing corporate culture of universities has a hierarchical line management that has substantially replaced collegial forms of collaborative work and this has led to a decreasing collegiality (McFarlane, 2005; Coates, Goedegebuure, van der Lee & Meek, 2008).

In structuring this paper, we have given priority to a narrative style where the reader will first hear the voices of the participating course leaders describing their tensions, in order to contextualise both the scholarly discussions about making tensions visible, and the subsequent, specific critical questions devised for each of the course leaders. The final section of this paper discusses the possible risks for course leaders and academic developers when posing critical dialogue about curriculum development.

Listening to the stories: Methodology for the pilot study

For this early pilot study we have taken a post-structural position (Naughton, 2005) as we expected the language of our subjects (and ourselves) to express the links between knowledge and power, consistent with Foucault's position of 'knowledge, truth and power' (1997). Using the stories of participants' experiences in a specific context (leading curriculum change) our discourse analysis is an exploration of narrative and social cognition (Rogers, 2014) rather than a critical language analysis based on linguistic form and function. We took a deductive approach to our case study as we defined our interview questions prior to data collection (Rowley, 2002:18). Our overarching research project (in which this pilot study is a small part) is titled *Leading Collaborative Course Teams*. The project aim is to investigate how academic developers and course leaders might make collaborative collegiality an explicit aim of curriculum review and innovation. Our methodological plan is to complete a cycle of interviews, each cycle occurring at a different stage of the curriculum review and giving focus to course leaders in particular, but including the voices of subject coordinators who form the curriculum teams. We are approved to undertake twelve interviews; initially four course leaders, then four unit chairs from each of the courses, and finally, the same four course leaders again.

Our method of recruitment for the first cycle was to identify which courses had been engaged in the course review for some time (all courses within a faculty were on a staggered review schedule) and then ask for volunteer course leader subjects. Of those who replied in the positive, we filtered our selection by identifying the first course leader to reply from each faculty, and, also selected leaders from both small and large course teams. In order to gain insights into individual course leaders' thinking, an exploratory case study approach provided us with a method to document and analyse an implementation process (Yin, 2012) of one program – a period of curriculum review and renewal. Importantly, we sought stories of experiences and beliefs of course leaders where there were likely to be both similarities and differences between the participants in the case (Stake, 1995). We sought to reveal the thinking and the processes of the course leaders – what were their particular stories as course leaders? Each of the course leaders' interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researchers.

We asked four questions of each of the academics but the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed course leaders to choose what they wished to share. The four questions were formed by considering the focus of the project: finding collaboration opportunities for course leaders, academic developers and course teams.

1. Is curriculum collaboration desirable/productive within course teams during a curriculum review process?
2. What promotes collaboration within course teams?
3. How would you describe your course team members' experience of the curriculum review and development process?
4. What support do course leaders value during a period of curriculum review and development?

While we were expecting to hear stories of challenge and success inherent in a change of practice activity such as a program of curriculum review and renewal, the open questions tended to elicit stories from the course leaders of unresolved tensions and uncertainty about how to proceed. While all course leaders' interviews experienced tensions and uncertainties, the form of the tensions were unique to each course leader's context. This research outcome was critical in determining how we, as academic developers, might be partners in their various struggles to develop curriculum in their courses.

We were aware that in focusing on course leaders' emerging tensions rather than stories of collegial cooperation we could be engaged in a deficit approach ourselves. However, course leaders were interested in sharing their experiences of tensions with us. In turn, we were interested in using course leaders' stories of tensions to explore with them ontological questions about their role in leading a team during a curriculum development process. For this reason, we, the authors, felt there would be a significant benefit in carrying out a pilot study focusing only on the first cycle of interviews where we could make visible the contextualised, contested spaces within the curriculum development process that course leaders were experiencing. We were able to frame critical, exploratory questions (as a result of the emerging themes within each interview) that course leaders could consider for themselves, and, could then share when initiating debate and discussion with their teams. In this way, we acted as facilitators, not arbiters, of critical discourse on the design and organisation of curriculum and pedagogy.

As a result, this research pilot study has paid attention to the particular tensions, rather than particular moments of consensus that surfaced during the curriculum renewal project. As suggested above, this type of work is expected to be done as a team with a lead, in our case course leaders who are charged with galvanising their teams to deliver curriculum change. Our findings are useful to course teamwork more generally and to academic developers charged with working on course teams. While our sample is extremely small and this is a limitation, we believe it is worthwhile to report at this early stage in order to share research about course or program leaders in what is quite a limited field of literature (Murphy & Curtis, 2013; Krause, Scott, Campbell, Lizzio, Spencer, Bath, Fyffe & Clark, 2012). We are seeking to assist the course leaders to 'surface the micro-politics' (Milliken, 2001) and curriculum values for themselves (and eventually their course teams), in order to see and make opportunities for coalescing their pedagogical ideals with other academics' beliefs and indeed, a university's requirements. In the future, this project will consider more deeply the relationships of power that develop amongst members of course teams, and the suggestions we make here are a start to that process as they include

how course leaders can work with their teams in a manner that attempts to develop collaborative relationships.

Curriculum course team work: Course leaders as curriculum leaders

The practice of working on curriculum development with a team may be a form of unfamiliar practice for course leaders. Curriculum leadership by course leaders has not necessarily been supported by university level professional development (Krause et al., 2012). Leading team collaboration in the field of teaching and learning may be a particular challenge. Even within their particular disciplines, Krause (2014) noted that ‘academic staff feel more like nomads than tribal members when it comes to teaching in their discipline’... and have ‘limited avenues for informed debate on a range of epistemological issues that lie at the heart of how curricula is designed’ (p. 17). Collegiality can be associated with curriculum development work; as Uchiyama & Radin (2009, p. 273) argued, ‘the values of collegiality and collaboration are embedded in the curriculum mapping process’. However, this is not always the case. The lone academics in charge of individual subjects (Benjamin, 2000) often desire to focus on discipline content within their individual subjects rather than take a course view. This can result in a lack of engagement by academics in bigger picture course development work (Oliver, 2013) during curriculum renewal projects.

The introduction of academic developers into these teams, as is often the case, can be a further point of tension as academic developers are often seen as representatives of university management teaching and learning decisions (Manathunga, 2007). Alternatively, we suggest it can be seen as an opportunity for academic developers to experiment with different forms of academic development. In this pilot study, our experimental form of academic development took the approach of exploring course leaders’ situated, contextualised tensions identified through analysing four interviews we undertook with course leaders, and, then considering how we could work as academic developers in this space. What if our work took as its focus the need to work with tensions rather than working around or seeking to minimise the emergence of tensions? Our analysis focuses on asking critical questions about power and academic beliefs.

Four emergent tensions and their related critical questions

In this section, we detail four emergent tensions drawn from transcripts of interviews with four course leaders. Each interview transcript provided a unique perspective of one course leader. The emerging themes prompted the authors to pose relevant critical questions for each leader that move, we think, towards a scholarly perspective of curriculum renewal. Four themes emerged from the transcripts: online teaching as a potential threat, authoritarian leadership, team disengagement, and political rivalries. The first two tensions were particular to the small course teams. Team disengagement and political rivalries were tensions particular to the two larger course teams.

Tension 1: Online teaching as a (potential) threat

One team was extremely small - two teaching members plus one other who was seconded to another area for a year or so but was about to return. The small team worked physically close to each other, had very similar backgrounds and shared the same views on teaching. Wendy, the course leader, spoke of how the small team worked. Any changes to the teaching would 'be just a discussion [...] it would be an easy negotiation with a colleague that I collaborate with on a daily basis'. Yet, there were tensions, some seemingly minor but they relate to student accessibility:

[She] particularly likes face-to-face teaching so she is always keen that we have that ummm now I'm less enthusiastic [...] So we have some disagreements.

In this instance, it seems that Wendy can collegially give way to her colleague's desire to teach an intensive (a weekend) face to face teaching program. Face to face teaching is important to the colleague and, in our discussion of tensions, we could work with the course leader to draw out what aspects of face to face teaching contribute to the colleague's preferred way of teaching. We could then assist Wendy to weigh up the detriments of it in terms of her struggle with the problems of accessibility and affordability inherent in face to face teaching for the students. We could attempt to work out ways to incorporate the important aspects of face to face teaching into online teaching. In this way, we could support experimentation in online teaching that both complement the teaching values of the colleague but that also encourage her to experiment with new forms of teaching.

Tension 2: Authoritarian leadership

Our use of the term authoritarian leadership here is related to the course leader's sense of sole responsibility for the overall vision and direction of the course taught by a small team of three. In the work of Collinson and Tourish, an authoritarian leader is one where the 'vision comes from the insights of the leader rather than through a process of co-instruction between leaders and followers (2015:578). The course leader we interviewed said of herself 'I am the vision. I am the leadership. I have that broad scope big picture stuff' - Sue. The course had originally been written by her several years ago and had not changed significantly and she took the lead in all development of curriculum.

So I tend to be the ideas person so for example we are meeting for course enhancement tomorrow and G who works in the team said to me yesterday so do we need to meet about that before we get there tomorrow morning but she said I know you will have all the ideas [...] I will just read it for two hours so I will understand and then I will know what we are doing.

This is a seemingly well-coordinated team who are given the ideas but also debate them:

I can give them the idea they'll either add to it or come to me with an idea that I will be able to add to and I will expand that and make it perfect and put it out to work. So we have very robust debates.

No particular tensions about how the course team functioned were mentioned by Sue, other than her work overload.

The workload. It is beyond comprehension and I don't even bother putting in what I do.

So to be clear, while Sue did not experience value tensions with her team, she did experience them with herself: the course leader was emphatic in describing the weight of her leadership role, and experienced very significant workload issues. 'I may have moved roles but I can't let go. This is a huge business and very competitive so it needs to be managed'. Sue was also mindful of managing succession to roles. 'In (name of faculty), we have specialist practice so succession planning is a major, major problem'.

Tension 3: Lack of engagement

The experiences of Wendy and Sue would suggest that there is a level of confidence and control within their work as course leaders. This is markedly different from the experience of Derek who was struggling to cope leading his large team of twelve through the renewal process. He was relatively new to academia and was just beginning as course leader and this contributed to his feeling somewhat at sea. Derek experienced the most obvious tensions of being a course leader. He had difficulties getting his team to see the benefits of undergoing curriculum renewal and had to struggle with them to gain engagement. Derek knew that some of his team were not committed to the renewal process.

It is not going to happen. And that is the real problem. I can see on the horizon there are participants in the team who are not very keen on implementing the changes as they are maybe not so convinced of the value. (They say) Is it really important? We just taught our units for decades and made graduates and it was ok. Do we really need to change something?

He was supported in this struggle by a faculty academic developer (not the authors) who worked closely with his faculty by attempting to make the reasons behind the renewal process known to all of the course leaders in his faculty. Derek found this useful as it supported him to work with his team, even if he found large gaps between the theory and practice.

This is what I need for me to be clear about what this whole thing is about. I am learning this as well. Where is this course enhancement process really going and how will that play out? So, there is the theory about that and then when you do it, it's a completely different thing.

We would argue that the course team needs to discuss what reasons they think are motivating course renewal. Their reasons may be quite different to the ones offered by the faculty academic developer and may expose the power relations guiding the faculty academic developer. However, other reasons for course renewal may surface. The discussion may also reveal there are positive as well as negative implications for engaging in curriculum work.

Tension 4: Political rivalries

Derek found the explicit politics between his team members that surfaced during the process problematic and was shocked that such politics would arise in a seemingly benign process (he was new to the university sector!).

We just had a team meeting about course enhancement last Thursday and it was my very first team meeting I was chairing. And you could very easily see there are sentiments and battlefields opening left, right and centre about other issues that are not really core to this [renewal process] that people are not happy about and it all comes up.

Derek suggested that he really did not know how to cope with these rivalries to ensure the process could reach a 'successful' point.

There are rivalries which are significant. Personally, I have very little sympathy for that kind of thing. [...] Often this (a solution) is not so easily done because people don't want to give in because it is a political thing.

Chris, another interviewee, was much more experienced in academia than Derek. He understood that politics would arise but engaged in it not through 'giving in' but through negotiating the curriculum, where he would lead course team members to investigate their own and others' beliefs. For Chris, the curriculum was political so he expected tensions to exist and that his role as a course leader would involve him negotiating with members to 'work it out' (Chris).

Now the real work is to get that working as a collaborative venture, you go and work it out here - work it out, find somewhere you can put this in and they're both happy with it. And they've done that to a certain extent, it was interesting to watch. It's been a somewhat fraught political process.

As described above, we were struck by the tensions expressed in the interviews. Rather than ignoring these tensions, we saw potential for a scholarly investigation into how collegiality is activated within the context of these tensions. In the next section, we investigate a novel approach to both academic development and course leadership that intends to use such tensions as a device for working collegially on curriculum development. Such an approach depends upon asking critical questions about tensions.

A novel approach for academic developers and course leaders: Deliberate steps to make tensions visible

Much has been written about how faculty academics and academic developers are faced with contradictory values in their day to day work. These contradictions relate to maintaining a set of academic principles and practices not supported by a neoliberal, performative agenda (Ball, 2012; Davies, 2005; Gonzales et al., 2013; Manathunga, 2007). Later, we present possible personal and professional implications for course leaders and academic developers if they were to privilege academic responsibility over academic

accountability (Handal, Hofgaard Lycke, Maakensson, Roxa, Skodvin & Dyrdal Solbrekke, 2014) during a course review process.

Increasingly, academics are expected to work as members of course teams lead by course leaders especially when it comes to teaching (Benjamin, 2000). However, while a curriculum review provides explicit outcomes for faculty, the process to achieve the outcomes is less transparent. During a pedagogical review process, course leaders find themselves cast in the role of the critical middle management leaders upon whom the university and the teaching academics rely to effect change (Murphy & Curtis, 2013). The tensions of this management role are well-known. Winter (2009) suggested such tensions exist because academics suffer identity incongruences within current university structures. Are they 'academic managers' or 'managed academics'? (p.121). A curriculum review process can raise any number of issues for course leaders charged with leading their colleagues towards curriculum change consensus.

We argue that there are two reasons for this pilot project: to move beyond a deficit approach to academic development, and to develop strategies for critical discourse around curriculum. Like any other discipline, academic development is a 'discursively organised domain whose practices are neither innocent nor neutral' (McWilliam, 2002, p.289). As such, academic development is a 'site of knowledge production and a system of power relations' (McWilliam, 2002, p.289). In considering the power relations that structure the possibilities of academic development, we are reminded of the work of Clegg (2009, p.406, citing McWilliam, 2002) who has argued that academic development is an attempt to 'make over the academic subject'. The assumption inherent in this assessment of academic development is that the academic prior to the academic developer is somehow not right. While this might not be either the intention or effect of all academic development work, some academic development may enact a deficit approach, or, be viewed by others as taking a deficit approach.

It is timely for academic development to both acknowledge the deficit approach that has structured much of its work and to move beyond it. Fanghanel (2013) argued for the need to 'anchor professional development in a non-deficit paradigm [...] where the focus is on systematic critical examination of an ever-changing object of inquiry' (p.62). Whether self-aware or not, academic developers interact with academics 'from a powerful position and they do things to others' (Roxa & Martensson, 2016, p.8). They are also often expected to implement institutional demands (Lee & McWilliam, 2008). In this sense, academic developers are required to remake academic subjects. In order to question this somewhat 'natural' approach we often take, we can participate in what Clegg (2009, p.406) identified as a 'recent turn in some of the higher education literature to questions of ontology'. The methodology we propose in this paper offers one alternative to a deficit approach, and one that confronts sites of knowledge production and contributes to the re-arrangement of power relations. This is achieved through an ontological approach focused on 'value tensions' (Di Napoli, 2014).

We maintain that academic developers bring to their work particular tensions. Di Napoli (2014) argued that they become involved in 'games to ensure their own beliefs about

education remain aligned with their own actions' (p.4). Participating in these games entails playing the 'game of power forces' (Di Napoli, 2014, p.6). These games are 'value tensions [that] inevitably run through the work of academic developers and they can manifest themselves in different forms of compliance and/or resistance' (Di Napoli, 2014, p.7). Academic developers often start their work with academics from a point of disadvantage because they are perceived as 'the soft arm of management and quality regimes' (Di Napoli, 2014, p.5). Di Napoli (p.7) suggested that academic developers use these points of tensions which he refers to as 'heuristic devices'.

This leads to the second purpose of this paper: helping course leaders develop a strategy for critical discourse about curriculum. When a curriculum review raises complex issues within a team, there are legitimate grounds to make explicit the contradictions and tensions associated with leading curriculum change. This is a type of discourse that asks ontological questions and demands a critical inquiry into the forms of academic subjects we represent. In turn, this affects the forms of the academic subjects we are developing through our practices, and ultimately, the impact this has upon curriculum (Foucault, 1984, p.50). This discourse, we argue, requires a collaboration between an academic developer, the course leader and the faculty curriculum team. As academic developers, we can have a specific role in supporting faculty course leaders to undertake critical discourse about curriculum. We can explore ontological questions that raise points of debate pertinent to course leaders working with their course teams. This methodology of working extends to academic developers thinking about the relations of power that impact upon their work and upon their sense of self. We suggest that academic developers can act as critical collaborators and use tensions to engage in curriculum development that does not result in a deficit model of judgement and improvement. In effect, we would be asking course leaders to problematise the process of their course development work. In exploring these elements of a novel approach, our analysis focuses on asking critical questions about power and academic beliefs and considers how such questioning can become the basis of an academic development methodology.

Returning to the tensions and posing critical questions

The examples of specific tensions identified in the stories of course leaders are familiar and unexceptional – they are the everyday realities of course leaders who manage 'the middle' layer of university academic work (accountability) while maintaining the responsibility for the collegial and collaborative practices required for successful curriculum development. The stories told by faculty academics here help make sense of why academics choose to 'comply with institutional imperatives, resist them, side-step them' (Di Napoli 2014, p.4). Importantly, these tensions also highlight the personal nature of decision-making at the course leader level of management. Subjectivity and the desire for individuals to see their beliefs upheld is also unexceptional in course teams. However, the articulation of subjective beliefs points the way towards a different form of academic development. Helping course leaders to create a frame or schema for addressing such subjectivity is a form of professional learning that academic developers can offer to course leaders. In this section, we propose some critical questions of the four tensions raised.

The questions are based in the novel approach described above wherein ontological questions are posed. These are questions of power relationships, 'managed subjects', new working arrangements (i.e., course teams) and, perhaps above all, questions of how to develop new arrangements of power that enable experiments with being 'academic subjects'.

This is an opportunity to go beyond the limits placed upon us (Foucault, 1984, p.50). We are arguing that academic developers and course leaders can work together to explore different ways of being academic subjects. The following critical questions are examples academic developers can share with course leaders about their own thinking, and importantly, the critical questions also provide examples of discourse that operationalise scholarly discussion about curriculum development that course leaders can enact with their curriculum teams. As academic developers, we saw potential in this kind of power exploration to move away from what De Napoli (2004) described as academics 'comply(ing), resist(ing) or side-stepping(ing) institutions' imperatives.'

Tension 1: Online teaching as a (potential) threat

Critical questions that address this issue could be:

- What are the important elements in face to face teaching?
- How do these elements contribute to the team member's sense of self as a teacher?
- How does the online environment impact upon these elements?
- How could these elements be experimented with online?

Importantly, this exploration of the teaching space by the course leader (and then between the course leader and her teaching team) might lead to a continuation of face to face learning rather than a shift into online learning. Wendy may in fact become 'more enthusiastic' about face to face teaching. Alternatively, a new form of online learning developed in response to the tension may be developed. The process of exploring the tension through critical discourse has provided the course leader with a frame or schema that facilitates a scholarly investigation. One important consideration for a small team is what if one member should shift in her views to the extent that the pair no longer share similar views about pedagogy? A frame of critical questions could provide the basis for a pedagogical exploration that does not depend on the small team sharing the same views on teaching.

Tension 2: Authoritarian leadership

With respect to the course leader, Sue, and the other members of the team, we saw potential for exploration of ways of seeing self from a collegial perspective.

Critical questions for this course leader and her team could be:

- How are more junior academics expected to act under authoritarian leadership?
- How do team member academics demonstrate a maturing curriculum leadership and independence?

- Are there different ways of managing high stakes curriculum?

For Sue, her challenges have been a constant for many years and their constancy may have given them a form of invisibility. If she were to problematise them collegially with others through a reflective practice lens, the surfacing of such tensions and contradictions may initiate productive discussion for herself and also her more junior team members.

Tension 3: Lack of engagement

For Derek and for Derek's team, critical questions for exploring reasons for curriculum change could be:

- When are there good pedagogical arguments for changing curriculum?
- Are there different ways of carrying out curriculum in course teams?
- What is important and valuable about current course content?
- How do teams negotiate curriculum?

In facilitating asking questions about localised tensions, course leaders and academic developers open themselves to challenges and potentially uncomfortable discussions. However, there are gains to be made in demonstrating the process of thinking about tensions. We can explore new reasons for engaging in curriculum renewal, reveal possible points of negotiation – and these may provide new reasons for engagement that hold meaning at the local course level.

Tension 4: Political rivalries

In Derek's team, critical questions for exploring the limitations of the status quo could include:

- What high stake understandings do we hold (as individuals) that cannot change?
- Is it possible to experiment with immutable beliefs?
- Can we experiment as a collective with what is not at issue?

These questions are aimed directly at experimenting with the sense of self of the academic, asking them to consider how their roles and behaviours might change if their beliefs changed.

Implications for activating critical dialogue as a form of academic development: On difficult ground

We have argued the need to move away from an accountability agenda wherein we, as academic developers, are the experts who attempt to 'make over' the academic subject according to a prescriptive outcome (Lee & McWilliam, 2008). While this may be a somewhat crude interpretation of the work of academic developers, it allows us liberty to understand different ways of acting that attempt to know the effects of this accountability agenda. In doing so, we need to retreat from the dichotomy of us being 'developers and

those understood to need developing' (McWilliam, 2002, p. 290). We are not arguing that academic developers lose their expertise, but rather that we seek to establish a questioning discourse with academics - one where we do not attempt to resolve teams' problems but rather, we encourage teams to first experiment with thinking and acting within 'these contradictions and tensions that neither fixes or attempts to resolve them' (Lee & McWilliam, 2008, p.74). This, we argue, is a legitimate form of problematisation; neither controlled by a prescription nor lacking the support of academic developers.

While our intention is to activate critical dialogue between a course leader and a curriculum team, we acknowledge that there are risks for faculty academics when posing critical questions about curriculum development. Fear for an institution's survival and fear for one's own survival (Davies & Bansel, 2005; Manathunga, 2007) dampens engagement in critical examinations that make explicit the various power relations existing in the hierarchical and shared working spaces within academia. These difficult spaces exist in a number of contexts in universities in Australia and internationally. Broadly, external government-funded quality bodies and university leadership in Australia set parameters for curriculum work by academics. Manathunga (2007) described how Australia is catching up on the 'quality road' (p. 29) already travelled by many countries, especially the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Handal et al. (2014) discussed the impact of the Norwegian National Qualification Framework (itself a part of the Bologna process), in creating tensions between 'two opposing world views: professional accountability where academics must facilitate policy implementation, and professional responsibility' (p.12). Handal et al. (2014) described professional responsibility as academics maintaining 'a professional mandate, left to situated judgment, based on trust and a moral rationale' (p.22). A form of professional development that explores the power relationships in collaborative work could thus be seen to challenge or resist accountability as it privileges the complexity of such contradictory world views or 'realities' (Gosling, 2009).

But, there are perhaps more profound, and possibly, more risky spaces for academics. This is the question of subjectivity. Tensions arise from the deeply personal experiences and relationships academics live each day with their students and colleagues that are made more difficult in a time of decreasing collegiality (Su & Baird, 2015; Christopher, 2012; Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). As academic developers researching and developing evidence-based scholarly approaches to working with curriculum teams, the tensions arising from within these more personal working relationships were the particular catalysts for the shift in our own perception about academic developers' work. Rather than provide pedagogical knowledge aimed at improvement, what if we explored our own and others' beliefs and truths and relate this to how curriculum develops and changes over time? Importantly, would this exploration of truths be transformative for course leaders or result in quite the opposite – a deepening of existing fault lines within the course team? In a time of decreased collegiality (Scott et al., 2008) some intra-faculty relationships may be tenuous. The degree to which these relationships are fragile may indeed become more apparent during a period of course review and renewal.

In working with course leaders and academic teams to experiment with new understandings of the self, that is, subjectivity, in spite of, and perhaps even because of,

the known limits (both local and institutional) we have described our desire to focus on thinking processes rather than knowledge as a form of professional learning (Fanghanel, 2013). We are not unaware of the difficulties of such an approach for academic developers. Like faculty academics, academic developers may be navigating between the two competing worldviews of accountability and responsibility (Handal et al., 2014), while occupying the further difficult space in the role of ‘university management’s teaching and learning foot soldiers’ (Manathunga, 2007, p. 26).

Further research

We chose to discuss four tensions arising from course leaders’ experiences during a period of curriculum renewal in order to show how academic developers could use course leaders’ tensions as a catalyst for collegial curriculum work. Course leaders have increasing responsibility to act as educational leaders and managers of faculty curricula and course administrators. By analysing their stories, (and forming the subsequent critical questions arising from problematising the emergent tensions), we may firstly, inform our larger research goal to investigate how to make collaborative collegiality an explicit aim of a curriculum review, and secondly, contribute to a body of scholarly research that is still relatively small in comparison to other areas of teaching and learning research in higher education (Murphy & Curtis, 2013; Krause et al., 2010).

Conclusion

This pilot study set out to make explicit course leaders’ own stories while they were engaged in team curriculum work during a period of curriculum review. Course leaders described curriculum work in course teams to be, at times, sites of particular tensions: some minor tensions that relate to small differences of pedagogical opinion, but some significant enough to stall curriculum progress. Academic developers also experience tensions when working with faculty on curriculum review and renewal. We questioned what we could bring to the table that might assist course leaders, would reflect our beliefs about non-deficit approaches to academic development, and address the university’s requirements. As a novel approach to assist course leaders we have proposed that we collaborate with course leaders to pose highly contextualised questions to make visible the points of contention that arise during a period of curriculum change, and to re-frame points of contention as legitimate debate questions within a critical inquiry approach to pedagogical practice. We acknowledge the risk this may pose for some course leaders, their faculty course teams and academic developers within a climate of university accountability. Additionally, making visible existing tensions presents personal challenges for those involved in critical inquiry, as what is revealed relates necessarily to the subject of self. While reflecting on the increasing complexity of course leaders’ work, we agree with Krause’s recommendations (2012) that more university support is required for course leaders. We see a situated, critical inquiry approach to curriculum debate as a legitimate methodology for supporting course leaders to facilitate pedagogical change at the level of implementation: the faculty course team.

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Please cite as: Savage, J. & Pollard, V. (2018). Developing critical questions from faculty tensions: An approach to collegiality in course teams. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28(2), 470-486. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier28/savage.pdf>