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A large, stylized graphic on a purple background. It consists of a thick yellow wavy line that starts on the left, curves down, then up, and then down again. A black railing with white vertical slats follows the curve of the yellow line, appearing to be on top of it.

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Teaching and learning together: Making space for curriculum negotiation in higher education

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Abstract

Research in compulsory sectors of education indicates that curriculum negotiation (sometimes termed co-construction) between teacher and students is beneficial for both students and teachers. It would seem, therefore, that this approach would be equally valuable in the tertiary context of initial teacher education, as a model of a good teaching approach for student teachers to observe and experience. However, enacting this approach in the context of an academic tertiary programme is often perceived as problematic. This paper discusses theoretical underpinnings of curriculum negotiation, its foundations, implementation and benefits. It then describes actions taken by a university teaching team which endeavoured to create spaces for the negotiation of curriculum, and to intentionally model curriculum negotiation. The ways in which staff and students have been able to work together collaboratively, giving both parties shared influence, input and control of learning, are explored. I contend that curriculum negotiation is an essential element within teacher education programmes if we hope to maximise learning engagement and outcomes and model an effective pedagogy.

Introduction

Teaching is a complex activity, and the pursuit of what makes good or even excellent teaching has been the focus of much research. Research focussing on improving teachers' performance has been predominantly within the compulsory sectors of primary and secondary teaching (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002), but it would seem reasonable to expect that commonalities exist with other sectors; enough to suppose that sectors could learn from one another. However, much of the research literature about the compulsory sectors and the tertiary sector has not been cross referenced (Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle, & Orr, 2000). Excellent teaching has been described from a number of perspectives, almost always with a view to helping teachers improve their performance, and researchers have described pedagogical approaches that promote effective student learning (Boomer, 1992; Gurney, 2007; Hildebrand, 1973; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004; Pratt, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; Spiller, 2011). The



implementation of one such approach, curriculum negotiation, has been shown to improve outcomes for students, and this is a pedagogical approach that can be used in a large range of contexts (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992).

This paper contends that curriculum negotiation is a teaching/learning approach that should be more seriously considered in the tertiary teaching context and that the perceived constraints of the tertiary sector need not preclude its use. The foundations, implementation and benefits of curriculum negotiation are discussed and illustrated through its successful use within a compulsory third year degree paper contributing to the Bachelor of Teaching degree at the University of Waikato.

Curriculum negotiation: Description and theoretical foundations

A number of terms are used in the literature to describe approaches akin to curriculum negotiation. All have underpinning philosophies which value learning, social justice and democracy, and emphasise power sharing, community and partnership. These include student-centred education, student participation in classroom learning (Holdsworth, 1999), integrated curriculum (Beane, 1997), culturally responsive pedagogy (Bishop et al., 2007), collaborative curriculum making (Zellermayer, 1997), classroom negotiation (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000) and co-construction (Mansell, 2009).

Curriculum negotiation describes a dynamic process in which what is taught and learned (the curriculum) is negotiated between teacher and students, rather than being solely pre-determined by the teacher. It is based on a philosophy that values power sharing and shared decision-making (Boomer, 1982, 1992). Curriculum negotiation is grounded in ideas of ownership: it involves particular interactions between teacher and students, who share ownership. Negotiating curriculum is like negotiation in other contexts such as law or business. It is the act of working with others to achieve one's goals as well as shared goals through a process of agreement and disagreement, resulting in consensus. It therefore involves teachers and students in reflecting on their own needs and wants, questions and interests, and their subjective interpretations of the agenda (Hyun, 2006). The negotiation process is dynamic where teachers communicate their intentions, and listen so as to understand the intentions of a class of students. Together the participants look for common goals or shared intent, and design the learning to meet this within the constraints of their context (Black, Madden, & King, 2000; Boomer, 1992). There is a sense of ongoing accommodation as emerging thoughts and ideas are brought together. Requisite to negotiation is the development of positive relationships between students and teacher, which allows for *āko* (effective and reciprocal teaching and learning) in a climate of trust.

When true curriculum negotiation occurs, the teacher shares control with the class, taking the role of the curriculum negotiator. However, the teacher is still in charge in the sense of providing an ethical, socially just environment for learning. Teachers' practices may sometimes take the guise of curriculum negotiation in that while they espouse curriculum negotiation, they may in fact severely limit the students' choices and decisions, and so not truly negotiate with the students (Hyun, 2006). So in other words curriculum negotiation does not imply a student-driven programme, nor does it imply teacher control under the guise of giving choices, but rather an ordered learning environment where all participants have a voice and take responsibility for the learning. The power sharing relationship that is required for curriculum negotiation is an uneasy

one for teachers new to this approach, and their doubts and concerns about sharing control can be a constraint in the process.

Negotiating curriculum with learners' results in many desirable outcomes such as better engagement, greater motivation, higher order thinking and improved critical literacy skills (Boomer, 1982, 1992). Teachers who negotiate the curriculum deliberately plan to invite students to contribute to their educational programme because they believe in the positive outcomes possible through working collaboratively with their students. By doing this they place student voice in the forefront of curriculum design and implementation. Furthermore, negotiation necessarily occurs in a socio-cultural context, where the beliefs and socio-cultural position of the negotiators will be reflected in the process of negotiation (Avruch, 2000). This means it is very important for participants (teachers in particular) to be aware of the cultures, perspectives and interests of individuals with whom they are negotiating (Avruch, 2000; Bishop et al., 2007).

Curriculum negotiation is set within a social constructivist paradigm, based on the premise that our knowledge of reality is always mediated through our perceptions, experiences and previous knowledge (Simon, 1995). Many educationalists have focussed on the importance of "shared, social construction of knowledge" (Woolfolk, 1998, p. 277). For example, Vygotsky's view of learning as a socially and culturally mediated activity, where social interactions are recognised as paramount in learning and development, is significant to curriculum negotiation (Vialle, Lysaght, & Verenikina, 2005; Vygotsky, 1981). Thus curriculum negotiation is seen as essential in order that the learning is developmentally meaningful and culturally congruent from the learners' point of view (Cook, 1992; Hyun, 2006).

Benefits of curriculum negotiation

A wide range of research evidence confirms that there are considerable benefits to students' learning achieved through curriculum negotiation. A number of these will be discussed in this section: agency, authenticity, collaboration, relevance and democracy.

Agency

Incorporating student voice in curriculum allows for more effective and rewarding learning experiences (Boomer et al., 1992; Hunter & Park, 2005; Mansell, 2009). Students are able to experience a power-sharing environment, thereby gaining agency in the development of the curriculum they enact. This agency has been shown to facilitate engagement, participation and motivation for students (Mansell, 2009). In New Zealand this approach, and the agency it affords, is relevant with respect to the notion of *tinō rangatiratanga* (self-determination/autonomy), a principle in Māori and central to one of New Zealand's founding documents, The Treaty of Waitangi. In terms of cultural safety, "Building a positive classroom culture is contingent on students having input and being included in determining the cultural boundaries and guidelines as embodied within the concept of *tinō rangitiratanga* (self-determination)" (Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, & Bateman, 2007, p. 73). It would therefore seem particularly appropriate that curriculum negotiation, which itself allows agency and a sense of self-determination, be a feature of any teaching and learning activity in New Zealand.

Authenticity

When students believe that what they are doing is authentic and connected to their world, they report they have greater motivation and a greater desire to learn (Coffey, 2001; Hunter & Park, 2005; Mansell, 2009). Learners report that they work harder and learn better when they are active participants in the process, as they are answering their own questions (Black et al., 2000; Boomer, 1992).

Collaboration

Contributing to the authenticity inherent in curriculum negotiation are the actions of real collaboration. Through the process of curriculum negotiation itself, students and teachers learn more about how to collaborate (an important life skill), and the negotiation process can reinforce positive relationships between participants in the classroom (Hyde, 1992). Alongside the collaboration evident in curriculum decision-making is the collaboration of learners whilst learning. One recent study, for example, highlighted how students recognise their fellow students as a major learning resource, and view peer teaching very positively when they are involved in negotiating the curriculum (Mansell, 2009).

Relevance

Another benefit for learners is their ability to raise matters that they perceive as relevant to themselves and that otherwise may have gone unrecognised in the programme content (Thornton & Chapman, 2000). This helps keep the curriculum relevant to students, although the notion of “relevance” is tricky to deal with and depends on the perspective of the participant.

Democracy

The principles of democracy should be evident in schools that purport to provide a sound education. The involvement of people in making decisions that affect them is, in effect, a definition of democracy (Levin, 1998). In his description of the characteristics of a democratic school, Levin (1998) discusses the importance of creating dialogue about practice, and the need for students to be active creators of the school rather than passive beneficiaries. The democracy afforded in a classroom where curriculum negotiation is valued allows for “a co-intentional, collaborative process of learning and teaching designed to provide a climate for promoting democratic schooling” (Lester, 1992, p. 202). Teachers who view learning as a participatory act rather than as a passive one, and who strongly believe in a democratic classroom, are able through the use of curriculum negotiation to align their practices with their personal beliefs, hence increasing job satisfaction (Trousdale & Henkin, 1989). Many teachers and students who practice curriculum negotiation speak highly of the benefits and improved learning to which they are contributing (Mansell, 2009).

During curriculum negotiation, teachers are involved in reflecting on the collaboration process, and through this, the reflection itself becomes a powerful tool in shaping curriculum as well as helping them focus on their personal growth as teachers (Trousdale & Henkin, 1989). In Hyun’s (2006) view the heightened awareness teachers experience through inner dialogue (using reflective pondering and questioning) and

outer dialogue (examining their thoughts with others) allows for pedagogy-based and learning-focussed teaching.

Negotiating within a constrained environment

Curriculum negotiation occurs within a specific context, and each context will offer constraints within which the negotiators have to work. Because university courses have prescriptions, which include compulsory content and high stakes assessment, some would argue that true curriculum negotiation at tertiary level is difficult (Carpenter & Tait, 2001; Kember, 2009). This argument, however, reflects confusion between a negotiated curriculum and a fully student-centred curriculum. In any educational setting there are constraints of one sort or another, whether these are staff expertise, funding regimes, resource limitations, curriculum documents, or timetables (Cook, 1992). Juxtaposed to the requirements of a rigorous university course prescription lies the consideration of how lecturers ensure that students are able to contribute to curriculum decisions so that the curriculum is relevant to them (Brew & Barrie, 1999). The tension caused by these considerations demands that those lecturers who hope to negotiate curriculum closely examine their teaching practice and pedagogy.

Given the constraints that inevitably exist then, tertiary teachers must be mindful of both these constraints and their students' needs. When teachers teach within a prescribed curriculum, they still have the ability to negotiate curriculum with their students but need to make the process clear from the outset. First, teachers need to make explicit to students the constraints within which the course is operating and the non-negotiable requirements that apply. Second, teachers can invite the students to engage with the prescribed material, allowing them to ask questions, contribute to and modify the programme so that they feel part of the process and have ownership in the outcomes. Finally then, within this framework teacher and students can negotiate their shared intent, with both being committed to the entire learning and teaching process (Hyun, 2006).

Pedagogical approaches in tertiary contexts

In the tertiary context there are a number of approaches that lecturers can use when they teach. Ramsden (1992) has categorised teaching approaches in higher education as follows: teaching as telling or transmission—(focus on teacher activity); teaching as organising and managing student activity—(focus on student activity); and teaching as making learning possible, working cooperatively with students—(focus on student learning). Similarly Snyder and his colleagues categorised teachers' approaches to curriculum as curriculum fidelity, curriculum adaptation and curriculum enactment (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). In both of these analyses the first two categories describe a teacher-directed approach, but the third describes an approach in which curriculum negotiation can play an important role. In this third category lecturers can give recognition to what the learners bring to their learning, and consider the teaching and learning experience as one where student and teacher are working together to the same ends. According to Snyder, this approach leads to a curriculum, which is "jointly created, and jointly and individually experienced by students and teacher" (Snyder et al., 1992, p. 428).

Despite the evidence that suggests it can be effectively implemented, curriculum negotiation is not used widely in tertiary settings, whereas a great deal of teaching is didactic or teacher-centred in nature (Kember, 2009). In occasional reports of the use of curriculum negotiation in higher education, the results have been positive and benefits for student learning have been noted (Brew & Barrie, 1999; Golightly, Nieuwoudt, & Richter, 2006; Knowles, 1975; McRae & Edwards, 2010; Shower, Gilmore, & Banks-Joseph, 2009; Tatnall & Davey, 2002; Thornton & Chapman, 2000). However, constraints due to class sizes, funding limits, workload of lecturers, and lack of teaching expertise, mean the curriculum content tends to be delivered via a transmission mode in many tertiary courses, giving little or no opportunity for students to have input into the curriculum they receive (Ramsden, 1993).

Brew and Barrie (1999), for instance, found that using a curriculum negotiation approach was particularly relevant in the context in which they were working (preparing academics for their teaching role). The use of curriculum negotiation in this case was aligned clearly with key principles of teaching and learning that make it effective in academic settings. In South Africa a study reporting on a concept model for geography teacher training programmes illustrated the positive learning environment that was created when students were empowered to take responsibility for their own learning (Golightly et al., 2006). Other studies which have looked at the attitudes of students towards student-centred learning in the tertiary sector have also reported that attitudes to this approach are very positive, although some concern was expressed as to whether current resources could support and maintain such an approach (Lea, Stephenson, & Troy, 2003). Wikander (2009) discussed the wider issues of negotiation in giving aboriginals a voice in a tertiary institution in Australia. In this case recommendations were made for negotiation during individual curriculum planning in courses taught by that institution. However, Wikander did observe that subject content rather than an underpinning teaching philosophy took precedence when the curriculum was later reviewed. This meant that opportunities to negotiate curriculum were lost, and showed that mandated policy is not necessarily enough to force the implementation of a different teaching approach (Wikander, 2009). In a brave move to promote student-centred forms of learning across an entire university in Hong Kong, professional development was provided to staff, and Kember (2009) reports on the resulting marked increases in the quality of the teaching and learning environment. This case demonstrates a growing focus in the tertiary sector on quality teaching and learning based on researched evidence of effective teaching approaches.

An example from a tertiary setting

The following example illustrates how a teaching team created spaces for negotiating curriculum within a third year compulsory paper (TEPS320: Curriculum and Assessment) from the Bachelor of Teaching degree at The University of Waikato, in 2010. In this example staff and students have been able to work collaboratively to negotiate aspects of content and assessment.

The course content in TEPS320 focussed on developing student teachers' curriculum and assessment knowledge, with a particular emphasis on how assessment evidence informs teacher decision-making and practice. Eight *enduring understandings* identified the core goals of the course (Earl & Ussher, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The course was taught face-to-face on two campuses and was available as an

online version to students who were either studying at distance or working fulltime as teachers. This course was taught to a total of approximately 250 primary and secondary student teachers. One academic staff member was designated as the coordinator of the course. A teaching team of 10–11 lecturers was involved in teaching the course each year, and all were involved in the planning and review of weekly sessions. Each week one lecturer had the responsibility for oversight of the week's principal lecture, and the provision of a large range of appropriate topic-specific teaching materials and readings to the whole teaching team.

Each week students attended a one-hour principal lecture in Hamilton, the main university campus, with a video link provided to students on the Tauranga campus 110km away. Following the lecture, a compulsory three-hour tutorial session was organised for groups of approximately 25 students on campus, each run by a member of the academic staff either face-to-face or as an online asynchronous discussion for distance students. The course was taught over a 12-week period. These arrangements contributed to the constraints within which negotiation was possible.

How to create spaces for negotiation

In the Curriculum and Assessment course described in this paper, all academic staff members were well qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Their expertise allowed for curriculum negotiation as the preferred approach in their teaching. This section provides a description of how the practical actions of the staff involved in teaching this course “created spaces” in which curriculum negotiation could occur, focussing on the preconditions for creating those spaces.

Classroom culture

All of the academic staff members teaching this course were open to power sharing in the classroom, allowing curriculum to be negotiated. Staff spent time developing relationships with their students; getting to know them as individuals, as relationships were seen as an essential element in the curriculum negotiation process. We encouraged open discussion and feedback and welcomed students' contributions to the class learning environment.

Enduring understandings

The teaching team developed a common understanding of the “priority ideas” of the course by using the enduring understandings of the paper as their guide (Earl & Ussher, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). These enduring understandings comprised a number of statements which distilled the essence of the course, encapsulating the most important ideas lecturers wanted the students to understand at a deep level by the time they completed their teacher education programme. The enduring understandings framed the curricular constraints of the course, but also provided opportunities for negotiation in *how* they were learnt about.

Use of formative feedback and feedforward

At the conclusion of each principal lecture, students completed a “lecture response form”, enabling them to raise issues, comment on their understandings, and ask questions. Students were asked to respond to three questions:

- What connected (squared) with your existing knowledge or ideas?
- What was new for you or extended your knowledge today?
- What questions or issues has today’s lecture raised for you?

This was a very important opportunity for students to provide input into the design of the tutorial sessions which followed later in the week. Immediately after each principal lecture (which all academic staff attended), staff met to discuss their perceptions of the effectiveness of the lecture, and to read the student feedback. Using this feedback, each staff member prepared tutorials that met both the needs of the students and the non-negotiable content. This meant the students’ feedback influenced the content and structure of the tutorial sessions, and this was a key ingredient of the curriculum negotiation promulgated in this course design. It also meant that no two tutorials were identical in design and delivery.

Formative feedback from lecturers to students was seen as a priority in tutorials, and in the main this was oral. Students also provided feedback to lecturers. Lecturers were then able to incorporate this feedback as they continued with their teaching. Sometimes this feedback promoted further negotiation of the direction of the tutorial session. The development of this level of dialogue, with its pivotal role in the learning, was to demonstrate a shared responsibility for learning in the classroom. Other strategies to elicit feedback included flash cards and post-it notes. Through the use of feedback and feedforward, the process of curriculum negotiation was made visible for student teachers.

Tutorial planning

Course lecturers usually started a tutorial session by proposing a list of learning outcomes and a plan for the tutorial. This initial plan was based on both the known non-negotiable outcomes and the feedback already provided by students. Students were asked to confirm that this would best suit their needs, and to propose other learning opportunities they wanted to have included. Together we prioritised the planned learning and activities for the session. Sharing the power with students in this way encouraged their participation.

Assessment

Because summative assessment in a tertiary institution is high stakes assessment, it is important that it not be compromised in terms of validity and reliability. The challenge in the TEPS320 course was to design assessment tasks that maintained their relevance and appropriateness for purpose, yet allowed for student input in negotiation with staff members. In the TEPS320 course described in this paper both major assignments allowed for some student input and negotiation.

In the first piece of major assessment students were asked to choose a piece of their previous work (an assessment task they themselves had developed to assess children on

an early practicum) to critique and redevelop. The alternative could have been that all students were given the same teacher-created resource material on which to base their assignment, but this would have reduced input, ownership and control from the students' perspective. Formative feedback given on the first part of this assignment meant the students could choose whether to enter into a dialogue with lecturers or to continue using only written feedback. As they completed the second part of this assignment, feedback and discussion furthered and deepened their understanding of the task.

In a second assessment staff asked students to develop marking criteria for the *presentation* aspect of a speaking activity, and these criteria were used as a peer assessment tool. Student involvement in developing assessment formats and criteria was in line with the aims of the course content as well as with the teaching approach used. Successful performance in each of these assignments was an expected outcome of the course.

Constraints

Specific constraints operating during the teaching of this course included staffing allocations, and class timetable, which was restricted to one lecture and one three-hour tutorial per week. The course had a pre-planned outline of topics, all of which related to the enduring understandings. Students were told of the constraints early in the programme. However, there was flexibility within this outline to allow for negotiation of specific content. The assessments were compulsory and pre-determined in format and timing, although students did have some chance to negotiate within this format, and were able to contribute to the way the assessment was marked.

Discussion

The actions of teachers contribute in a real way to the learning climate that students encounter (Gibbs, 2006; Ginott, 1971). In developing an effective classroom, a focus on moving beyond the ritual of classroom activities to producing a learning climate with shared responsibility for curriculum is desirable. This was acknowledged by lecturers in the TEPS320: Curriculum and Assessment course through their efforts to develop a learning climate, which encouraged curriculum negotiation. Relationships are crucial in allowing this to happen. Interactions and relationships in a tertiary setting can be more or less formal depending upon individual lecturers; however, without effective interactions between staff and students, curriculum negotiation is impossible. So in this example all staff placed a deliberate focus on developing relationships in order to allow spaces for power sharing. It is recognised that the enthusiasm and passion teachers feel has a huge impact on their ability to connect with learners and develop authentic curriculum (Hargreaves, 2005; Senyshen, 1999). Staff in this example understood their responsibility to engage minds, and by negotiating curriculum in a climate conducive to co-construction, students and staff had opportunities to engage in learning-focussed dialogue in which they both had a vested interest. Learning-focussed dialogue has a direct impact on students' metacognitive development and their ability to reflect on and improve their learning (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004).

The stated enduring understandings were part of the non-negotiable constraints of the course, and these were explained to students at its commencement. The enduring

understandings were touchstones that prompted students to ask questions they thought were worth pursuing, and these fed into tutorial planning. This practice paralleled the process of negotiating within constrained environment discussed by Hyun (2006).

Lecture response forms were a core contributor to the curriculum negotiation that took place in this course. Students were able to provide feedback to lecturers to help them shape tutorial sessions. Students appreciated the opportunities given to them to provide input and share their perspectives throughout this course. Sometimes students raised issues/questions that would have been otherwise unrecognised within the curriculum, as was similarly noted by Thornton and Chapman (2000). The inclusion of such topics benefitted students. They were able to feel a level of empowerment in the tutorial activities, given their input. All staff members took the response forms seriously and we had to decide how best to incorporate the input they received from their students. Other forms of feedback and discussion during the tutorial sessions allowed for refinement of the goals and purposes, of the sessions as well as the topics that required further exploration or teaching. The dialogical relationship with students plays a key role in pedagogy which embraces curriculum negotiation (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995).

Through the use of curriculum negotiation in this course, students were able to see a very important teaching approach in action. This meant there was alignment between how they were being taught, and how they were being encouraged to teach. Negotiating curriculum is not simply a teaching strategy which can be used occasionally. It is instead underpinned by a philosophy of teaching and learning which values collaboration, democracy, and social justice through the sharing of power in the classroom. It dismisses the traditional reception-transmission or instruction-oriented approach to teaching as not being good enough, and instead supports views that students who are engaged and have the capacity to be heard, resist and question in the classroom will learn better and learn more than those who have been instructed “against their will or with their will having been motivated by a persuasive teacher” (Boomer, 1992, p. 278). The idea that the quality of learning suffers when planned curriculum is delivered without engaging the interest of the students (Boomer et al., 1992) was made explicit in tutorials and an alternative approach was modelled. Because students in this course were able to experience this approach personally, it was hoped that they would be more likely to use it in their own classrooms.

Staff members working on this course agreed on an approach that gave their students a voice in the classroom. This meant that staff had to be confident in both their own abilities and in their students’ commitment to learning, so as to be open to negotiating the curriculum within the constraints they were working. Curriculum negotiation required disciplined preparation as well as general teaching expertise which allowed the lecturers to deviate from their planning, as appropriate. To effectively teach in this way, all staff needed to feel confident to talk about a wide range of issues that might be raised by students, rather than to be prepared within only a narrow focus. The joint planning meetings facilitated staff sharing their expertise and helped build capacity within the team. These meetings also helped staff engender and maintain enthusiasm for their preparation and teaching. Overall, staff tended to be “over-planned” i.e., have an excess of planned teaching materials so that they were prepared for whichever way the class wanted to take a topic. The increased workload that this might imply was mitigated by the fact that all resources and planning was shared across

the team, allowing for a large range of resources and activities to be gathered quite efficiently. From my experience this collaboration strengthened the teaching team and encouraged high expectations of teaching quality.

Both students and lecturers took assessment in the course seriously as this course was one of the final courses that students needed to pass before completing their teacher education degree. Based on student feedback, a key motivator in one assignment seemed to be the authenticity of the task. Students were able to choose a focus task that they had actually developed and used whilst on practicum. The freedom to make this choice seemed to create motivation and desire to engage with the task, as in the findings of Black et al. (2000). Students said they appreciated the opportunity to have some input into the assessment process and particularly valued the two-part assessment in which formative assessment practices were employed by the staff.

Conclusion

The pedagogy used by the majority of lecturers in tertiary contexts is traditionally a conservative one (Lammers & Murphy, 2002). The perseverance of such teaching methods does not align with research on best practice for teaching and learning, but may be justified in part by the perceived difficulties and constraints embedded in system of tertiary education. However, as has been discussed, it is possible to successfully add elements of curriculum negotiation to a tertiary course.

This paper has described how one teacher education course in a university environment was taught in ways that meant staff and students could work collaboratively to develop curriculum to best meet the needs of students. It was hoped that this approach would allow the learning to be more developmentally meaningful and culturally congruent from the learners' perspective. Through this description it is clear that even within the constraints of a high stakes tertiary course contributing to a degree, creating spaces for curriculum negotiation was possible. The staff members involved in this course were able to endorse beliefs and values that they believed in. This approach provided an alignment between theory and practice for the staff and students involved in the course. From a pragmatic perspective, the teaching team approach helped in the implementation of curriculum negotiation by sharing the workload and expertise.

Students were likely to have benefitted from the curriculum negotiation approach taken by the teaching team; they were given a voice within the curriculum they experienced. They were able to critically examine their own ideas and practice and to make decisions about directions for their own growth. Students also saw the process of curriculum negotiation in action and they were encouraged to use this approach in their own teaching. In terms of teacher education this is an important outcome.

Curriculum negotiation is an approach that can be used in tertiary settings, as has been exemplified in this paper. Its benefits are many and its underlying philosophy emphasises power sharing, community and partnership. Although the constraints in the tertiary teaching sector are considerable, they are not insurmountable, and spaces for curriculum negotiation can be created and utilised. In this way teaching changes its focus to become more like the ideal written about by Friere: "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while also being taught teach. They become jointly responsible for the process in which all grow" (Freire, 1993, p. 61).

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