

2021

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Recommended Citation

McGraw, A., Keamy, R., Kriewaldt, J. A., Brandenburg, R., Walker, R., & Crane, N. (2021). Collaboratively Designing a National, Mandated Teaching Performance Assessment in a Multi-University Consortium: Leadership, Dispositions and Tensions. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(5). Retrieved from <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol46/iss5/3>

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<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol46/iss5/3>

Collaboratively Designing a National, Mandated Teaching Performance Assessment in a Multi-university Consortium: Leadership, Dispositions and Tensions

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Abstract: It is a requirement for pre-service students in Initial Teacher Education programs in Australia to successfully complete a teaching performance assessment (TPA) before they graduate. This follows similar requirements in other international contexts, particularly the United States, where standard-based assessment is also a focus. As members of the design team of a TPA, which was affirmed by a nationally appointed Expert Advisory Group in Australia, we examine the social processes contributing to the development of a high-stakes assessment task. Significant challenges emerged through the nature of the task and the responsibility developers had for ensuring validity and fairness, but also because the design team comprised of teacher educators from ten universities. Using collaborative self-study as a methodology we examine our reflexive narratives and find that collaborative leadership and key personal dispositions are at the heart of the design process. These enable us to identify, examine and navigate arising tensions.

Introduction

Having contributed to the design of one of Australia’s required and accredited Teaching Performance Assessments (TPAs) for pre-service teachers (PSTs), the Assessment for Graduate Teaching (A/GT), we examine in this article the processes that enabled us, a team of teacher educators from diverse universities, to work productively together as we grappled with emerging tensions. As a TPA, the A/GT is a summative assessment task completed by PSTs in their final professional placement. Successful completion of the teaching practicum, along with a successfully completed TPA claims to demonstrate that PSTs are ‘ready to teach’ (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014).

There is limited research in the area of team-based collaborations in higher education course design (Newell & Bain, 2019) and even less of a focus on collaborations involving educators from multiple universities. While higher education collaboration networks in research are relatively common and seen as important ways to share, acquire and create

knowledge (Leite & Pinho, 2017), practitioners/teachers in higher education largely work in isolation (Norton, Sonnemann & Cherastidtham, 2013). In this article we examine our experience, as a self-study community of practice, to contribute insights into processes that enable productivity in a context where collaboration is rare and the stakes high.

In 2014, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG, 2014) recommended a series of policy initiatives for accreditation of ITE programs. As a consequence, in 2015, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) revised the National Program Accreditation Standards to mandate a final TPA. In 2016, with Commonwealth Government funds, AITSL invited expressions of interest from consortia of ITE providers to design and trial a TPA that could be used nationally. TPAs are required to assess whether PSTs are 'classroom ready'; that is, whether they can demonstrate impact on student learning through evidence they have met the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at a graduate level (AITSL, 2014).

One of two successful consortia at the time of this research, led by The University of Melbourne and comprising ten Australian ITE providers, our team designed a teaching performance assessment called the Assessment for Graduate Teaching (AfGT). The AfGT was piloted during 2017, refined for partial implementation in 2018, and was fully implemented in participating institutions in 2019. The AfGT is a multi-faceted assessment that comprises four elements: planning for learning and teaching; analysing teaching practice; assessing for impact on student learning; and expanding practice.

All six authors are qualified and experienced teachers with teaching experience in schools and other settings spanning early childhood education, primary education, special education and secondary education. As teacher educators in diverse locations in Australia we have many years of experience between us in the areas of teaching, research and leadership. During the past three years, we were part of the AfGT Design Team and actively participated in all aspects of the implementation of the AfGT instrument.

In this article, we tussle with a 'puzzle of practice' (McGee, 2011), asking: What are the factors and processes that enabled us to collaboratively design and implement a summative assessment task which impacts significantly on multiple stakeholders? Using self-study methods (Loughran, 2006) to examine our written reflections and dialogic interactions, we aim to extend our professional growth and to create and share knowledge that can improve educational practices (Kitchen & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2009). As we debated ideas, solved problems, made decisions and met objectives, we found ourselves working as a community of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2006). In a nutshell, communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion and learn how to operate more effectively as they regularly interact, negotiate meanings and take action. Importantly, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner argue, members of a CoP are practitioners who over time, as they engage in a joint enterprise, develop a shared repertoire of resources, a shared practice.

This article firstly addresses the literature that is relevant to our research, followed by a description of self-study - including the data collection and analysis. Three overlapping and interconnected themes were identified: leadership and social practices; dispositions and context, and tensions, and these findings are discussed before concluding comments are made. The following section addresses leadership aspects in higher education, dispositions for collaborative academic work, and working with tensions in higher education.

Leadership in Higher Education

Conceptions of what constitutes leadership in education have changed over time, with the focus shifting away from an emphasis on supposed attributes, styles of leadership and formal structures of leadership built on transactional approaches, towards transformational processes, which include notions of learning leadership (Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003). These processes include distributed ways in which leadership is shared, with trust, power sharing, collegiality and mutual respect being important elements (Dinham, Aubusson, & Brady, 2008).

Distributed leadership involves shifts in power, authority and control, and encompasses both the distribution of tasks and processes in the educational setting (Harris, 2013). The notion of distributed leadership in universities is increasing in popularity (Floyd & Preston, 2018) though academics are uncertain about how to ensure collegiality exists (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Kligyte & Barrie, 2014). There are also concerns about how little guidance there is on how to be collegial or how to create supportive environments in universities (Selkrig, Keamy, Sadler, & Manathunga, 2019). Newell and Bain (2019) argue that formal collaborative practice in higher education is rare and that the culture in higher education is more supportive of individualised, hierarchical, and competitive work practices.

Collegial working environments – where they exist – don't just happen; they demand considerable commitment (Scott, Coates, & Anderson, 2008), including moving beyond 'contrived collegiality' (Datnow, 2011; Hargreaves, 1994). Nevertheless, the work of a team – *team work* – where individuals work mainly as individuals, transforms into *teamwork* when the members of a team operate interdependently and foster positive group experiences and each other's well-being (Hall, 2002). Having a clear task structure, appropriate group composition and agreement on core norms are some of the conditions that contribute to the concept of teamwork (Hall, 2002). Such collaborations occur in face-to-face settings and, with advances in technology, academics are increasingly collaborating virtually in order to conduct and advance research (Hannum, 2002).

Dispositions for Collaborative Academic Work

While there is interest in the role dispositions play in effective teaching (McGraw & McDonough, 2019; Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg & Cargill, 2009), learning (Entwistle 2012, 2009) and school and early childhood leadership (Davitt & Ryder, 2018), there is less of a focus in the research on the role dispositions play in higher education leadership contexts (Dunbar, 2016) and in collaborative academic work (Newell and Bain, 2018).

The term 'disposition' is notoriously difficult to define and some suggest there is little consensus about its nature (Bair, 2017). Freeman (2007) contends that the concept has the advantage of being associated with behaviours and actions rather than intentions and is therefore worthy of deep consideration. While some argue that the term 'disposition' requires further conceptual refinement (Kim & Zimmerman, 2017), Bair (2017) suggests clear patterns are emerging in the literature and that dispositions are 'internal attributes or psychological characteristics that motivate action' and are 'a tendency to act in a certain manner ...' (p. 223). Significantly, further characteristics of dispositions are that they have a social component and are dependent on context and circumstances (Bair, 2017). Certain dispositions like trust, respect, reciprocity, a commitment to shared work, self-awareness, adaptability and openness predispose individuals for effective collaborative work (Friend & Cook, 2014).

Some academics (such as Smyth, 2017) write with dismay about the current dominant managerial culture in universities which, through a focus on marketization and performance measures, threatens the professional life of academics. Zipin and Brennan (2003) argue that this climate suppresses certain dispositional orientations, including dispositions toward ethical conduct, agency as well as collegiality.

Working with Tensions in Teacher Education

Tensions are regularly experienced in complex work and are useful to surface and examine because they capture internal turmoil as educators deal with competing demands (Berry, 2007, p.119). In teacher education, Berry (2007) suggests, tensions are useful signposts for learning to understand the ambiguous work of teacher educators. Identifying tensions, articulating a preparedness to tolerate tensions, and examining the ways tensions impact on practice, she suggests, are a new form of expertise.

Instances of tension, Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Murray Orr (2010) suggest, serve as ‘markers for inquiry’. They are “bumping places” or ‘fissures in the texture of experience’ (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 89) that allow inquirers to examine coherence as well as ‘breakdowns in coherence’ (p. 89) and therefore must be attended to in any relational methodology. Clandinin et al. (2010) worryingly suggest that a reshaping of the assessment landscape has created new tensions for teachers who ‘can no longer live out their knowledge in their classrooms’ (p. 87) and resort to cover stories to hide the conflict they recognise between their out-of-school story and their in-school practice. Interestingly, tensions can be both helpful and paralysing (Sanders, Parsons, Mwavita & Thomas, 2015). Sanders et al (2015) found that while tensions can be ‘emotionally- taxing and difficult’ (p. 241) they also help, in useful ways, to shape beliefs and actions and enable learning.

In the following section, we describe in detail the self-study methodology we adopted, together with the data collection and analysis of data.

Self-study: Data Collection and Analysis

Purpose is a central driver of self-study methodology (Loughran & Brubaker, 2015; Brandenburg, 2008). Our purpose, as a CoP, was to employ self-study methods to understand the processes that enabled us, as teacher educators from diverse universities, to design a summative, high stakes national assessment task. Self-studies, like our own, ‘seek to illustrate tensions, dilemmas and concerns about practice and programs’ (Loughran & Russell, 2002, p. 244) and significantly, they focus on personal, program and professional renewal (Samaras & Freese, 2006). An essential outcome of self-study research is that it results in, and provides evidence for rethinking, improving and transforming practice. Through this study, we hope to provide insight into the complex work of educators and to more deeply understand the nature and value of our collaborative interactions.

This study, part of the research component of the A/GT (University of Melbourne Ethics ID 1749479), is underpinned by five characteristics: it is improvement aimed; self-initiated and focused; interactive; employs multiple and primarily qualitative methods, and uses exemplar-based validation (LaBoskey, 2004). A further requirement is enactment in practice (Loughran, 2006). Self-study, as Loughran (2006) reminds us, is a way of purposefully examining the complex relationship between teaching and learning with a focus on ‘developing appropriate alternatives for future experiences’ (p. 174). We remind ourselves

that in this project, and in the complexity of competing demands, we must ensure that learners, learning and curriculum are central (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012).

As a CoP with members from diverse institutions, we generated data in a systematic and structured manner using both reflective writing and dialogue, over an extended period. Firstly, we each responded in writing to open-ended sentence stems which prompted memories and reflections related to the process of designing the instrument. The prompts included: *I came to the project with the purpose of ...; I learned a great deal about ...; I was challenged by ...; Designing the TPA has led to ...* We then shared the individual written responses and engaged in a reflexive dialogue online where we sought to further explore our perceptions and memories through conversation. We began the dialogic meeting by silently reading the written reflections and individually identifying significant thoughts, moments, and experiences. The discussion unfolded as we elaborated on thoughts, made new connections and shared insights, questions and concerns. This conversation was then transcribed and acted as our second source of data.

The data were interrogated both individually and collaboratively (May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000) and collated using a clustered matrix framework (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). This enabled us to place less emphasis 'on specific cases and people and more on the conceptual and thematic matters of the study' (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014, p. 178). Verbatim quotes were identified and organised into 'like' categories and related themes and were entered into the matrix. Following the advice of Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) efforts were made in this article to represent all members' perspectives, and to draw upon the interplay between members as we conversed.

Three categories emerged from the analysis of quotations: leadership and social practices, dispositions and context, and tensions. Within each category we identified significant themes. It is worth noting that the themes, like the categories, overlap and interconnect in complicated ways. We now examine the themes within each of the categories.

Leadership and Social Practices

Team members identified leadership and social processes as a category that frequently emerged in the reflective writing and dialogue. When members referred to leadership, they referred to leadership exhibited in the Design Team. Interconnected themes related to this category are: the purposeful focus on dialogic, social processes and communication; trust and respect were important to team members; and the collective functioned in a non-neoliberal manner.

By necessity, with Design Team members located across multiple universities up to 3,000 km from each other and working interdependently 'across space, time, and organization boundaries,' online collaboration tools were utilised (Sofa, 2010, p. 122). According to Kim, the Design Team was assisted by 'having had a strong background in online teaching which also helped with group facilitation and other moments of e-collaboration.' E-collaboration has similar requisites as teaching online: both require an understanding of interaction protocols such as turn-taking, having shared opportunities for interaction, and being guided by a framework for structured and purposeful discussions.

Given the challenges associated with frequent online communication, explicit attention to the social aspects of leadership as well as to the strategic management of what was essentially dynamic, purposeful work was pivotal, with Amanda observing that:

Leadership is a key factor in the effectiveness of our work. The leadership team has not only modelled excellent technical and managerial skills but also

demonstrated the human and symbolic dimensions of leadership that are so vital.'

Rebecca considered that these collegial approaches provided:

'a model of how to collaboratively work in a national, large team and built and strengthened professional relationships. It has also led to opportunities to collaboratively disseminate the findings from the AfGT research and consortium ways of working.'

Knight and Trowler's (2000) model of interactional leadership, with its emphasis on collegiality and consultation, encapsulated the social processes visible to the Design Team, in which there was 'a climate of negotiation based on trust oriented to, as well as growing from, a developing understanding of the shape of ... goals' (p. 79). The importance of trust and respect emerged as a key enabler of collaboration for members of the team. Robyn noted that the Design Team demonstrated 'inclusivity and respect for all opinions and suggestions' and Kim, that everyone 'needed to be respectful of each institution's context and history' and that 'it was obvious that we were trusting each other.'

Nadine, who joined the Design Team twelve months into the project noted a culture of trust and respect was evident when she attended her first meeting with the consortium group.

'What I walked into was the culture that had already been set up... by the end of the day, it was very clear that whoever was in that room got to have a say ... and was listened to.'

The importance of distributive leadership in developing a culture of trust and respect, in both the Design Team and the larger Consortium, was apparent across the data sets with Jeana stating, 'full Consortium meetings via video conferencing were frequent and were structured to enable discussion and chaired respectfully.' It was noted by Kim that as the Consortium worked together, he was 'seeing how the academic leadership literature was actually unfolding before my very eyes.' Kligyte and Barrie (2014) propose that collegiality 'represents the interface and connection between 'leaders' and those who are led.' (p.158) As evidenced in the following quote from Amanda, an interesting outcome of the presence of trust between people, was enhanced faith in the product developed.

'An important outcome of these approaches is trust. While some of us may be feeling tentative about stepping into TPA territory, we have grown to trust one another and our intentions and consequently, we place faith in the tool we have spent so much time constructing, testing and reconstructing.'

Members of the Design Team described how the building of relational trust was an unexpected development of the Consortium's journey, and for Jeana, this 'seemed unusual for institutions who are also competing for student enrolments.' Robyn also commented on this phenomenon saying:

'It doesn't really matter where you're from; we're working together towards something. I have to say, I didn't think like that at the beginning. So that has grown over time. That understanding and that trust that people are ... here together.'

Amanda expanded on this idea, remarking that:

'The processes used for developing the AfGT have been warm and open-hearted. They seem strange words to use in the context of high-stakes assessment, but it is true that from our first meeting the mood, the social relations, and the design processes have been shaped by dialogue and storytelling, humour, collaborative problem-solving, consultation and respectful debate.'

As noted by Hil (2014) in light of neoliberal values driving university policies and agendas, there appears to be less collegiality as a result of 'marketisation, massification and managerialism' (p.64), with universities and academics positioned in competition with each

other. Kligyte and Barrie (2014) describe collegiality as a behavioural norm that is the ‘glue’ holding the academic community together and propose that institutions should contribute to the narrative of universities undertaking academic work in a cooperative, collegiate manner rather than ‘...acquiescing to the competitive ethos of the market’ (p.66). As Rebecca commented, the team embraced these ideas in their collaborative endeavours:

‘I think sometimes we have myths about perhaps other institutions that aren’t accurate. And certainly, institutions are made up of individuals, not the institution itself...it was great to work with a group of people who didn’t position themselves as one institution competing against each other. It was everybody collectively working together.’

Dispositions and Context

Dispositions are dependent on context and circumstances (Bair, 2017). The high-stakes nature of the instrument, tensions surrounding the mandates, and external deadlines meant that the design context was embroiled with tensions, possibilities to be canvassed and solutions to be negotiated. Most of the Design Team had not worked in a cross-university collaborative team before and came to the experience with different degrees of trepidation, possibly fuelled by limited collaborative practices both within and between universities (Newell & Bain, 2018).

In relation to the category of dispositions and context, the following themes were identified: an openness to learning; an appreciation for mess and change; a genuine sense of care and commitment; an inherent respect for diverse people, places and positions; and an optimistic orientation while still maintaining a critical lens.

Members spoke about the outcomes for them personally and demonstrated a key disposition: a valuing of and openness to professional learning. Through the process of working collaboratively Jeana said she had grown professionally as her ‘understanding of the standards, of ethics, of working collaboratively and of teacher education programs and contexts’ developed. The direct experience of a collaborative design process, enriched members’ understandings of assessment and moderation and opened up new possibilities to replicate the processes in their universities. Rebecca wrote:

‘The AfGT modelled to me the development and refining of an assessment against evidence, data and with academic expertise. The whole process including responding to data gathered from trial participants and at consortium moderation meetings outlined a model of assessment development that could be applied in other situations and replicated.’

Through openness to learning and reflective practice, members identified personal gains and increased confidence, and saw possibilities for transforming professional practices in their separate workplaces.

A focus on improving teacher education co-exists with an appreciation of complexity and trust in the generative, messy nature of social processes and change. The dynamic nature of the design process appeared fascinating and rewarding to the Design Team members. Robyn wrote, ‘I came to this project ... open to a non-linear, messy process.’ She raised concern about a prevailing focus on grids and charts and was committed to being involved in a ‘work in progress that keeps changing as our challenges reveal themselves.’ Kim reflected:

‘I’ve conjured up images of looking into a front-loading washing machine, watching the clothes getting tossed to and fro, with varying levels of murky, frothy, then clean water as the process gets closer to completion. The washing machine metaphor isn’t a bad way to capture what’s involved...messy indeed!’

A clear focus on care and optimism circulates in the data and this seems to underpin and fuel other key dispositions. Rebecca explained: ‘I came into this project with the purpose of making a valuable and collaborative contribution on behalf of the institution where I work and to the consortium as a whole.’ Similarly, Jeana entered the Consortium with a strong sense of professional commitment and responsibility: ‘I came into this project with the purpose of co-designing an assessment tool that was fair, adaptable, practicable and that should contribute to professional growth in those completing it.’ Robyn came ‘with the purpose of responding to a national call to improve the quality of teacher education.’

Members’ inherent respect for diverse people, places and positions is evident and linked to an underpinning notion of care. Team members revealed their concerns about whether a TPA could cater for stakeholders in diverse educational contexts. Amanda commented:

‘With each iteration of the tool and its supporting documentation, my colleagues and I checked in with our PSTs and school partners. Would this work meaningfully in the myriad regional and rural contexts where our students refine their capacities to teach? This constant process of checking in and being responsive to individual contexts, not only has practical advantages for diverse communities. It is also important symbolic work that illuminates cooperation and agency in a time when these processes are increasingly under threat in education.’

The willingness to respect diversity fostered optimism. Members from less prominent universities expressed concerns about how their contributions would be sought and honoured. Nadine acknowledged her initial feelings of apprehension:

‘I know in the data people were concerned about the differences between these institutions but when the people got to the table ... everyone was probably thinking the same thing: wanting a voice and wanting to be involved. So maybe that ...overcame the concerns around how you are going to get a tool to really work across all those institutions.’

With optimism and faith in social processes and collaboration, members were able to collectively value and exhibit scepticism and critical thinking. Amanda reflected: ‘While I am sometimes quietly anxious about the impact of what we are creating, I have also seen the possibilities inherent in the collaborative design process where diverse universities have worked optimistically and without competition on the creation of the AfGT.’ Rebecca maintained that we ‘absolutely need a critical lens to what we write.’ Valuing critical reflection enabled all members to honestly examine their doubts and vulnerabilities as we sought to design a high stakes assessment instrument in a competitive educational environment.

Tensions

The third category to emerge in the written and conversational data related to tensions. Within this context, tensions are defined as the strain or forces experienced by the Design Team that existed both internally and externally. The identified tensions arose naturally from the team’s philosophical views on ITE, their experiences in the development and implementation of the TPA, and their pragmatic responses to current policy requirements. There is an ‘interconnected complexity’ when identifying, discussing and analysing tensions and we acknowledge that ‘dynamic tensions continually exist and need to be thoughtfully navigated’ (Lock, Kim, Koh, & Wilcox, 2018, p.1). Four interconnected themes related to tensions were: the experiences of risk and opportunity; complexity versus

simplicity in TPA design and outcomes; program diversity versus homogeneity; and ethics and ethical practice.

Design Team members spoke of the experience of risk and opportunity. Deciding to be involved initially caused angst for some members. Robyn commented, 'I anguished over the whole TPA thing...because I felt that our level of professional judgment and our professional responsibility was being challenged and I guess taken on by someone external.' Nadine wondered: 'Is it possible to have an instrument that is sensitive enough to assess the course in which it sits?' In relation to an expectation of consistency she asked, 'What's right? What's wrong? What is the standard? It still sits within the context of a pre-service sector education course and what's being taught.'

Concerns about whether TPAs would limit possibilities in teaching and learning within schools and universities were fuelled by the view expressed by Kim: 'Teaching performance assessments were going to be a big deal – probably the single biggest change in preparation of new teachers that I would likely see in my career ...' Interestingly, apprehensions about being involved were minimised by participants finding personal meaning and professional worth in the design, with Jeana commenting, 'Peoples' contributions were sought, valued and acknowledged ... designing the TPA has led to a strengthened understanding of assessment design and moderation processes.' Robyn said, 'I felt very confirmed as a voice in a process at a very early stage.'

The initial work was underpinned by preconceived assumptions made about other universities in the Consortium. This created feelings of being guarded and apprehensive; however, much of the anxiety was dispelled as the team regularly met via scheduled virtual meetings. It was 'these meetings [that] supported e-collaboration where critical review and respectful robust discussion of the AfGT occurred ... provid[ing] an opportunity for institutions to share their experiences,' according to Rebecca. The experience, described by Robyn as a 'democratic approach' served, in a positive way, to 'bust myths' about universities and their reputations. Amanda, who works in a regional university commented on the practice of ensuring agreement, across all contexts, in decision-making:

'The dynamics of inclusion are particularly significant for regional universities in contexts where decision-making has such high stakes. From the beginning, my colleagues and I felt as though we were just as vital to the process of design and evaluation as our colleagues from more prestigious universities.'

There was also tension related to the capacity of a TPA to effectively measure and determine the readiness of a graduate given the complex, sophisticated and nuanced nature of teaching. Some members wondered whether the complexity and 'messiness' of teaching could be adequately captured within a template. Nadine said,

'What we're on about is the messiness of good teaching. It is messy ... It shouldn't be: "I've planned this whole thing out and that's how it goes". ... We've got a tool that's set out in boxes and with word limits. There's a lot of tension there ... they want education to be looking for that simplistic answer ... But that's not what teaching is ... the reality of what's happening in classrooms.'

Tensions related to the need to negotiate and meet the requirements of external stakeholders were also raised. Kim spoke about the TEMAG requirements that had led to increased pressure on teacher educators and their workloads. He commented with wonder that external stakeholders probably did not 'ever intend that the requirement for a TPA should end up being a vehicle with which to bring universities together.' The need to 'tick off standards' through the design of the instrument created tension for Jeana, and Nadine spoke about the difficulties for PSTs who were completing placements in schools where 'planning has just been locked down.' She believed that this created constraints and difficulties for PSTs who could not respond adequately to learners' needs, as the instrument requires them to

do. Amanda wondered whether into the future ‘the AfGT will play some role in shifting this practice.’

A further interconnecting tension was diversity vs homogeneity. The Design Team members wondered whether a national, one-size-fits-all approach would lead to uniformity and disadvantage diverse and unique responses and contexts. Beliefs about inclusivity, diversity and the need for flexibility were expressed by members. Rebecca said, ‘I believe that education should celebrate diversity, not all of us become the same.’ Amanda wondered whether we were adequately developing an instrument that would cater for ‘multiple perspectives, multiple opportunities for responses based on very, very different experiences, or whether we’re constraining the possibilities for students.’ Through distributed leadership and a valuing of social processes across the Consortium and within the Design Team, the members saw collaboration as a means of catering for diversity. Amanda said, ‘no decision was made without us all being in agreement; without us all wondering about the impact on our diverse communities.’

The final theme, ethics and ethical practice, mainly related to the use of video in the AfGT, data storage, security and maintenance. The requirement of PSTs to film two segments of their teaching in the AfGT is a distinguishing feature of the instrument and is included as a means of fostering reflective practice. Concerns about ethical issues related to capturing classroom learning were expressed and some wondered about the tension between the video footage being used as evidence as opposed to stimulus for reflection. Jeana commented,

‘I was challenged by video being described as capturing what the candidate does in classrooms, yet I believed it is important to recognise that video does not fully ‘capture’.... It can provide a self-curated snapshot of teaching performance ...’

Tensions surrounding the video extended to concerns about the ongoing storage of video footage and the ethical responsibilities and maintenance of TPA data across the Consortium.

While unease existed, there was a shared belief that tensions and messiness *should* exist and that dynamic tensions should be carefully examined and ‘thoughtfully navigated’ (Lock et al, 2018, p.1). We have found, as Sanders, Parsons, Mwavita & Thomas (2015) suggest that navigating tensions helps to shape beliefs, actions and to enable learning.

Conclusion

‘What factors and processes enabled us to collaboratively design and implement a summative assessment task which impacts significantly on multiple stakeholders?’

When we posed this question, we did not have a pre-determined process for how we might go about finding answers. By capitalising on the diverse research expertise in our community of practice, a process emerged – a process that we describe as ‘collaborative self-study’ (Davey & Ham, 2009).

Australia’s ITE reform agenda has created shared challenges for the sector, but it also provides new opportunities as those who work in institutions respond to the recommendations of TEMAG (2014). Opportunities include professional growth and sector transformation that extend beyond changes to learning programs. For the AfGT Consortium, this has been evidenced in the development and strengthening of collegial relationships with colleagues in different parts of the country, in institutions with different program types, delivery models and histories. Not only has expertise been shared, but the diversity of our institutions and each other has been recognised, respected and harnessed.

Learning to work with colleagues from other universities replaced initial feelings of apprehension and guardedness. For most of us, the very idea of a teaching performance assessment was problematic – and being part of a consortium that would be responsible for producing a TPA added a level of anxiety. The idea of being able to reduce the complex and sophisticated tasks of teaching to template-driven responses troubled several of us. Identifying and grappling with emergent tensions in a collaborative community enabled diverse perspectives and our considerable collective professional experience as teachers and academics, to be acknowledged.

Collaborative leadership, social processes and personal dispositions that were activated in this context, contributed to the ways we embraced teamwork with trust, respect, openness and a focus on care and optimism. All in the Design Team were concerned with having a voice and wanted to actively participate in the creative messiness of designing a TPA that could straddle many different requirements – and that was before the additional challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through collaborative social processes members were able to exercise scepticism and critical thinking as well as discuss doubts and vulnerabilities. This, in a context where universities can be ill-prepared to work collegially, is quite an achievement. As Amanda reflected:

'In an institutional climate honed on competition and marketing campaigns which pit one university against another, this is a story that illustrates the importance of universities as social institutions where collaboration is purposefully nurtured.'

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Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the seed funding from the Australian Institute for Teaching & School Leadership (AITSL) in the first year of the project (2017) and the significant and ongoing financial support provided by the member institutions of the AfGT Consortium. The authors also thank the members of the AfGT Consortium for the enthusiastic and collaborative work in developing the Assessment for Graduate Teaching.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the interpretation of the data by all members of the AfGT Consortium.