




VicTESOL
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Tensions in the Adult ELT Curriculum Session 2 Overburden

Dr Chris Corbel
Faculty of Education University of Melbourne

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Introduction (1)



These two sessions explore **tensions within the adult ELT curriculum**.

We're exploring


- how the **curriculum** has changed over time
- how the current **compliance** tensions emerged
- the likelihood of **change** in the future.

We're using the **Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)** as a case study.

It's a unique program serving up to 60,00 participants a year. It's a national treasure.

Although the focus is on the AMEP the issues are relevant across **all ELT and education sectors**.

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Introduction (2)

Session 1 Meeting Midway


In Session 1 we looked at how the AMEP went through **three broad curriculum eras** in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

1. A focus on specific elements of **language forms** (structures) – *Situational English*.
2. A focus on elements of **language use** (proficiency) - *ASLPR*
3. A focus on elements of **language tasks** (competencies) - *CSWE*

We examined the **tensions** underlying the changes.
We saw how **compliance requirements** have changed with each era, from a focus on **teaching** to a focus on **assessment**.



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Introduction (3)

Key Curriculum Concepts

Production, **Recontextualisation**, Reproduction (Bernstein, 2000)

- Recontextualisation is the process of **converting knowledge into texts** that are amenable for use by managers, teachers, and learners. Such texts include policies, guidelines, frameworks, scales, textbooks and other resources.

Two groups seek control over recontextualisation:

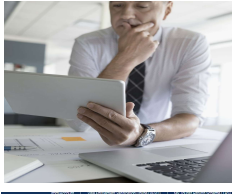

- **the ORF** – the **Official Recontextualisation Field** (politicians, public servants)
- **the PRF** - the **Pedagogic Recontextualisation Field** (providers, teachers, academics)

Trust

- the belief that another person or entity is **capable and reliable**. It's central to ORF/PRF relationship

Compliance

- activities imposed by the ORF on the PRF that demonstrate adherence to the requirements of an external **monitoring or accountability** framework

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Session 2 – Overburden


Overburden (verb)

This time we'll look at how teachers have become not just burdened but **overburdened** by administrative tasks relating to assessment.

We'll look at

1. How compliance became a **burden**
2. How the burden became **unsustainable**
3. Prospects for **reducing** the burden

The ORF has **appropriated the discourse** of the PRF to achieve its goals.



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In the 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's there was increasing **increasing trust** between the ORF and PRF.

However, the nineties, noughties and teens were decades of **decreasing trust** the between the ORF and PRF.

This was reflected in the imposition of a **curriculum environment** in which **compliance** with rigid techniques of **assessment** and a focus on **outcomes** was central.

Three features of this environment reflected and intensified this distrust - Certification, Competition and Conflation.



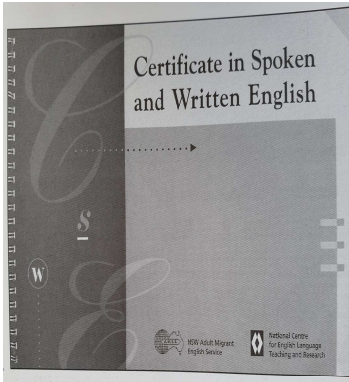
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Certification

CSWE = VET (CBT) + SFG

- Forced on the PRF by the **National Training Agenda** – ORF micro-economic reforms to improve Australia's economic prospects and competitiveness (early 90's)
- Embraced by many in the PRF because of the perceived **benefits**
- Reflected the change in focus of the ORF **from inputs to outputs**.
- Reflected a focus by the ORF on **'steering rather than rowing'**.
- Required greater control of the PRF by the ORF in the name of **'transparency'**.
- Rise of the **'audit culture'**




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Competition

- Global changes in ORF thinking (New Public Management) led to a policy of **competitive tendering**.
- There was fear in the ORF of **'provider capture'**
- The **collaboration** in the PRF that had led to the successes of the eighties was now replaced by competition.
- The PRF was under constant **pressure of compliance** from the requirements of being
 - a **VET provider**
 - a deliverer of accredited **courses**, and possibly
 - a member of a **quality** scheme such as ISO.




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How compliance became a burden (3)

Conflation

- Language, literacy and, later, digital literacy and employability conflated over time into **foundation skills**
- EAL was no longer seen as a distinct area of learning** by the ORF. The subsequent relationship with the SEE program further blurred the distinctiveness of the AMEP mission.
- Debates within the PRF in the 90's relating to the **distinctiveness of adult language** learning in relation to **adult literacy** learning worked to the ORF's advantage, as did the closing of the various national support units.
- Professional development became focused primarily on **CBT training**.
- A **mix of students** in classes (a perpetual AMEP issue) remained due to different funding sources (e.g. SEE)



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How the burden became unsustainable (1)

Curriculum choice

By the late teens the camel's back was straining.

- The **New Business Model** AMEP contract (2017) allowed choice of curriculum.
- However, this was made by **providers, not teachers**, and hence on budgetary as well as educational grounds
- Curriculum choice may have suggested an **improvement of trust** by the ORF in the providers and practitioners of the PRF.
- However, the **professionalism** of teachers was called upon not to make the choice but simply to **make whatever had been chosen for them work**.




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How the burden became unsustainable (2)

Curriculum 'reconciliation'

- There was immediately a tension in trying to reconcile the ORF demand for **consistent national reporting** with the need to assess against the **various curriculums**.
- The PRF was under pressure from two directions. They needed to carry out **assessments** as required as a **VET** registered training organisation,
- However, in order to meet **KPI** requirements they were also required to report learners' **progress**, not against the ASLPR (now ISLPR), or CSWE, but against a national framework, the ACSF.
- This was the undercurrent at the 75th anniversary conference in 2023.



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Reducing the burden (1)

A single national curriculum

- In the early twenties a series of **engagements** between the ORF and PRF informed the **planning** for the next AMEP contract, then due to begin in 2024.
- In 2021, after surveys of providers and users and discussion with PRF representatives and an AMEP Advisory Committee, the ORF announced that a **single national curriculum** framework would be re-introduced.
- This was to be the **EAL Framework** (*Certificates in English as an Additional Language* (CEAL) one of three main curriculums that had been in use nationally since 2017.

- 22482VIC Course in Initial EAL
- 22483VIC Course in EAL
- 22484VIC Certificate I in EAL (Access)
- 22485VIC Certificate II in EAL (Access)
- 22486VIC Certificate III in EAL (Access)
- 22487VIC Certificate IV in EAL (Access)
- 22488VIC Certificate II in EAL (Employment)
- 22489VIC Certificate III in EAL (Employment)
- 22490VIC Certificate IV in EAL (Employment / Professional)
- 22491VIC Certificate III in EAL (Further Study)
- 22492VIC Certificate IV in EAL (Further Study)

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Reducing the burden (2)

Changes to the AMEP

The **new** New Business Model promised:

- **A National Curriculum**
- **An AMEP Academy**
- **An AMEP Innovate fund**

These had the potential to address the burden.

However, this (15 Sept 2023):

The Australian Government has committed to deliver a new AMEP business model from 1 January 2025. The new business model will provide greater flexibility and enhanced client and teacher supports. This aims to further improve English language, employment and settlement outcomes for AMEP clients.

... has been replaced by this (12 April 2024):

The Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs is undertaking a review of the AMEP program settings to ensure they incentivise flexible delivery and economic participation outcomes.

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Reducing the burden (3)

Changes to VET

A current project, VET Qualifications Reform, has recommended **three new qualification types**

- **Purpose 1 – qualifications leading to a specific occupation** (for example a licensed trade)
- **Purpose 2 – qualifications to prepare learners for multiple occupations within an industry**
- **Purpose 3 – qualifications that develop cross-sectoral or foundation skills and knowledge which may be applied across industries, or lead to tertiary education and training pathways.**

- Though some kind of amelioration of the burden of compliance may be possible, **CBT itself will not be going away any time soon.**
 - *“In response to feedback from these national consultations, qualification reform will retain units of competency as the building block for VET qualifications, but also recognises that VET serves a diverse range of industries, and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not in the best interest of learners and industry.”*
- This will remain true for EAL and the AMEP as well. The concern is that such diversity may require even greater documentation.

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Reducing the burden(4)

Changes to Professionalism

New views on the nature of professionalism

- **Institutional** – driven by the field (traditional view)
- **Organisational** – driven by the employer/funder
- **Critical/transformational** – driven by commitment to a cause(s)
- **Personal** – driven by commitment to learners

- In the AMEP **personal** professionalism has always been as strong as occupational or transformational professionalism.
- Its culture has always strongly focused on the **qualities of individual teachers** as much as their qualifications.
- **Organisational** professionalism has thus slipped in as the dominant model.
- The appropriation by the ORF of the **discourse of learner centredness**, and apparently desirable notions like *flexibility*, has made this more acceptable for some in the PRF.

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Conclusion


Responding to the burden

- Ro (2024) recommends **more engagement in curriculum planning and design.** (schools)
- Gore et al (2023) show how professional development can “**create spaces of freedom** even within regimes of performative accountability” (466) (schools)
- Bathmaker & Avis (2013) recommend a **focus on pedagogy** as the bridge between teachers’ actual work and the broader context. (UK FE)
- Mercer (2021) calls for ‘**wellbeing competence**’, in ELT, not just as individuals but from a social perspective

- **Whichever your response is, understanding the nature of the discursive contest and resulting tensions between the ORF and the PRF is part of the professional understanding that all language professionals need to have.**

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Overburden (noun)

- I come from the brown coal mining town of **Morwell** in Victoria's Latrobe Valley, home of the Hazelwood power station.
- Everyone knew that to get to the coal you had to remove what was called the "**overburden**", the layers of earth on top of it.
- **Remove the overburden of distrust** manifested in extreme compliance requirements and perhaps, instead of coal, we'll find more of those diamonds that have emerged from **the AMEP innovations** we have seen displayed at each of the key AMEP anniversaries over its unique 75 year history.

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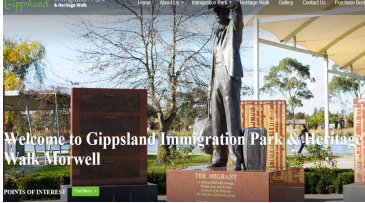
The power station is now gone. Will there be a **100th anniversary** of the AMEP, or will it too simply disappear?

Morwell was a company town for the State Electricity Commission (SEC), a **large state enterprise that had (almost) disappeared**.

A few years ago Morwell was dying, but lately it's showing **new signs of life**.

Just like the AMEP?!


(Don't dream it's over...)

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