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Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching
2018, Vol. 15, Suppl. 1, pp. 192–205

Education Leadership and Curriculum Design: Towards Quality Chinese Language Programmes in Australian Universities

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Abstract

Multilingual and multicultural knowledge and skills can facilitate advancing university degrees as modern-day education becomes increasingly globally oriented. Building high levels of language proficiency has become a strong force in shaping university curricula. This paper addresses how best to accommodate the needs of Chinese language learners in an Australian university from the perspective of education leadership with a multidisciplinary approach toward curriculum design through Chinese language and culture activities. The discussion starts with the traditional role of needs analysis, stretches to education leadership in relation to standards and professionalism, and finally weaves with the primary accounts of student and teacher experiences obtained through university course experience survey data. Student enrolment data are also cited to allow exploration into the increasingly multivariate needs of Chinese language learners. The nature of learners' needs in relation to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and career pathway is examined. The aim of this paper is to explore the options for conceptualising and re-conceptualising a framework for analysing the needs of learners and curriculum intervention for acquiring language communication skills, academic learning skills, disciplinary programme skills and leadership skills. The context for multidisciplinary and multimode offerings of university language programmes is outlined. The implications of the changing nature of quality university language programmes are also showcased. Finally, the impact of policy-making decisions on university curricula is highlighted in relation to the postmodern role of education leadership.

1 Background

For the past 100 years, Australians have enjoyed one of the world's highest levels of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The linguistic diversity of more than 200 languages spoken in Australia today lays the foundation of its cultural diversity (Henderson, 2008; Rudd, 1994). Language and culture education constitutes one of the key agendas of Australian universities and schools, as well as the federal and state governments' education policies. The Chinese language, for instance, is one of the many languages spoken and taught in Australia, and its learning and teaching is seen to bear economic, social and political benefits (Mu, 2014). Orton (2008, 2011), after reviewing the Chinese language education in Victorian schools, considers that developing Chinese language education in Australia would contribute to building a solid and positive Australia-China relationship.

Politicians in Australia have acknowledged that language and culture education policy is a crucial part of national economic policy. The teaching of foreign languages is regarded by the Australian government as a fundamental element to participation in the global economic and political arena. This acknowledgement is evidenced and well documented on its official website.[1] The Australian federal government has financially sponsored numerous projects to support language education in Australia, though such support tends to fluctuate with the change of government (Li, 2012). The National Network for University Languages, a project which started in 2010 and was funded by the Australian Academy of the Humanities,[2] was one of those endeavours. This project aimed to address effective language education in Australian universities, and in 2013 led to the creation of the national organisation in Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU).[3] In the process of internationalising education for languages and cultures, LCNAU exercises a traditional role of education leadership in relation to standards, benchmarks and professionalism in the sector of language education and advocacy for policy-making for the nation.

Building multilingual and multicultural knowledge and communication competence has become an impeccable trend in the curriculum design of Australian universities and is now an integral part of the learning capabilities for more and more university curricula. Cultural and linguistic competence is even regarded as a prerequisite by various disciplines in the university, particularly those that are internationally oriented, for instance, B.A. in Business and B.A. in International Studies of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University).[4] Embedding language skills into the curriculum has the advantage of enabling students to acquire not only language skills but also academic learning skills, disciplinary programme skills (which major degree programmes are expected to deliver) and leadership skills in their chosen disciplinary areas. University graduates are expected to build capabilities in communication skills with more than one language to open up their career prospects and attract employment opportunities at both local and international levels. Language learning is no doubt a valuable add-on tool, either as an independent degree or in combination with other university majors, thereby expanding and building upon students' existing learning in the universities (Bourdieu, 1991; Grin, 2001).

Accordingly, language learning and teaching constitutes an important part of strategic policy in Australian universities in their search for a global passport for their university graduates. Like other global universities, RMIT University, one of Australia's most esteemed universities, has identified globalising the curriculum as one of its goals for academic success. RMIT University is committed to improving the quality of students' learning experiences by aligning its commitment to internationalising the curriculum through its strategic and academic plan (e.g. Li, Singh, & Robertson, 2012).

However, in Australian universities, issues relating to serving culturally and linguistically diverse student populations have been paramount. In Chinese language programmes, there has been much debate over the past few decades about how best to serve the needs of the Chinese language learning students. When migration brings more and more Chinese-speaking students into English-speaking education contexts, the issues raised by this situation also include local native-English-speaking students' Chinese learning not being balanced with that of those students with Chinese family background, including international students (Orton, 2008), assessment and reporting not meeting the requirements of university standards, and teaching and learning in general not meeting the multivariate needs of the multilingual and multicultural learners (Orton, 2011). The progression rates of language learning students following admission has long been identified as a major area for improvement (Nettelbeck et al., 2009). These problems have received significant attention in higher education, and constantly challenge us language educators in defining our role as education leaders and in what we do as policy-actors in an ever-changing education environment.

By examining the multivariate needs of Chinese language learners in RMIT University, with a focus on Chinese language and culture activities, this paper will explore the options for curriculum intervention grounded in the linguistic and cultural diversity of local and international students in the university. It will focus on an analysis of learners' needs from the perspectives of knowledge-driven educational leadership, with a view that language practitioners can act as education leaders, and language learners can be trained as future leaders in their chosen disciplinary areas. We anticipate that

the needs analysis and program renovation as presented in this article will be applicable to other curriculum content for Chinese courses. The purpose is also to shed light on conceptualising and re-conceptualising a comprehensive framework that aims to build a quality and shared curriculum of Chinese language learning for Australian universities.

2 Needs analysis and multidisciplinarity in university (language) curriculum

Among the priorities for quality university language programmes, needs analysis is at the top of the agenda. A successful language programme is key for students' learning and university life, because it can feed into the academic success of each individual student as well as fulfil the strategic plan of the university.

Learners from diverse cultural backgrounds around the globe are immersed in university programmes, including programmes of the languages disciplines. For language teachers, the languages curriculum has been designed to meet the specific needs of learners by systematically setting out the teaching content, in juxtaposition with teaching methodologies and classroom activities, and coupled with assessment standards and evaluation strategies. Individual learners with their specific needs in learning, either with sociocultural, linguistic, cognitive, psychological or affective differences, will also be factored into the curriculum development process. For them, it is essential to set the 'what' (what to learn) and 'how' (how to teach and how to assess) questions before anything can take place in the classroom. Hence, needs analysis has been widely accepted as the first critical step in the curriculum design process (Long, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Richards, 2001). The aim is to lay the foundation and to provide the final goals of the whole programme; thus, the teaching and learning process has guidelines to follow in developing the language and communication skills of learners. It is expected that a curriculum guided by a solid needs analysis will maximise the best learning potentials of the learners (Biggs, 2003).

The expectation placed on academics or course designers when conducting an effective needs analysis is that they have the skills and experience for the entire process of designing appropriate instruments for data collection and data interpretation. Though with all possible means, the issue of validity and reliability of needs analysis has been of major concern to researchers (Cowling, 2007; Reeves & Wright, 1996). Indeed, it is the responsibility of teachers and course developers to investigate and analyse the needs, and then eventually transform the needs analysis into to a coercive mechanism that can bring the best possible learning outcomes to the students. However, a gap often exists between designing a language programme and delivering it, and much yet needs to be done to guarantee that the course has been tailored to the learners' authentic needs as identified through the needs analysis process.

Apart from the issues of curriculum approaches, which essentially address the balance among teaching content, teaching method, learners' individual needs and assessment strategies (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, 2001), an equally challenging issue lies in constantly managing the ever-changing world and interconnected settings. Such situations require better coordinated engagement from multiple specialised disciplines for the purposes of quality university programme design. The disciplinary culture of language offerings extends from single disciplinary to multidisciplinary, or to disciplines within disciplines. According to Graddol (2006), language curriculum design for a multidisciplinary education at university could create identification with nation states in a highly globalised world. In other words, if university graduates are geared for an international platform through language learning, informed by multilingual and multicultural knowledge, they can build a sense of connectedness to the interests of the nation or the community in which they live. This connectedness, if well catered for, can be elevated to an aspiration for leadership skills in the programme areas they choose to develop, both during and beyond their university years. For this to happen, language teachers and educators need to be equipped with leadership skills to cope with the changes and to generate a 'living and walking' curriculum that can tackle the multivariate needs of the learners. In Luke's (2003) proposition, this changing multidisciplinary university environment requires new conceptual tools that are

adequate for the study of dynamic, simultaneous, multiple and interdependent interactions in programme offerings.

To showcase the multivariate needs of the multilingual, multicultural and multidisciplinary learn-ers, a framework for identifying their needs for the best possible language teaching and assessment practices is of utmost importance (Nunan, 1988, 1989, 1997, 2004). This includes raising awareness of the importance of internationalising curricula through language education across the institution to guarantee excellence and sustainable demand for language learning. This may result in disciplinary variation in the language programme offerings, since language skills for different content areas vary. To cater for these differences, universities should adopt a whole university multidisciplinary approach towards programme design, taking into account students' multivariate needs (Luke 2003; Vaucher, 1978).

Multidisciplinarity in language offerings provides all learners in the university with equal oppor-tunities to learn a specific language. Biggs (1997) emphasises that this approach is critical, because when we discuss the teaching-related problems of students, we should be prepared to "improve teach-ing across the university rather than labelling them as a special case of deficit requiring remediation" (Biggs 1997, p. 1). The whole university multidisciplinary approach to programme design aims at improving the language learning of the whole university student population and building a 'wonder-land' of languages for university students, including – in the case of the Australian education context – maintaining and enhancing English as a first language, developing English as a second language and learning languages other than English.

3 Education leadership and the university (language) curriculum

Indeed, to build a university 'wonderland' requires university knowledge workers to perform as education leaders. They must lead cross-cultural, cross-language, cross-sectoral, and cross-disciplinary change and transformation from within and beyond their own disciplinary areas. Unlike decades ago, when education leaders in universities mainly had to address the essential questions about the generation of skills and knowledge, today they must engage in production and reproduction of knowledge and skills. They not only have to address the quality issue in generating and regenerating skills and knowledge, but also must cope with changes and transformation and drive these through their educational organisations. While education leaders continue to achieve the planned targets, standards and benchmarks through quality teaching as the top agenda, they must engage in new in-formation, and disciplinary and multidisciplinary revolution and its corresponding new curriculum reform (Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

The challenges to education leaders are in line with the scholarly literature regarding higher education (e.g. Bass, 1998; Clancy & Webber, 1995; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Marginson, 1997; Readings, 1996; Turnbull & Edwards, 2005). In Australian higher education, in Marginson and Considine's terms (2000), the university has changed from an academic institution to a global business. The traditional idea of the university is that it is a "Paradise Lost" with "changes in common" and "there is no single, unified chain of command" (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 1). This view, brought about by constant change in governance, depicts a common situation in modern higher education in which the universities are operating in. It foregrounds the challenges that all university knowledge workers, including language teachers and practitioners, are dealing with on a daily basis.

Along the similar line of debates, Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) suggest that alternative leadership styles are replacing the traditionally held definitions of leadership and provide new and diverse ways to understand leadership. They have identified alternative leadership as an additional leadership style through their explorations of the current leadership literature, and they explore options that can facilitate and drive through the changes. In the context of Australia's language education, alternative leadership style could involve a leadership role played by language educators in conceptualising an effective needs analysis framework that can address the challenges in post-modern education while catering for learner's multivariate needs for being an effective cross-cultural communicator and future disciplinary leader.

Learners from other parts of the world bring with them into the one same learning context, such as that of Australia, their learning and work experiences, either in their first language or in the target language, and either in their major degrees or in their electives. Chinese language is often taken as an elective for their University degrees, thus they are willing to take up the challenges they face in their learning and to take the necessary steps towards their academic and disciplinary achievements. They are conscious and reflective of their own learning preferences and difficulties, and keen to succeed in their university degrees and future careers. If a language programme is designed with the students' major disciplinary (learning) skills as an integral part of the learning content, language courses can be employed as a useful tool for furthering students' university education and cultivating students who aim to be both academic high achievers in cross-cultural communication and future disciplinary leaders at an international level. This could be where educational leaders can cultivate a 'wonderland' out of a 'lost paradise' through generating next-generation leaders while keeping in mind the whole university multidisciplinary approach for curriculum design (Vaucher, 1978).

4 Needs analysis in action: Addressing the questions of WHO and WHAT

The situation of the Chinese language programmes in Australian universities is more or less in the same boat with many other universities in today's globalised world: learners come to Australia with a range of diverse cultural and language backgrounds, together with prior learning experiences. Such background information provides essential information to the needs analysis process. Chinese language teachers, also as education leaders, are playing a key role in bringing the multivariate needs of learners into the curriculum planning with a whole university multidisciplinary approach. Needs analysis, therefore, becomes the first crucial effort in developing a constructive Chinese language programme that also engages the students in the process of needs analysis. For the purpose of this paper, we employed students' enrolment data, students' Course Experience Survey (CES) data and teachers' responses to the CES survey results. The data were triangulated to identify the learners' needs, the processes of which inform and drive a program structure renovation for RMIT Chinese courses.

4.1 Enrolment data: Who are the Chinese language learners (2010 – 2016)?

The internationalising of education has brought culturally and linguistically different learners from all over the world into the same learning contexts. To an important extent, this immersion at the global level has changed the nature of student composition as a whole and the complexities of the demands of university students. Learners themselves have created a setting for global learning to happen in which multilingual and multicultural skills become critical for their future career. They may learn English as a second language, or Chinese, Spanish or Arabic as a second, third or fourth language, as well as maintain and accelerate their own first language. For many, they are yet to realise that language skills are valuable assets, socially, politically and economically (Bourdieu, 1991; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992), and learning languages has become an essential part of their university life. However, the small increase in the student enrolment number of RMIT Chinese courses for the past few years, as showcased hereafter, has no doubt come as an encouraging outcome.

The complexity and the changing trend of this cohort of learners is reflected in the enrolment data from RMIT University's Chinese language courses which were offered to all university students in 2010–2016 (see Table 1). As a reference point, the total university student population was about 90,000 in 2016, including all enrolled as onshore, offshore and online students as well as those enrolled through partner institutions in various parts of the world. The data show that there was an increase in the number of students selecting Chinese language courses as electives during the period of 2010–2016. Moreover, variations in learners' cultural backgrounds have always existed and will most likely continue to exist. The biggest student sources have been from Australia, China, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Students who come from China and who speak Chinese as native language enrol into Chinese 7 and plus levels (see Table 3 and Table 4 for a full list of Chinese courses that are offered). These

higher-level courses are designed to cater for the needs of the students around vocational and communication skills through application of both Chinese and English languages. Students who learn Chinese as a second language and whose Chinese proficiency is at near-native level may also be capable of taking these courses.

Table 1. Country of origin of students enrolled in Chinese programmes 2010–2016

Country of Origin	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Australia	53	41.4	92	32.2	128	56.3	121	48.2	176	54.1	181	50.6	189	48.9
China	-	-	37	1.1	31	0.6	46	4.1	54	4.1	66	6.2	122	23.5
Indonesia	39	21.4	115	45.2	41	23.6	74	20.6	84	16.4	87	14.3	95	13.3
Malaysia	39	21.4	54	10.7	47	9.8	63	14.1	82	15.6	105	21.2	81	7.9
Japan	32	11.4	44	5.1	36	3.5	47	4.71	51	2.9	61	4.3	66	2.3
Korea (South)	27	4.3	40	2.8	34	2.3	43	2.35	50	2.5	57	2.7	67	2.6
Thailand	-	-	40	2.8	37	4.0	49	5.88	55	4.5	52	0.8	64	1.5
Others	3	0.2	2	0.1	3	0.2	6	0.40	7	0.4	2	0.1	3	0.2
Total	193	100	354	100	387	100	449	100	559	100	611	100	687	100

Students come from various disciplines, including Business, Science, Engineering and Design. There has been a substantial increase in student numbers in the Business discipline, from around 20.4% in 2010 to 48.1% in 2016 of the total number of students enrolled in Chinese courses (see Table 2). Over the years, the percentages are spread fairly evenly across Engineering and Design, except that the spread of Applied Science presents a decreasing trend. This may mean that students from the disciplines of Engineering and Design have maintained a level of awareness of the importance of learning languages. It may also mean that the programme academics of these disciplines have considered conceptualising their programmes to be internationally oriented. Though the percentage for the Design discipline appears to present a declining trend in percentages over the years, the actual head counts have been steady.

Table 2. Programme majors of students who enrolled in Chinese programme 2010–2016

Bachelor Programmes	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Business	39	20.4	100	37.4	112	44.4	124	45.0	158	44.3	131	35.9	178	48.1
Engineering	22	2.2	41	9.8	50	14.5	55	12.0	56	9.0	64	12.1	72	11.2
Design	-	-	27	3.3	24	1.9	40	4.8	46	5.5	51	7.5	61	7.3
Applied Science	38	19.4	68	22.4	54	16.4	58	13.4	78	16.6	57	9.6	57	5.9
Social Science	-	-	22	0.9	21	0.5	33	1.4	33	1.0	35	1.8	50	3.5
Science	-	-	-	-	26	2.9	-	-	39	3.1	67	6.0	53	4.5
Communication	-	-	-	-	-		33	1.4	38	2.8	38	2.8	51	3.8
Nursing	-	-	-	-	21	0.5	-	-	-	-	36	2.1	43	1.1
Arts	71	-	69	-	45	-	62	-	73	-	84	-	45	-
Education	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	0.4	-	-
Others	23	3.2	27	3.3	54	6.8	44	6.7	38	2.8	37	2.5	47	2.5
Total	193	100	354	100	387	100	449	100	559	100	611	100	687	100

As can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2, the students' linguistic, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds are becoming increasingly varied. An increasing number of disciplinary areas reveal that learners are getting more aware of the importance of learning languages, and more disciplinary programmes are making attempts to add a winning edge to the qualifications of their graduates in the increasingly competitive employment market. In real life, the electives offered by other disciplines (such as the language discipline) are often perceived as competitors to the electives offered by the disciplines as majors (such as the engineering discipline). The electives that come from the outside are often considered less relevant to the core learning content of the major disciplinary programme. Language offerings must be attractive to other disciplinary areas, so academics in those disciplines will be convinced that it is worthwhile for their students to spend time on learning languages. Language academics, for instance, can demonstrate to the other disciplinary programmes in the university that the content of the language courses is relevant to their home programmes and worth the commitment of their undergraduates' study. As this competition amongst discipline areas adds another layer of challenges for language academics, it becomes more compelling for language practitioners to excel as teachers, curriculum developers, researchers, disciplinary leaders as well as fully-fledged program competitors.

The quality of language offerings is vital to win these multilingual and multicultural learners and the academics of their home programs. They are circumspect not only of the language knowledge, but also of the academic learning skills and leadership skills for self-directed and autonomous learners (Benson, 2001) – in their language learning as well as in their majors. Thus, learning a language should be designed as a life-long learning process so it can relate to students' life and work for the span of their entire career. Strategies of how to embed the multilingual, multicultural and multidisciplinary features of this cohort of students into curriculum have become compulsory for language curriculum designers.

4.2 Course Experience Survey (CES): What students and teachers are saying?

The CES is conducted at RMIT University at the end of each semester. All enrolled students are invited to evaluate their learning experiences for each of the courses they have taken in that semester.

The intention of including students' CES feedback in the needs analysis is not only to obtain reliable and valid data, but also to ensure students participate in the process of curriculum design so that they learn the planning strategies and leadership skills while they learn the language. Friedenberg, Kennedy, Lomperis, Martin and Westerfield (2003) commented that learners need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction. If curriculum planning can link directly to what learners think about the programmes, it is more likely that the curriculum will cater for the students' utmost interests in language learning.

Table 3 presents the key points that are summarised from the CES data collected from Chinese learning students. We employed the data collected in 2015 and 2016, as academics were requested to provide responses to the students' survey results, starting from 2015.

The points listed in Table 3 are the key areas of concern that the students raised and to which the teaching staff provided responses. After a content analysis and a triangulation of data, a list of problems was generated in a descending order, where (1) indicates an issue that is most frequently mentioned by students and most frequently dealt with by academic staff:

1) balancing four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing
2) ineffective placement
3) catering for the needs of individual students
4) more focus on speaking conversation
5) more content for real-life and real cultural situations
6) 2 x 2 hours contact hours per week (normally it is a three-hour block each week)
7) more classroom instruction in Chinese language.

Table 3. Focus points from the CES Survey against the staff responses: 2015 and 2016

Course titles	2015		2016	
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Semester 2
Chinese 1	- Balancing 4 skills - Class size	- Balancing 4 skills - More practice writing characters	- Catering for the needs of individual students - Ineffective placement	- Find it daunting to cover the amount of learning content at the start of the semester
Chinese 2	- Interesting to include cultural component - Need to balance cultural component and the teaching content	- Balancing 4 skills	- More focus on speaking conversation - 2 x 2 hours' contact time	- Classroom set-out and whiteboards need to suit language learning
Chinese 3	- Mixed ability group: unequal opportunity to practise in class - Ineffective placement test - Balancing 4 skills - 2 x 2 hours contact time	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)	- More focus on speaking conversation - Explaining grammatical features	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)
Chinese 4	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- Speaking conversation opportunities in class - More classroom instruction in Chinese language	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- 3-hour block is too long - The unbalanced content of the textbook
Chinese 5	2 x 2 hours' contact time	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)	- More content of real-life and real cultural situations	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)
Chinese 6	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- More content of real-life and business situations	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- 2 x 2 hours' contact time - Unbalanced content of the textbook
Chinese 7 (Translation 1)	- Could cover more areas such as communication	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)	- An excellent course	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)
Chinese 8 (Translation 2)	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- An excellent course	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- An excellent course
Chinese Through Drama (Chinese 9)	- More dramatised scenarios or examples could be shown in class	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)	- An excellent course	(course not offered in the 2nd semester)
Chinese for Professional Communication (Chinese 10)	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- An excellent course	(course not offered in the 1st semester)	- An excellent course

The first item is about balancing four skills, which is the biggest concern of the students. In the CES survey students most frequently commented on the need to balance listening, speaking, reading

and writing skills, and teaching staff provided the greatest number of responses to students regarding how they could best address this balance and improve teaching in class. Even so, students' feedback tends to focus on this balance of four skills and it becomes an ongoing issue for teachers to deal with. It seems no matter what changes we bring to teaching and learning, it does not change the students' view that the balance of four skills is not maintained to the satisfactory level of the students.

Other issues tended to centre on placement procedures, more real-life content and more listening and speaking conversations in class. However, there were only three face-to-face contact hours available for each Chinese course every week for twelve weeks per semester. The students asked for four hours of teaching, with two two-hour sessions for each week. In today's climate of financial strain for enterprise universities, extension of class time is difficult to achieve. It is hoped that if students can be placed at a level that best suits their learning potential through an effective placement process, they will gain more chances to practise their conversation skills in class. However, the truth is that this cannot always be the case: placing students with a range of mixed abilities and backgrounds into the right level is another challenging issue facing the language academics.

Since there is recognition that language teaching does not take place in a context-free or budget-free environment, the choices that teachers have are limited. Thus, what options do language academics have when they are facing institutional and financial constraints, and when they must design and evaluate language curricula to meet the students' needs, which are increasingly multivariate – culturally, linguistically and disciplinarily?

5 Towards a 'walking' program structure through language and culture activities

The number of issues raised by the students in the CES survey may have occurred together with the steady increase in linguistic, cultural and disciplinary diversity in the university. Demographic trends coupled with the multivariate needs of the students highlight the imperative to develop a framework that can support effective, culturally appropriate and disciplinary relevant language offerings (Dlaska, 2000, 2003) and in the meantime is able to deal with dynamic situations, simultaneous and multiple and interdependent interactions among students and teachers (Luke, 2003). This article intends to contribute to the exploration of such a framework through a program structure that incorporates Chinese language and culture activities, and entails Chinese language knowledge and skills, academic learning skills (e.g. research skills), program skills (knowledge and skills in the disciplinary majors) and leadership skills, supported and shored up by leadership skills and life-long learning strategies, in the context of multidisciplinary and multimode program offerings.

Table 4 presents a programme structure that considers varied linguistic, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds of the students as overlapping and complementary strengths through a series of activities relating to Chinese language and culture. This structure was put in place in Semester 1 2016 and put to trial in Semester 2 of the same year. One student for a particular course only needs to choose to do one of the activities. At this initial stage of trial of this program structure, each activity works as a supplementary assessment strategy which takes up ten per cent of the total score of a certain course.

This program structure through language and cultural activities weighs into the issues identified through the CES survey, aiming to enhance learners' language communication skills, academic learning skills, disciplinary program skills and leadership skills. It intends to achieve a balance amongst the multivariate needs of the learners through the selected activities which constitute a 'walking' program structure. It is a 'walking' structure for students, as each student can identify the activity that suits their needs. It is also a 'walking' structure for teachers, as they can add and delete activities freely to make adjustment to serve the needs of a different cohort of learners.

Table 4. Program structure through Chinese language and culture activities

Course titles (one-semester course)	**Activities for all levels**	**Activities allocated to each level while open to all levels**	**Mentoring and team work**
Chinese 1	- CCC* - Learning strategies** - Learning styles***	- Presentations on cultural knowledge of the language - Handwriting and calligraphy	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 3+
Chinese 2	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Online reading activities on cultural knowledge	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 3+
Chinese 3	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Researching on the role of Chinese language on the discipline area of their major	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1 and 2, and 5+
Chinese 4	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Visiting/interviewing community/industry leaders	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1 and 2, and Chinese 5+
Chinese 5	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Researching and presenting on Chinese learning strategies with Chinese 1 and 2	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1 and 2, and Chinese 7+
Chinese 6	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Practising teaching Chinese to Chinese 1 and 2 students	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1 and 2, and Chinese 7+
Chinese 7 (Translation 1)	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Marco Polo online live translation project - Business and Trade	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1–6
Chinese 8 (Translation 2)	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Marco Polo online live translation project - Media and Communication	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1–6
Chinese Through Drama (Chinese 9)	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Dramatising for celebrating mid-autumn festival - Singing and dancing Chinese songs	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1–6
Chinese for Professional Communication (Chinese 10)	- CCC - Learning strategies - Learning styles	- Real-life job interviews	- Teamwork with students at Chinese 1–6
↓	↓	↓	↓
↓	• Multidisciplinary academic learning skills; • Research skills	• Research skills • New technology skills • Multidisciplinary program skills	• Autonomous learning skills; • Leadership skills
❖ Whole Programme Approach; Whole University Approach ❖			

*CCC stands for Chinese Conversation Corner.
**Learning strategies: list of recommended learning strategies is accessible on the online Learning Hub.
***Learning styles: inventories of cultural learning styles are placed on the online Learning Hub for students to assess their own (cultural) learning styles as needed. Teachers hold seminars when necessary.

Specifically, the following needs and issues have been addressed in this program structure:

1) Chinese language knowledge and skills are balanced from Chinese 1 to Chinese 10 with a whole programme and whole university approach, encompassing language learning skills,

academic learning skills and program disciplinary learning skills;

2) Becoming high academic achievers in language learning skills, academic learning skills and disciplinary programme skills through academic learning strategies training, and exposure to the learning content of their own home programs;
3) The real-life conversations, such as through conversation corners, that are suitable for both short-term and long-term Chinese language learning, can help balance the four micro-skills of Chinese learning: listening , speaking, reading and writing;
4) Use of new technology is maximised, such as in Chinese 2 in particular, and using technology as an everyday routine for language learning;
5) Learning to be researchers through engaging in research in both learning Chinese language and its culture;
6) Individual differences are catered for, such as the students' learners' first language and learners' second/foreign language, their cultural learning styles (Hofstede, 1986; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), and language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990), which, in turn, enriches their research skills; and
7) Learning to be potential leaders through teaching practice in class, class presentation and mentoring activities with students at other levels, while they become connected with other learners in the Chinese learning community.
8) Learning to be autonomous and life-long learners through various activities, such as one-on-one mentoring programmes.
9) Learning to be life-long planners through engaging in planning for programmes through CES surveys and conversation and planning meetings with teachers.
10) Multidisciplinary and multimode flexible offerings include face-to-face in the classroom, online activities, conversation corners, mentoring sessions, etc.

The program structure that is detailed here deploys the theoretical, methodological and empirical resources that are available to students and academics to frame the tasks in multidisciplinary and multimode delivery. It is this flexible program structure that makes this structure adaptable for other needs analysis and curriculum inventions, since it is intended to bring as many culturally-appropriate and disciplinary-relevant activities as possible into both short-term and long-term teaching and learning practices. A structure guided by this level of flexibility is expected to detect and capture the multivariate needs of students fast, and, in real-life situations, nurture language learners as life-long autonomous learners and future leaders in the areas of their own career choices (Benson, 2001; Ciekanski, 2007).

This structure also represents educational practices that occur within cultural, linguistic and disciplinary boundaries, as well as educational leadership that goes hand in hand with multidisciplinary and multimode university programmes (Luke, 2003). Above all, it is those teachers and curriculum designers who can perform as education leaders and bring together the needs of the learners, the knowledge and skills of the teaching staff, and the support of the university management. It is their education leadership qualities that can drive a quality curriculum which may bridge the gaps that often exist between needs analysis and program offering. They plan the program structure, such as in Table 4, through which the teachers can manage changes not only in the classroom, but also those occurring inside and outside the university. Such a structure, though it may only take a small proportion of assessment weighting, can support teachers in driving through those changes by mobilising the skills of students and teachers themselves to achieve the goal of quality university language education (Long & Norris, 2000). It can also foster intercultural understanding between first language (L1) and second language learners (L2), and between lower-level and higher-level students. It creates collaborative learning activities that can potentially generate the best possible learning outcomes for all language learning students, satisfy the multivariate needs of the students and cope with the financial constraints of the university. To a certain extent, it is a program structure that features dynamic, simultaneous, multiple, flexible, interdependent and cooperative interactions in curriculum with what a 'walking' curriculum for a multidisciplinary and multimode delivery can possibly offer.

6 Conclusion

The quality issue in language offerings eventually comes down to analysing the needs of the students and bringing life to the process of needs analysis. Understanding the needs of the students not only intersects the daily teaching practice of all language practitioners, but also contains the key to improved practice. Guided by the enrolment data, feedback provided by students in this study through the CES survey and teachers' responses to students' input, the needs of the students can be proportionally embedded and balanced into the learning and teaching content through a 'walkable' program structure. This process of data collection and needs analysis is expected to enhance the design of the Chinese language teaching and learning of RMIT University, and to be informative for language education for other languages and in other Australian universities.

With learners becoming more multicultural and multilingual and their needs being increasingly multivariate, educational leaders in the language disciplines need to explore hidden opportunities to create a 'wonderland' of language learning. Through engaging in multidisciplinary and multimode offerings of university language courses, it is feasible for the university to be transformed into a language learning community as well as an inseminating ground for generating future leaders equipped with high cross-cultural communication skills and leadership skills. For this purpose, Chinese language academics need to endeavour to work collaboratively with colleagues from all Australian universities in search for an effective framework of needs analysis and curriculum renovation that can contribute to the university's drive for quality learning and teaching in a whole-programme and whole-university approach. Then they can go beyond the traditional boundaries in education (Sifakis, 2003) and plan and facilitate Chinese language teaching and learning to be creative, innovative, and potentially transformative and competitive.

Though the aim of language education is to regain a 'lost paradise' in Marginson and Considine's terms (2000, p. 1), we cannot neglect the challenges required to mobilise the skills of postmodern leadership and deliver the changes. It is hoped that this example of collaborative learning and teaching through language and culture activities, as exemplified in this article, could be a small step toward a comprehensive curriculum framework through which language educators can work side by side with policy makers to steer the direction of the learning and teaching of languages in local, national and international communities. Eventually, language learning will happen when socially, politically and economically sustainable collaboration between educators and policy-makers can come into play.

Notes

[1] The Australian government's official website on education is http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ (viewed on February 18, 2017).

[2] The Australian Academy of the Humanities was established in 1969 by Royal Charter and is constituted by a body of more than 500 elected Fellows who are leaders and experts in the broad disciplinary groups, including Archaeology, Asian Studies, Classical Studies, Cultural and Communication Studies, English, European Languages and Cultures, History, Linguistics, Philosophy and the History of Ideas, Religion and the Arts. Its website is http://www.humanities.org.au/Home.aspx.

[3] The official website for LCNAU is www.lcnau.org.

[4] See RMIT University website: www.rmit.edu.au

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