

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CULINARY ARTS PROGRAMMES: IS THERE A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?

Jeff Thomas

INTRODUCTION

This case study considers my learning experience through the completion of a Master of Professional Practice (MProfPrac) degree from Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand. I am highly supportive and complementary of this degree, as it allowed, encouraged and supported me to undertake a process-based learning project which resulted in my professional practice being developed and my knowledge base deepened. However, for years, my professional identity within the secondary culinary field has remained fragmented – a consequence of there being too many resource sites within the Ministry of Education (up to five) containing curriculum material from which the secondary culinary framework is derived.

This situation has resulted in two things. First, a myriad of options for food curricula offered within secondary schools often sees teachers confused and frustrated as they attempt to navigate through this multi-optional haze. Second, it creates a class division between achievement standards and unit standards. In New Zealand, achievement standards are used as a prerequisite for university entrance, whereas unit standards are prerequisites for trades training. This encourages deficit theorising in relation to unit standards, as they are often considered as lacking rigour and more suited to the academically challenged. One common theme found throughout my study was the lack of design and creativity permitted to the students who undertook these programmes.

I knew that something needed to be done – an alternative needed to be considered. I used the MProfPrac degree as an opportunity to address this need. The result was the creation of a teaching model based on my research project. The project drew on my daily practice, where I created and trialled an alternative model which combined elements of both achievement and unit standards in a blended approach which also allowed and encouraged design and creativity to shine.

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT/PERSONAL PROFILE

I am a teacher of food technology and culinary arts in a secondary school in Auckland, New Zealand. Over the last decade, and on a daily basis, I have experienced the challenge of designing and delivering authentic and relevant culinary arts curricula – curricula that will provide learners with the knowledge and skill set which will enable them to transition into a tertiary culinary arts programme or straight into industry, with little or no lag. Frequently when discussing the planning of culinary programmes, design and creativity are not mentioned. It appears that they are not valued or appreciated as valuable components. I believe that they are in fact the unsung and undervalued heroes of our culinary arts programmes. However, in order to allow design and creativity to be valued and developed, I believe that we need to add the human touch to food education.

The goal of my MProfPrac was to develop a new model of teaching food technology that culinary educators, curriculum leaders and learners within the culinary arts field would find practical, usable and thought-provoking. My aim was to create a radical collegiality that would ignite within educators a spark which would drive novel approaches, as well as consideration of the place of design and creativity in culinary arts methodology and pedagogy.

Being interested in developing and delivering a secondary-schools culinary arts programme based on the twin concepts of design and creativity, I knew that current models of hospitality/catering and food technology are not only designed and delivered separately, they lack design and creativity at their core. Teachers delivering these programmes have always predetermined what the learners will create and are focussed on the process and the outcome, the latter being the main goal for assessment.

My own observations – combined with discussions ranging from staff meetings and cluster meetings through to national conferences – indicated that those charged with delivering the relevant unit or achievement standards do so to the letter, and have no wish to deviate from them and 'get creative.' These teachers often share their fears of failing, of getting it wrong. The result is 'products' as stand-alone outcomes, not tied to any concept. Consequently, hospitality/catering and food technology education run in a very linear fashion, delivered as two separate subject lines, two separate pathways, and are very outcome-focussed. The main reason for this segregation is that food technology, home and life sciences, and home economics all fall into the achievement standards camp and are accepted for university entrance, whereas hospitality and catering sit in the other option of unit standards and are recognised as trade qualifications.

METHODOLOGY

I utilised a reflective approach throughout my MProfPrac, which enabled me to create a philosophical inquiry and critique of the current delivery of culinary arts programmes within secondary schools in New Zealand. Approaching research from an autoethnography mind-set, I first assessed the shortcomings of current teaching practice and then developed a teaching model more suited to blending the hospitality/catering unit standards and food technology achievement standards, and weaving this model into an 'event' or a 'project' which allowed students to create an outcome that was relevant to them and their individual projects. This approach also requires them to manage themselves and their project through the process and production phases using skills drawn from both domains, all underpinned by the concepts of food design and creativity. By critically examining how teachers currently operate, and by creating an alternative, I challenged the current codes of practice within the workplace.

To test the applicability of the new blended model, I invited 30 year 11 and 12 students to take part in a survey of their responses to this new teaching approach. Twenty-two answered my call for a reflective assessment of my new approach.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

My new model for teaching food technology at the secondary level is a blend of achievement standards and unit standards. Within the education sector, achievement standards have traditionally been considered more academic compared to unit standards, which are skills-based and considered less challenging. I argued that there was a need to overcome the false and sterile opposition between academic and vocational learning. Curricula should be designed with a view to eliminating the distinctions between academic and vocational; young people needs aspects of both traditions.

I argued that the two sides of the coin were equally valid, and in fact complement each other as both require elements of 'head' and 'hand.' Learners fully engage with the concept, which enables them to test and trial food design concepts and seek feedback from peers and stakeholders, who then inform and provide critical decisions

about 'where to next.' Learners have total agency over what they design – the main constraint being that they must work to a brief and a rubric based on key assessment criteria taken from the achievement or unit standard providers (NZQA registered).

My new model of subject delivery for secondary schools enable a horizontal and circular blend of subjects which relate to each other in a holistic fashion, offering multi-dimensional and multi-directional pathways for learning (Figure 1).

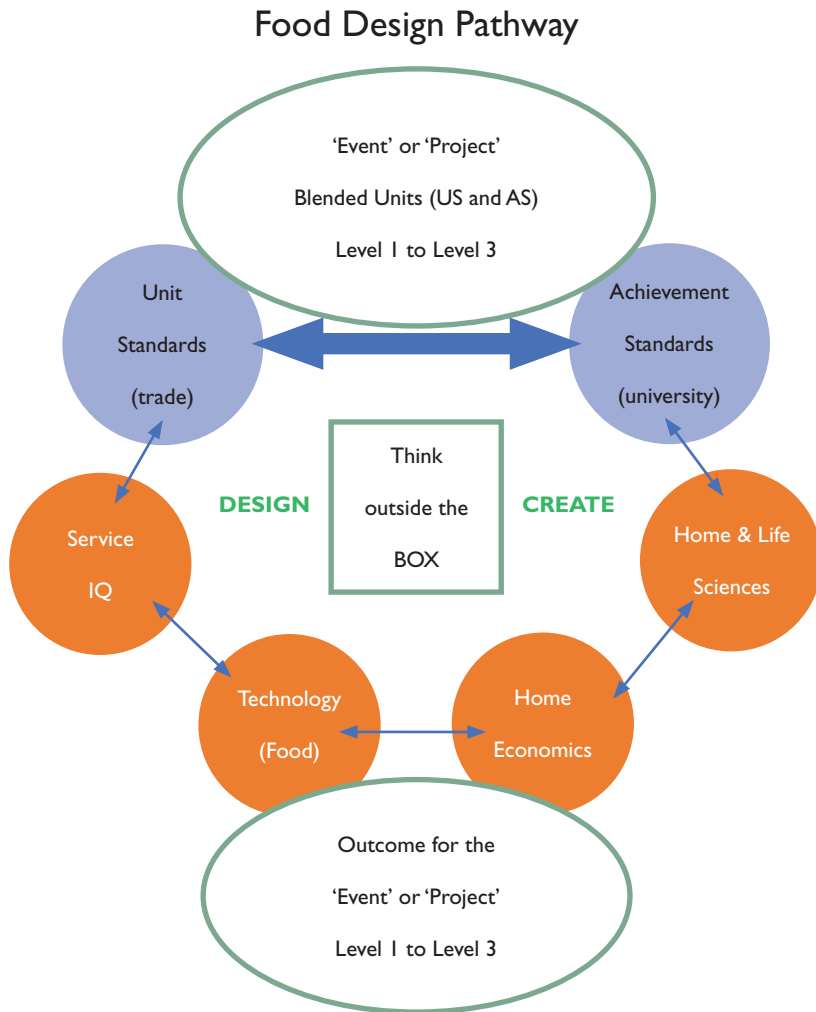


Figure 1. Suggested food design pathways for secondary-level hospitality/catering and food technology courses.

Learner feedback has highlighted some of the pitfalls in my model, including such issues as struggling to gather evidence, the difficulty of managing multiple tasks and multiple units of study to be completed in a term. There was also evidence of how, at times, misunderstanding key vocabulary and terms undermined learners' project outcomes. However, the underlying message is clear: Learners want more time to design and create food products. Through introducing an event or project, some magic is injected into the syllabus – and using a blended approach of 'head' and 'hand,' it is not only requested, it is required.

REFLECTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE/ LEARNING OUTCOMES

My MProfPrac project has enabled me to consider and unpack the question: Curriculum Development and Delivery of Secondary School Culinary Arts Programmes: Is there a Recipe for Success?

In response, I would assert that the MProfPrac process has helped restore my faith, belief and passion in a profession that for many years I had given up on. I started my culinary journey proud and eager to don the white jacket. However, in the course of that journey things slowly changed. The long hours, the low pay, the lack of a professional voice – it all became just a bit too hard. I thought teaching food technology would rekindle my enthusiasm, and at first it did. However, I did not expect to be pigeon-holed to the extent I experienced. Through the MProfPrac process, I realised that I was a chef first and a teacher second. My 'blue-collar' bones are my foundation – which every day manifests elements of tradition and respect not present in most schools.

As my practice has been tested, so has my attitude towards what and how we deliver. I now have a deeper confidence, as I can truly see and believe that there are multiple ways of enabling culinary output, not just one. The question is, can this programme be rolled out in any school?

I believe it can, because it is not dependent on money. Rather, it requires a belief in this type of programme and how to deliver it, and the belief that an alternative is not only possible, but worth it. My practice now gives learners agency in that they use their own work to create their own culinary identity.

My practice has developed through participating in a pool of culinary voices, dialogue and academic discussions – which, for a change, are not just hegemonic conversations with dated home economics teachers threatened by what they don't know and understand. I love the sense of excitement – bordering on urgency – which is being generated as more and more culinary material is written. On this topic, leading hospitality and culinary education authority Joseph Hegarty writes that "my own sense is that Culinary Arts education is metamorphosing towards a position of scholarly activity, emerging along with a core of highly educated specialists from which new lecturers can be required" (2004, p. 31). I feel that it is a privilege to be part of all this.

I have come to realise that we must focus and develop the skills and qualities that can't be measured through testing or assessing. I have always felt this, and every day I place a strong emphasis on it, much to my peril. However, the readings that I have digested and the MProfPrac process I have journeyed through have all confirmed my belief that not only will my students benefit from us allowing them every opportunity to let design and creativity 'roar,' but they will also allow us as practitioners to endorse designerly thinking and to encourage failure as a true path to the purity to be found when design and creativity are encouraged, with no limitations imposed.

We must learn to "trade beyond experience" (Ings, 2017). Creativity develops when new horizons are sought and unfamiliar places are investigated, all unmapped and uncharted. We know this causes problems as schools currently operate on the expected and the known, the measurable and predictable. We must push through this barrier.

Jeff Thomas is a passionate foodie, food writer and food educator. As a former hotel manager and chef, his culinary life has seen him work in New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Channel Islands and the United States. He is currently a secondary school teacher and lives in Auckland, New Zealand where he teaches food design. When not giving Martin Luther King speeches to his students about the how cool food design is, Jeff spends his time with wife Claudia and sons Mateo and Dante. A man with a keen interest in the concept of 'home-made' he can often be found sipping home brew beer while gazing through the smoke of his wood fired oven as he bakes bread, pizza or some other equally delightful morsel.

REFERENCES

- Hegarty, J. (2004). *Standing the heat: Assuring curriculum quality in culinary arts and gastronomy*. New York: Routledge
- Ings, W. (2017). *Disobedient Teaching: Surviving and creating change in education*. Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press