

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION

Curriculum Policy 2007

As adopted at the
2007 Annual Federal Conference

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1 Introduction

1.1 Definition Of Curriculum

- 1.1.1 Broadly defined, curriculum is the totality of students' experiences within formal schooling. Curriculum describes the practices and operating ideas, both implicit and explicit, in the school. It encompasses the content, structure, assessment and reporting of the formal program of studies, co-curricular activities, and also the administrative procedures, personal relationships and teaching styles in the school.
- 1.1.2 Ultimately, curriculum is the outcome of the complex interaction between educational institutions and society. Schooling is one of the sources of personal and educational development, alongside the family and affinity groups, the local community, the mass media and work. Schooling's unique contribution lies in its formal program of studies, together with the experience of living and working within a broad and inclusive social environment.

2 Overarching principles

2.1 Social purposes of schooling

The role of schools is to develop students to be active citizens in a democratic global society with the capacity to participate in the development of society and discussions of ethics and values as well as to work in a globalised economy.

- 2.1.1 Schooling should assist in overcoming inequalities between social groups, seeking to produce equal and high educational outcomes for all social groups.
- 2.1.2 It should provide students with a basis for full participation in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the community.
- 2.1.3 It should develop in students a capacity for critical thought, informed opinion and the skills and knowledge to be socially responsible contributors to Australian society interested in the creation of a better global future.
- 2.1.4 In the national interest it should ensure there are highly educated and qualified people across all areas of the economy and society.

2.2 Development of the Individual

- 2.2.1 The curriculum should develop each and every student to his or her maximum potential. It should seek success not failure and have high expectations of every student.
- 2.2.2 It should be provided on a basis that is accessible and meets the needs and interests of all students.
- 2.2.3 It must be based on the concept of a common curriculum i.e. one which gives all students access throughout their schooling to all the major fields of human knowledge.
- 2.2.4 It should offer increasing choice with age in a way that opens up options and maintains a breadth of study rather than narrows opportunities (pathways) and options.
- 2.2.5 It should meet the cultural, social, civic and vocational needs of each student.

2.3 Equity and Access

- 2.3.1 Curriculum must be inclusive and be able to cater for all students in public education including:
 - Students learning in isolated situations;
 - students in low economic circumstances;
 - Indigenous students;
 - Students from language backgrounds other than English;
 - Special needs students;
 - Gifted and talented students;
 - Both girls and boys;
 - GLBTI.
- 2.3.2 Curriculum must be relevant to the needs of all students. It must be appropriate, motivational and able to engage students from all backgrounds.
- 2.3.3 This entails recognising that Australia is a multicultural society and that therefore students come to school with a variety of backgrounds, cultures, histories and values, all of which are equally valid.
- 2.3.4 Students should be encouraged to gain a rich understanding of both their own and other cultures through an inclusive curriculum.
- 2.3.5 Students should gain an understanding of the role that the construction of gender has played and continues to play in society.
- 2.3.6 A high quality curriculum must be accessible to all. To achieve this systems must ensure the availability of:
 - quality teachers who have appropriate qualifications and skills to cater for students' needs;

- appropriate staffing levels and cooperative structures to offer all students a broad curriculum;
- professional development for teachers which is appropriate, relevant and of high quality, including time and support for the enactment of new curriculum;
- technology and technical support;
- resource allocation including necessary aides, course offerings, the ability to communicate with other agencies, human resource assistance etc.

2.4 The Contested Nature of the Curriculum

- 2.4.1 Because of its extreme importance in shaping the future of individuals and society the content of the curriculum will always be a contested area.
- 2.4.2 “Knowledge” is never absolute, is always open to interpretation, and is often constructed by groups in their own interest.
- 2.4.3 For this reason, it is important that curriculum development take place in an environment which acknowledges this, in a manner which allows a broad perspective on it, and within a set of explicit principles.
- 2.4.4 Because of its contested nature the teaching profession should play a key role in developing the curriculum.

2.5 Curriculum Development and Renewal

- 2.5.1 Curriculum should be subject to a process of ongoing reconceptualisation in terms of the future needs of students and the current social context.
- 2.5.2 Curriculum development, change and renewal processes should operate within a policy framework determined by each state and territory which allows schools and teachers to exercise their professional judgement and the flexibility to find the most appropriate solutions at the school, pre-school, class and individual level.
- 2.5.3 Any movement towards greater national consistency should involve collaboration between the states/territories and federal governments in consultation with the teaching profession. This should not detract from the capacity for innovation in curriculum and assessment at the system and school levels nor lead to over standardisation.
- 2.5.4 Systems, in consultation with the profession, should develop curriculum frameworks in a way that enables teachers to adapt curriculum to local circumstances and assures age-appropriate material and activities which build on previous learning.
- 2.5.5 The curriculum should be based on a set of core principles and be responsive to the social context within which it is provided.
- 2.5.6 Change should be supported by research and theory which has been informed by the professional expertise of teachers. This can include research undertaken by teachers in schools.

- 2.5.7 Change should involve discussion, genuine consultation and collaboration with all educational stakeholders.
- 2.5.8 Change must be properly resourced and be introduced with timelines which take account of the realities of classroom implementation and the complexities of curriculum change, and should be properly evaluated.
- 2.5.9 Schools must be encouraged and enabled to innovate, experiment and research.
- 2.5.10 New curriculum must:
- be supported by high quality professional learning opportunities for teachers;
 - be sustainable in terms of the workload of teachers and other education workers;
 - be developed collaboratively by the profession and especially involve practising teachers with the appropriate expertise, with involvement by other stakeholders as appropriate.
- 2.5.11 Curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment and reporting are integrally linked and the development of new curriculum must ensure that these continue to complement each other.

3 The Formal Curriculum

3.1 Content of the Curriculum

- 3.1.1 Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills and understandings are foundational to participation in modern society and essential for life-long learning. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure that all students develop capabilities in these areas. This includes appropriate concentration on these areas at the relevant developmental stage, and access to additional resources and help for those who experience difficulty acquiring these skills. All teachers throughout schooling should accept responsibility for and receive appropriate pre-service education and professional development in incorporating the teaching of these skills.
- 3.1.2 At the same time, it should be recognised that basic literacy and numeracy are not of themselves a sufficient education for anyone. All students, including those experiencing difficulty should have access to other forms of learning, including critical thinking and higher order skills, as well as an understanding of the major fields of human knowledge.
- 3.1.3 All areas of the curriculum should be reflective of the fact that it is for Australian schools and students and should facilitate the development of an understanding of the cultures and traditions that make up the histories of Australia and the nature of Australian society.
- 3.1.4 The curriculum should acknowledge the special place of our Indigenous peoples in the history and culture of Australia through integration throughout the curriculum and through specific Indigenous studies.

- 3.1.5 Curriculum content also necessitates a broader understanding of other cultures and events, international relations and Australia's place and role on the world stage.

3.2 Reconceptualising the Curriculum

- 3.2.1 Knowledge and the organisation of knowledge are always in a state of reconceptualisation, and curriculum development needs to reflect this.
- 3.2.2 At the current time, there is a particular need to look at the curriculum needs of students in the twenty-first century who will be spending their lives in a world undergoing rapid and fundamental change. These circumstances require a curriculum which develops different skills and concepts of knowledge from those of the past.
- 3.2.3 There should be greater connection between different bodies of knowledge.
- 3.2.4 Whilst curriculum will remain underpinned by content, learning should be as much about skills and concepts as content. It should also be rigorous. Therefore the outcomes of curriculum processes should be about the capacities developed and an understanding of the skills specific to fields of knowledge as well as the knowledge gained, and the connections between these.
- 3.2.5 Nevertheless, there will remain a need for specialist knowledge within a context where specialist areas will relate to each other, contributing to an interrelated whole.
- 3.2.6 The senior curriculum should be relevant and accessible for all young people, in particular those who are not achieving optimal outcomes. The senior curriculum should provide flexible pathways for all students and not curtail future options for them. Certification arrangements should facilitate not restrict access to TAFE, higher education, or employment for all students, with articulation and credit transfer arrangements made explicit so that students can be advised appropriately in terms of the pathways they have chosen.

Senior curriculum reform should maintain quality assurance and public confidence in senior schooling and in its certification.

3.3 Civics, Citizenship and Values within a Social Justice Framework

- 3.3.1 Public education should provide a strong values system based on:
- The pursuit of excellence;
 - Principles of tolerance, fairness, egalitarianism and inclusiveness;
 - Student leadership and participation;
 - Preparing future citizens to make responsible decisions and participate in and contribute to local and global societies;
 - Awareness of and respect for diversity;
 - Awareness of human rights issues and legal processes.
- 3.3.2 Students' experience at school should engage them in and prepare them for participatory democracy.

- 3.3.3 Students need to develop a sound basis for making judgements about local, national, and international issues. This necessitates awareness of how decisions are made, a concern for others, knowledge of international circumstances and understanding of the importance of international organisations and the role they do and could play.
- 3.3.4 Students need to learn how to play their part in securing their own and others' futures. Implicit in this is an understanding of working conditions in a changing industrial climate.
- 3.3.5 Students should develop awareness of:
- industrial and human rights and how they vary from country to country;
 - the history and role of trade unions and the politics of workplaces;
 - the history and role of non government organisations and international organisations in improving human rights;
 - the part that gender has played in the history of democratic development, and the role of women in citizenship, non government organisations and politics;
 - basic economic literacy;
 - the place of public and private interest in democracy, and the difference between them.
- 3.3.6 Particular emphasis in the school curriculum should be given to developing the skills and understanding to actively participate in public debate in such significant issues as:
- environmental sustainability;
 - the implications of a diversity of lifestyles, values and beliefs;
 - the distribution and control of wealth and resources;
 - the development and application of technology;
 - ethical and moral issues;
 - questions of rights and discrimination;
 - industrial legislation;
 - access to information;
 - equality before the law;
 - global inequalities and issues of development and displaced people;
 - the nature and role of the education system;
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and the impact of non-indigenous cultures; and
 - poverty and homelessness.

3.4 Environment Education

Environment education for sustainability should be studied by all students and should:

- be a core feature of the ethos of public education settings and evidenced throughout policy and practice;

- foster awareness and understanding of economic, social, political and ecological interdependence;
- provide every person with opportunities to acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills to protect and improve the environment;
- encourage responsible patterns of behaviour and attitude by individuals, groups and societies towards the environment.

4 *Pedagogy*

- 4.1 Schools need to ensure the development of modes of teaching and learning that foster understanding of meaningful content and encourage students' positive engagement with schooling.
- 4.2 All students need to be provided with intellectually challenging learning opportunities which provide opportunities for higher order thinking and critical analysis.
- 4.3 It is important that what goes on in classrooms is connected to the world beyond.
- 4.4 New knowledge should be built on students' existing knowledge. Connections between different bodies of knowledge should be made, rather than a curriculum with discrete compartments. Knowledge and skills should be developed in the context of real life issues and problems.
- 4.5 All students should be taught in an environment which is supportive, characterised by high expectations and in which they exercise agency and responsibility for their learning. Criteria for achievement should be explicit and all students provided with assistance to achieve.
- 4.6 Students should learn about and value a range of cultures, create positive human relationships, respect individuals, and help to create a sense of community. Working with and valuing difference is an important element in improving the academic and social outcomes of marginalised students at the same time as improving the social outcomes of all students and being important for society as a whole.
- 4.7 Pedagogical change is often an important means of achieving improved student outcomes.
- 4.8 Research into effective pedagogy should be undertaken by systems and incorporated into professional development.

5 *Assessment and Reporting*

Assessment, reporting, teaching and learning are interrelated, and any changes to one have implications for the others.

The primary purposes of assessment, reporting, evaluation and accountability are to:

- support inclusive learning processes ;

- provide teachers, students and parents with information about the progress and achievements of students;
- form an integral component of the ongoing planning and modification of educational programs and practices and the targeting of specific resources.

5.1 Assessment

5.1.1 Assessment should be authentic (closely linked to the purposes of the curriculum), and integrated with curriculum and classroom experiences.

5.1.2 Authentic assessment systems allow students multiple ways to demonstrate their learning.

Assessment should be:

- for learning (diagnostic assessment);
- as learning (students learn to reflect on and evaluate their own work);
- of learning (summative assessment).

5.1.3 Assessment should be based on a range of assessment activities. These may include structured and impromptu observations some of which may be recorded and filed; formal and informal discussions/interviews; collections of students' work; use of extended projects, performances, and exhibitions; tests and practical exams.

5.1.4 The best forms of assessment rely on and value informed teacher judgement, as this ensures the integration of a range of factors including knowledge of the student and performance in a variety of forms of learning and assessment. This requires:

- ongoing development of the capacity of teachers to assess;
- moderation practices within and among schools to improve the ability of teachers to make judgements of student work;
- time for teachers during the school day to assess, evaluate, moderate and report on student learning;
- professional development programs on assessment;

5.1.5 It is important to ensure the confidence of the community in teacher judgment.

5.2 Reporting

5.2.1 Reporting to parents and students should flow from the principles outlined in the section on Assessment above.

5.2.2 The aim of reporting is to communicate information about student learning. It should indicate achievements and areas in need of improvement, and suggest how this might be achieved. Standards referenced reporting is much more meaningful than comparison to the achievement of peers.

5.2.3 Decisions about the nature of reporting of student achievement should take account of the age and previous learning of the students.

- 5.2.4 Reporting of student strengths and weaknesses should avoid labelling, provide parents with clear and concise information that is easy to understand and create trust between students, parents and teachers.
- 5.2.5 Given the wide variation in rates of development amongst children in the early years, and significant differences in ages of children in the same class, comparison with other students is particularly inappropriate in the early years of schooling.

5.3 Evaluation and Accountability

- 5.3.1 Teachers welcome accountability used to build the capacity of education communities. Accountability needs to be based on valid processes, which are fair and equitable for all students, teachers and schools.
- 5.3.2 Standardised tests are a snapshot of limited learning at one point in time and are best used as a random sample over a large population to determine program effectiveness. Mass census testing is unnecessary, expensive and often counter productive in that it encourages poor teaching and learning situations.
- 5.3.3 Sample testing can provide the system-wide information required to support planning and resource allocation and enable governments and education systems to fulfill their responsibility to provide funding for programs in areas identified as in need .
- 5.3.4 There must be ongoing discussions with teachers, students, education unions and parent groups about any proposed collection and use of data from standardised testing programs. Information gathered on the achievements of individual students or schools should not be released to others outside the systems, and at no stage should there be public reporting comparing schools against schools.
- 5.3.5 All standardised testing should take place within strict data protocols for privacy and which ensure that “league tables” cannot be constructed. Ranking of schools is inappropriate, unfair to students and school communities and potentially destructive of the ethos of the public education system, particularly in areas of disadvantage.
- 5.3.6 Schools have a responsibility to report to their communities and this means developing reporting mechanisms in consultation with them.