

# **Localising Curriculum Development –How to Make it Work**

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## **Introduction**

In Australia, as in many other countries, we are struggling to provide the best possible education for all of our students in this rapidly changing world. In our attempts to respond to the demands of the knowledge society and to cater for the increasingly complex needs of individual students, we sometimes make mistakes. Thankfully, we learn from our mistakes and we go on to implement smarter reforms in response to the challenges set by our society.

Today I will share some of our successes and failures in localising curriculum development in Australia to inform future developments in the area, as well as point to some key findings in school improvement research which can assist in supporting the most useful approaches to localised curriculum development.

Finally, I will ask you to consider the most important question – does localised curriculum development lead to improved student learning?

## **Why localised curriculum development?**

Firstly, it is important to consider why there has been a trend towards localised curriculum development in many countries in recent years. For the purpose of this paper, we will assume that localised curriculum development means school-based curriculum development. Whilst most people here today would probably agree that schools having more control over curriculum development is a good idea in principle, we should not accept that it is really the best way to improve student learning in all situations.

Have we moved towards localised curriculum development because the more traditional centralised model of curriculum development was not delivering results? Or has the increase in localised curriculum development simply been the result of decentralisation and school-based management principles dominating educational territory? Or has the increased focus on the individual in society, along with student-focused learning been the main driver of developing curriculum locally? In Australia, it seems that each of these factors has had a key part to play in the increased focus on school-based curriculum development. Yet, what is emerging now is a return to a greater central, national focus in curriculum development – but more on that later.

## **The Context**

Recent developments in curriculum in Australia are outlined in the attached background paper for your information. Given the constraints of time, my presentation will focus on examples from two states, Queensland and Victoria, as well as highlight recent key national developments. In Australia there is currently no national curriculum, but there are national tests in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7

with further national tests being developed in ICT, science and civics and citizenship education.

Each of the 8 states and territories in Australia has responsibility for curriculum development, implementation and assessment. There is great variation in the curriculum frameworks and syllabi, as each of the 8 states and territories has a deep commitment to producing guidelines appropriate for its state context and often resists trends towards any national uniformity. Not surprisingly, each state system believes its curriculum approaches are the best in Australia. I am often asked which state does have the best curriculum, and I can honestly say that each state curricula has its strengths and weaknesses and all are continually on a quest for improvement. It puts me in mind of one of our famous arts' administrator's observations that although Australia has the best opera house in the world, the pity is that the outside is in Sydney and the inside is in Melbourne. There just are good and bad bits in all.

Both Queensland and Victoria are two states which foster the development of school based curriculum. Queensland has a curriculum framework and syllabus documents which guide schools in their endeavours to provide curriculum based on student needs, without prescribing very much content. Victoria has a Curriculum and Standards Framework which describes in more detail the major content to be covered. Each system produces some additional curriculum resource material for teachers which further elaborates and supports the curriculum frameworks. A brief description of the frameworks follows, along with web addresses for those interested in more detail.

### **Curriculum frameworks in Victoria**

“The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) describes what students should know and be able to do in eight key areas of learning at regular intervals from the Preparatory year to Year 10. It provides sufficient detail for schools and the community to be clear about the major elements of the curriculum and the standards expected of successful learners. At the same time each school works out the best way to organise its own teaching and learning program, taking into account government policies and the school community's priorities, resources and expertise.....Curriculum focus statements are provided at each level for each strand. They outline the major content to be covered and describe appropriate contexts for course development. These statements do not constitute a syllabus and do not prescribe specific teaching methods or the details of actual courses. Teachers will design and implement courses in many different ways, taking into account the individual needs of their students. ...”

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/csf/GeneralInfo/csfi/overview.htm>

### **Curriculum framework for Education Queensland Schools**

“Years 1—10 Policy And Guidelines”

Purpose

The purpose of this Curriculum Framework is to provide the structure around which schools can build education programs. These education programs will optimise student opportunities to demonstrate knowledges and skills designated as being important for them to engage with changing futures.

In describing the curriculum requirements for all Education Queensland schools, the Curriculum Framework provides the structure that will allow schools to achieve the curriculum objectives of QSE—2010. It recognises and enables schools to respond to the geographical and cultural complexity and diversity of Queensland, ever mindful of the drive to regenerate and revitalise Queensland communities outside the south-east corner of the State.

The Curriculum Framework facilitates the emergence of schools as learning organisations in learning communities, each with its own way of combining relevant approaches to school organisation, curriculum, teaching and learning within the context of school-based management and differentiation. It provides the scope for schools and their communities to respond in innovative ways to the needs of learners situated in the local community and, at the same time, engage with global realities.

School curriculum plans that give substance to this framework will:

- increase intellectual engagement and relevance in Years 1–10;
- strengthen learning and teaching in the middle years of schooling;
- conceptualise and develop multiple pathways through school into changing workforces and tertiary studies;
- engage with relevant futures scenarios and technologies.

It is important to note what this document is and is not. It is a framework. It is not a syllabus or a collection of syllabuses. Nor is it a prescriptive program of work. It defines the approach to core learnings and associated pedagogy, assessment and reporting that is required for all students in Education Queensland schools in Years 1–10 at the beginning of the 21st century. In particular, it links system-wide requirements to syllabuses developed by the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC).....”

[http://education.qld.gov.au/public\\_media/reports/curriculum-framework/html/purpose.html](http://education.qld.gov.au/public_media/reports/curriculum-framework/html/purpose.html)

## **Implementation – Success factors**

For now I would like to focus on the key issues arising from the move towards school-based curriculum development for systems and schools. I’ll use some recent examples from Australian schools to illustrate these points, as well as draw on my own experience as a teacher, education system bureaucrat and manager of national curriculum projects. Firstly, a couple of success stories.

### **A Primary school**

Recently I interviewed a principal in Queensland, whose primary school has built a strong reputation for its innovative locally developed curriculum and the great improvement in results in student learning over time. The school had been underperforming for years, yet this principal and the team of teachers greatly improved results using a school-based curriculum as the vehicle. The school is in an urban area and the students at the school are from diverse cultural and mostly low socio-economic backgrounds.

The principal identified the following key features as those which greatly contributed to the success of the school-based curriculum program:

1. Passion When she arrived at the school, the principal spent time with each teacher learning about their passions, interests and expertise and identified ways in

which these could be applied to the development and delivery of the curriculum. She felt it was important to focus on people's strengths, including her own, and make it clear that they are highly valued. This focus on the teachers' interests sets the school apart from many others, as it is more common to begin with the interests and needs of the students as a starting point.

2. Shared values and vision Teachers, students and parents were engaged in identifying their values and what they wanted to achieve. They were encouraged to be ambitious and aim for their ideal schooling scenario.

3. Setting of high expectations for all students The previous poor results of students were simply not accepted and new expectations were developed. Gaining engagement and support from parents was a key part of this strategy.

4. Documentation, reflection, data Action research is a key part of the ongoing process of curriculum improvement at this school, as is discussing and learning from mistakes. Key to this was the implementation of a strategy many teachers find challenging – allowing others to observe them teaching and provide advice and suggestions for improvement. All staff in the school have a focus on learning as their core business, but having the courage and confidence to regularly observe and be observed in the teaching situation is a key difference between teachers here and many other schools.

### **A Secondary school**

In a visit to another high performing school in Queensland, I asked the principal how she'd managed to lead this P-12 school of 2000 students through recent major curriculum changes, implementing a 'New Basics' school-based curriculum up to Year 10.

Firstly, she said they had wanted to take on the challenge of a more locally driven, innovative curriculum as there was a community view that the previous more traditional curriculum was not meeting changing requirements of their students. Having had that impetus to move to an almost completely school based curriculum development model, these are the main features the principal identified as leading to successful curriculum development and implementation:

1. The students Identifying their academic requirements, interests and diverse cultural and family backgrounds and developing curriculum in response to these identified requirements.

2. Backward mapping From post-compulsory requirements to ensure that the curriculum prepares students for later years.

3. Jointly developed vision and values School and community members thoroughly discussed and developed the vision and values for the school which underpin the innovate approaches to curriculum structures, timetabling and delivery.

4. Teachers as researchers Time is structured so that teachers work in teams to prepare, deliver and evaluate the curriculum. An action research approach with an emphasis on continuous improvement. Self-reflection is modelled and promoted.

5. An emphasis on training and professional development outside the school The challenges of school-based curriculum were recognised by the leadership team and opportunities for formal training and visits to other schools are actively sought.

That brief overview of two schools is obviously not definitive, it is simply intended give a quick snapshot of some successful practice in particular settings, as well as provide some points for discussion later.

## **Problems in localising curriculum development**

Not surprisingly, these schools and others undertaking the demanding task of substantially developing their own curriculum, highlighted many problems and challenges. Interestingly, when I asked principals to outline the key challenges in developing a successful school-based curriculum, they generally spoke much more about teachers and other support staff than curriculum documents.

A common view is that it is necessary to have the most experienced, skilled staff in place, along with having specialised curriculum support staff from the state system available regularly, to develop a sound school-based curriculum. While the value of high quality classroom resources was seen as important, having the most appropriate personnel for the school was the key issue. What I observed in high-performing schools I have visited is the incredible amount of time and commitment the staff and others in the community have dedicated to their school. Much of this time and expertise is required to continually develop and refine a school-based curriculum.

### **Teacher capacity**

In all cases, principals felt that having control over staff recruitment, selection and having adequate resources for professional development were of high importance in successfully implementing school-based curriculum development. Put simply, it is the capacity of teachers (or lack of) which makes it impossible or difficult to carry out such reforms. This is not said to blame teachers for their lack of experience or expertise in the area, rather it is a call for education systems to recognise the magnitude of the work required to properly develop curriculum locally. As Professor Richard Elmore says, "...it is not enough to say that people in schools know what teaching and learning are 'really' about, while people in policymaking positions don't. Often the problem is that people in schools are so isolated by the conditions of their work and so cut off from research on effective practices in other settings that they don't 'really' know what their work is about. Likewise, policymakers don't always see the consequences of what they are doing because they don't bother to carefully look at how schools are coping with the policies that they make' (Elmore, 2003).

There is plenty of evidence in Australia and elsewhere to suggest that teachers themselves feel ill-equipped to properly develop curriculum themselves and require more support from education systems to develop their capacity. In a report on the National Pilot Study for Learning Process Reform in Thailand, Professor Sumon Amornvivat notes that although the core curriculum encourages schools to create their own content and teaching activities, teachers have difficulty doing so as they '...still feel uneasy and confused by the various sets of standards, indicators and criteria prescribed for the whole country, those set by their respective authorities as well as those set by an independent body responsible for evaluation and quality assurance.' (2002, p42)

An important corollary of this issue of teacher capacity is also the capacity of principals to provide the educational leadership and management needed to develop the capacity of their staff; and hence the training and support that principals need as well. But the leadership issue is a subject worthy of another whole conference.

### **Cumbersome curriculum documents**

This point about the various sets of standards and indicators brings me to another key problem for schools developing their own curriculum. That is the

ridiculously overcrowded curriculum documents that have been developed by education systems in an attempt to broaden the scope for schools, whilst not being too prescriptive. This has produced curriculum which is ‘a kilometre wide and a centimetre deep’ with too many outcomes and crowded, complex documents with lots of breadth, but no depth. As Dr Gabrielle Matters pointed out recently, ‘The literature on school reform argues strongly that the over-elaboration of curriculum content, outcomes and goals has the effect of limiting depth, relevance and intellectual engagement.’ Dr Matters also goes on to argue the need for clear articulation of curriculum intent, for uncluttering the curriculum and for rigour. (2003, p13).

Like the Thai teachers cited in the National Pilot Study for Learning Process Reform, many principals and teachers in Australian schools simply find the current set of curriculum documents confusing, rather than helpful, in guiding curriculum development. They need to be more focused, clearer, simpler and need to focus only on what really matters. What is more, if we are to address the varying teacher capacities alluded to above, they need to be accompanied by a rich array of evidence-based, exemplary courses, units and lessons which bring together in an illustrative way content, pedagogy, standards, assessment and annotated work samples, for schools to consider and use as appropriate to their own circumstances, to give teachers the starting points to develop their own innovative approaches to curriculum provision. This also has the advantage of responding to growing workload concerns being expressed by teachers in Australia and elsewhere who feel overwhelmed by the need to develop much of their programs themselves.

### **Towards a more nationally consistent curriculum focus in Australia**

While it is recognised that decentralisation of education system functions, including curriculum development, has some great advantages for students, teachers and communities, in Australia we are now at the point of recognising that we have far too much fragmentation in curriculum development, assessment and reporting. For the foreseeable future we will have state developed curriculum guidelines with much local implementation, but we are seeing a significant trend towards national collaboration and a drive towards curriculum consistency across the nation.

### **Why we need national curriculum consistency**

The following eight key points which provide a rationale for increased national curriculum consistency are extracted from an Issues and Options paper prepared by Curriculum Corporation for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, May 2003.

1. With distance from the work that led to and followed the development of the national Statements and Profiles, the place of the learning areas, the curriculum structures that define them, and the nature of learning outcomes has become defined in increasingly dissimilar ways.

2. The curriculum – what is intended to be learnt and what is intended to be taught – is a potent agent of change and continuity for Australia as a whole and for all Australians. Greater national agreement about the curriculum and greater national consistency in the curriculum will enable us to better transmit our shared culture, promote our common values and work together for our preferred futures.

3. For our students and their families, particularly those moving school, greater agreement and consistency would bring a sense of confidence that the curriculum of their new school, at the very least, shares the same intentions as that of their old school. Between 1991 and 1996 about 220,000 children and young people aged 5-19 (in a total population of less than 20 million) moved to a different State or Territory. Consistency in curriculum would go some way to alleviating the educational and emotional impacts of moving school.

4. Our students are operating in a national and global society and economy. In thinking about what our student needs to know, do and be, there are two forces at work. The context for which they are being prepared and the context in which they are learning or which they bring to their learning. If we are preparing our students for an Australian or global society and economy which is information-based, then it makes sense for education jurisdictions across Australia to work collaboratively to identify a small body of knowledge, skills and attributes which we agree is essential for that context.

5. As they implement curriculum, and in some cases develop it, teachers are conscious of local and system or school priorities. But they are also conscious of the role of the curriculum in shaping Australian citizens and Australia as a nation. Greater curriculum consistency across the nation would help engender a shared sense of purpose and facilitate shared pedagogical approaches. It would also advance the work in developing standards of teacher effectiveness and in improving teacher education. It would enable universities and other further education providers to develop programs that, at least in part, would be appropriate to all Australian students. Finally, in thinking of our teachers, it needs to be remembered that teachers are also mobile and that mobile teachers face substantial new learning – learning which might not be so necessary if curriculum were more consistent.

6. For jurisdictions and schools, responsible for curriculum development, greater national consistency brings significant benefits and opportunities. One such opportunity comes from the process of achieving and maintaining greater consistency. Each system and sector is subject to different local imperatives to which its local curriculum is responding. Each engages teachers closely in their development processes, generating ownership, relevance and professional learning. Whenever national collaborative processes have been adopted in Australian education, they have built on system and sector initiatives to provide powerful mechanisms for contributing expertise, sharing learning, articulating the best curriculum practice and bringing about new, and frequently visionary, developments in curriculum.

7. Achieving greater consistency in curriculum would also stimulate the development of high-quality resources to support its implementation – resources which are more viable to develop and disseminate/market because of their greater applicability across Australia and which in turn contribute to greater consistency when the curriculum is implemented. Greater national consistency would also allow governments, jurisdictions and schools to make their resources go further and achieve more, possibly directing more of their allocated curriculum development resources to teacher professional development – a critical part of all curriculum implementation.

8. Finally, in spite of all the benefits for students, teachers and systems, the benefits of greater curriculum consistency are most clear at the national level. Greater national consistency would enable the articulation (and marketing) of what distinguishes Australian education. It would support a vision of learning in Australian

schools. It would help ensure that our students and ultimately our country are well positioned in an information-based global society and economy.

### **How will we begin to achieve national curriculum consistency?**

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs endorsed the development of statements of learning, as briefly described below, that define and deliver common curriculum outcomes to be used by jurisdictions to inform their own curriculum development and implementation.

1. Statements of Learning will help achievement of 'high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding' as stated in the Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals of Schooling in the Twenty-First Century.

2. The Statements of Learning would not attempt to describe the whole of learning within a domain. Instead they would identify and build on important and essential elements of learning within the domains that are common among jurisdictions' curriculums. Through the articulation of these elements, they would provide a common basis on which Australia's education systems can make progress towards greater consistency.

3. The Statements of Learning should represent a level of skill that is reasonable and challenging and appropriate to the majority of young Australians.

4. It is proposed that the first Statements of Learning encapsulate the essential knowledge, understanding, skills and capacities of the four curriculum domains of English, Maths, Science and Civics and Citizenship at agreed points of schooling.

5. It is further proposed that the Statements of Learning integrate some of the generic and trans-disciplinary capacities and understandings from the National Goals of Schooling within the domains. In particular, the incorporation of information and communication technologies across all domains is seen as essential.

6. This powerful combination of the distinctive knowledge, understanding and skills of the domains with the generic capacities and understandings from the National Goals of Schooling will achieve the aim of the recommendation to 'equip students to make progress towards high order skills, deep levels of thinking and the attributes needed for a global, knowledge-based society'. In addition, this combination provides a known context for the development of these high order capacities and adds value to the ways these domains have been traditionally constructed.

7. The Statements of Learning would outline a sequence of learning within each of the four domains showing progression in expected student learning across the chosen years of schooling. In doing so they would define the knowledge, skills, conceptual understanding and capacities that characterise learners at particular points in schooling and illustrate the rate and kind of progress which should occur.

8. Any work on the development of Statements of Learning would need to be based on:

- a sound theoretical base;
- existing or new empirical data on current levels of achievement; and
- professional judgement about necessary and appropriate Statements of Learning and levels of performance.

9. The Statements of Learning will be written in plain language to ensure that they are accessible to parents and community members.

10. The limited scope of the Statements of Learning proposed would avoid constraining systems, sectors or schools more than is necessary to achieve the Ministerial purpose. Systems, sectors and schools will have flexibility and autonomy to integrate these Statements of Learning into their own curriculums in a manner which suits the diversity of students needs and types of schools across the country.

11. The Statements of Learning will be defined in such a way that they enable students to demonstrate their mastery of particular knowledge and skills in a number of ways and teachers to monitor them using classroom-based ‘assessment for learning’ principles and repertoires. They should also imply the potential for teachers to use a wide repertoire of teaching styles.

12. This initiative does not assume system monitoring or reporting of achievement of the Statements of Learning; this will be a matter for individual systems and sectors to decide on.

Source: *15th MCEETYA Meeting*, Perth, 10-11 July 2003 Agenda Item 2.4.2

### **Achieving the balance between national and local curriculum development**

Clearly, this national work is critical in helping achieve the balance between system-developed and locally developed curriculum. It will provide teachers with some of the clear direction and support they need, particularly in preparing students for an Australian or global society and economy which is information-based. Teachers, students and parents across Australia will have a common understanding about a small body of knowledge, skills and attributes which will be agreed as being essential for that context. Teachers will be able to better use their curriculum development time on the matters that are important for local curriculum development – such as catering for the individual requirements of their students, and focusing on local communities, local history and culture.

### **Relevant lessons from school improvement research**

Given the nature of the education reform initiatives being discussed at this conference, it seems highly appropriate to refer to the literature on school improvement to identify lessons learnt which can be applied to localised curriculum development, many of which are evident in the high performing schools we are familiar with. Professor Peter Hill (2003, pp5-7) outlines ten of the most critical lessons for systems wishing to improve student learning and staff capacity in schools, which are summarised below:

Lesson 1 – Improvement is more likely where there is consensus about the important outcomes of schooling, both cognitive and moral, and where there are high expectations of all.

Lesson 2 – All the elements that contribute to student performance must be designed and aligned systematically.

Lesson 3 – Leadership is crucial. Improvement does not occur without strong instructional leadership that focuses on academic goals.

Lesson 4 – Improvement requires being research-minded and evidence based. Effective schools seek out proven practices and programs that align with what already works within the school. They constantly collect and analyse data to find out what is and is not working.

Lesson 5 – Improvement requires ongoing and substantial investment in improving staff capacity and in creating a learning culture that is focused on outcomes, continuous improvement and working on common goals.

Lesson 6 – Improving the quality of teaching is essential for the improvement of student learning and school improvement generally. Classroom teaching must be observed, analysed and improved, and must focus on setting instructional goals appropriate for each student.

Lesson 7 – Sustained improvement requires on-going commitment, clear focus and maintenance of resources for implementation.

Lesson 8 – Rates of improvement vary according to the capacity of schools to engage in improvement processes. Schools with relatively low capacity to change need more time to change and require a higher degree of direction and support until capacity is stronger.

Lesson 9 – Early intervention in improving learning is more successful than later intervention, when patterns of failure are more entrenched.

Lesson 10 – Whatever the nature of the reform, improvement is more likely to occur when implementation occurs according to the reform design.

### **A curriculum program to consider**

Taking into account some of our successes and failures, the trend toward national learning statements, along with lessons learned from relevant research, how can we usefully conceptualise a curriculum which supports both system-wide improvement and development and local school flexibility to adopt innovative approaches suited to the students and community? I suggest that the following components of system-wide curriculum program would go some way towards meeting these key requirements

1. Generic transdisciplinary skills, values and attributes should be identified, described and included in national curriculum statements or guidelines. These generic skills respond to the requirement to equip students for a global, knowledge society, where the only certainty is uncertainty. Broad areas covered could include thinking, problem solving, and the use of information and communication technologies.

2. Content expectations would be outlined in a small number of critical national statements in each discipline area, for each phase of schooling, about core learning for that discipline. Only agreed mandatory content would be included, along with some suggested important content.

3. Specification of the relevant performance standards for both the mandatory and other important content included in the curriculum would need to occur. Standards would be both challenging, minimum standards of knowledge, skill and understanding to progress to the next phase of schooling, as well as advanced standards to provide extension and challenge for more able students and those who wish to specialise.

4. Teachers can never have enough support materials. When developing school-based curriculum, teachers spend an inordinate amount of time developing material to support student learning. Education systems need to take responsibility for the provision of a rich array of evidence-based, exemplary courses, units and lessons which bring together in an illustrative way content, pedagogy, standards, assessment and annotated work samples, for schools to consider and use as appropriate to their

own circumstances, to give teachers the starting points to develop their own innovative approaches to curriculum provision.

5. A framework for reporting during each phase of schooling, and at the end of the phase, needs to be developed which addresses reporting to parents on both student progress and their overall level of achievement in normative terms, and which also provides advice for further learning improvement and progress to occur.

6. Finally, education systems need sets of standards-based assessments, applied on a state and/or nation wide basis, for each of the phases of schooling. These will enable schools to demonstrate the specific value they add to the learning of the students they teach and provide teachers with some of the data they need.

These components of a curriculum program can assist in achieving the balance between both system and school priorities in diverse settings, as well as support student learning in a comprehensive way.

### **Final key points**

Successful local curriculum development relies on many factors, but if we are to be successful in this area, we should focus on major initiatives that make the difference.

#### **Curriculum documents**

Firstly, we must throw away overelaborate, cumbersome curriculum documents which provide too much overlapping information for teachers. Education systems must support teachers by providing clear, concise curriculum statements which describe essential knowledge, understanding, skills and capacities in core areas of learning. Systems must also provide high quality curriculum resource materials as described above to support school-based curriculum development.

#### **Teacher capacity**

Building the capacity of teachers and principals is a critical task if the heavy demands of developing localised curriculum are to be met. Education systems need to do more than just tell teachers to develop their own curriculum. They need to equip them professionally to do the task. This means developing a research culture driven by an evidence-based approach. It means providing pre-service and in-service professional training for teachers in curriculum development. It means fostering a culture of reflection and collegiate learning that focuses on continuous improvement.

Central to this capacity-building approach is what David Hopkins calls the ‘...blend of informed prescription with informed professional judgement’. As he says, ‘...the next phase of reform must be driven by moral purpose, passion and a commitment to capacity building and the creation of new knowledge. It must also be recognised that this will require much more intensive and ongoing opportunities for teachers, heads and other staff in their school to learn both individually and collectively, drawing on their peers as well as on external experts and ideas’. (2003, p17).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion I’d like to leave you with two big questions:

Firstly, why can’t we move from national to international curriculum consistency? Whenever I attend an international forum or work with colleagues in other countries, I’m always reminded that although there are many commonalities in our educational theory and practice, we often lack a common language, or a shared

agreement about what is important for students to know, understand and do. I know there is great diversity between and even within nations, but wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all move to some international consistency in curriculum and other key aspects of education? We all talk about equipping students for a global, knowledge society – shouldn't we be leading the way by looking beyond our national boundaries and collaborating more on defining and developing curriculum that supports student learning? International collaborative curriculum work of substance would be of great value to educators at all levels, including those developing school-based curriculum.

For the second and final question I need to return to the allocated topic and ask you to consider the most important question – does localised curriculum development lead to improved student learning? I suspect the answer is 'it depends'. It does indeed depend on so many variables it should be the basis for some significant research, so that we can find out how much of the improvements in student learning can be attributed to localised curriculum development. I would argue strongly that there is not enough evidence to suggest that student learning is generally improved in contexts where curriculum is developed locally, much less in all school settings. We need to ensure that we are not driven simply by ideology in this matter – we must be sure that all the efforts that education systems and schools are putting into supporting the development of school-based curriculum are not just well-intentioned, but are based on what is known to improve student learning.

## References

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## **Background Paper to Accompany “Localising Curriculum Development”**

### **Curriculum provision in the Australian States and Territories**

## 1986-2000

In Australia, significant collaboration in curriculum began in June 1986 when the then Australian Education Council (AEC) resolved to:

'support the concept of a national collaborative effort in Australia to utilise to maximum effect scarce curriculum resources and to ensure that unnecessary differences in curriculum from state to state be minimised'.

In 1989, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met in Hobart and made an historic agreement to improve Australian schooling within a framework of national collaboration. The resulting Hobart Declaration included the *Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia*.

In 1991, the AEC endorsed the development of both a national *Statement* and a national *Profile* in the eight key learning areas. By this time the groundbreaking results of ministerial consensus were clear:

- a core of essential curriculum areas had been agreed;
- a process for curriculum mapping had been developed; and
- work on national *Statements* and *Profiles* was under way.

National *Statements* and *Profiles* in eight key learning areas were published in early 1994 and became the dominant influence on curriculum development in each of the States and Territories. Following publication of the *Statements* and *Profiles*, States and Territories reviewed them, often rewriting them to suit their own approaches. Since that time, some jurisdictions have rewritten their curriculums several times.

In the years following the publication of the national *Statements* and *Profiles* for the eight learning areas, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) commissioned a number of research papers.

In 1994, 1995, and 1996, Curriculum Corporation undertook a curriculum-mapping project involving all States and Territories to investigate the take-up and implementation of *Statements* and *Profiles* and to gather information about their variants. Summary reports and research data were presented to MCEETYA in each of these three years. Reports tabulated and made observations about responses to a range of questions.

Additional research by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) provided information about the implementation of *Statements* and *Profiles* in South Australia. In 1995 the Victorian and Queensland

Departments provided a *Map of Current Primary and Secondary School Practice in Health and Physical Education Against the Statement and Profile for Australian Schools*.

In 2000, the then Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers (CESCEO) requested The Learning Federation to map, and if possible to align, each State and Territory's curriculum. This was to ensure that teachers in a State or Territory would be able to discover online content relevant to their individual curriculum frameworks/syllabuses without having that search mediated by a new curriculum overlay.

## 2002-2003

At the thirteenth MCEETYA meeting in Auckland in 2002, the following action was approved by the Council.

### **Item 1.5.1 Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce**

- f. Council requested the Taskforce to review the current status and use within the States and Territories of national *Statements* and *Profiles* and to provide advice back to Ministers on how the States and Territories can collaborate further on consistent curriculum outcomes.

Source: 13<sup>th</sup> MCEETYA Meeting, Auckland, 18–19 July 2002

The meeting of the Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce in Melbourne on 29 August 2002 agreed that Curriculum Corporation should undertake the review of the current status and use within the States and Territories of national *Statements* and *Profiles* indicated in the MCEETYA decision. In addition, the Corporation was requested to prepare a paper setting out issues and options relating to further collaboration on consistent curriculum outcomes.

In undertaking this review of curriculum provision, the questions used in 1996 to monitor take-up of national *Statements* and *Profiles* were used as the basis for developing a new research instrument.

On the consistency issue, it was agreed that Curriculum Corporation would prepare a paper, which would:

- initially identify a set of issues to be taken into account for consultation
- subsequently, and based on the issues, identify a number of options for moving forward on the achievement of national curriculum consistency
- where possible, relate the issues and outcomes of the paper to the information included in this research report.

## Acknowledgments

This research report represents a collaboratively arrived at view of the current use within States and Territories of national *Statements* and *Profiles* and local curriculum frameworks. In addition to the input from State and Territory education departments and authorities, the Catholic education and

the independent schools sectors have also provided responses about the curriculum provision of their constituent members.

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## **Executive summary**

### **Curriculum development in the States and Territories**

The Australian States and Territories have constitutional responsibility for educational provision (including curriculum development), as it relates to the Government schooling sector. In a number of States and Territories, Catholic and Independent schools are also required to use locally developed curriculum frameworks/syllabuses through statutory school accreditation requirements.

The responsibility for the development of curriculum, or syllabuses, is generally established through legislation and vested in boards of studies or their equivalents (NSW, NT, Qld, Vic, WA). However, in three jurisdictions, curriculum development is shared between more than one education authority. In Queensland, the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) is charged with the development of syllabuses, while the New Basics Framework has been developed and trialed (2000–2004) by Education Queensland in 59 State schools. The Tasmanian Secondary Schools Assessment Board (TASSAB) has had responsibility for the development of syllabuses (years 9–12), while the Department of Education has developed and managed the introduction of the Essential Learnings (B–10) curriculum. In Western Australia, the Curriculum Council, the Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia have worked together to create a curriculum framework for all schools. The WA Department of Education and the Catholic Education Office also develop documents for their specific jurisdictions.

### **Implementation**

Most States and Territories have legislated to require schools to implement their curriculum at K/P/R–10 (NSW, NT, SA, WA). Alternatively, statute may require schools to follow educational policies determined by a schools authority (ACT). In Queensland, only State schools are required to implement a Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) approved or accredited syllabus for an area of learning. Less frequently, Government schools are not required by statute to implement locally developed curriculum frameworks/syllabuses (Vic). However, while some States and Territories do not mandate the use of locally developed curriculum frameworks, government schools may still be required to report to parents against curriculum outcomes (Vic).

As students progress through the compulsory years of schooling, the likelihood that they will be taught from and be assessed against, locally developed frameworks and syllabuses increases. In NSW for example, legislation requires that schools seeking School Certificate accreditation use syllabuses for stages 4–5 (years 7–10).

It is outside the scope of this report to describe curriculum provision in the senior years of schooling (11–12). In all States and Territories, curriculum is regulated through the requirements of certification.

### **National initiatives**

In July 1996, Ministers for Education in States, Territories and the Commonwealth agreed that 'every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level'. Ministers agreed to develop national benchmarks for use in reporting minimum acceptable standards of literacy and numeracy achievement, in support of the national goal.

In April 1999, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in Adelaide. At that meeting, Ministers endorsed a new set of National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century. The new goals were released in April 1999 as *The Adelaide Declaration (1999) on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. The Adelaide Declaration (1999) arose from a Discussion Paper (1998) reviewing The Hobart Declaration (1989) and supersedes these earlier documents.

While there is a range of other nationally-funded programs, such as Discovering Democracy, or the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy, with accompanying resources for teaching and learning, these do not have the status of a curriculum framework or syllabus.

Training Package-based vocational education and training programs, used primarily at years 11–12, but sometimes during the compulsory years of schooling, are the sole example of a nationally-accredited curriculum in use in Australian schools.

### **Curriculum Consistency**

Each State or Territory has a well-established tradition of curriculum development, consultation and engagement of interest groups. Most have formal structures for managing curriculum and assessment. Most have an existing framework for curriculum. Most have mechanisms for assessment and accountability linked to the framework. Each has a relationship with Catholic and Independent schools about the applicability of the curriculum approach or framework. Each has a view about curriculum components and emphases, which are characteristic of the State or Territory and about what is believed to be in its best interests. Each has made and continues to make a considerable investment in developing and implementing curriculum reform.

It is clear that that since the last equivalent report presented to MCEETYA *Take-up of Statements and Profiles*, (1996), State and Territory curriculums have become significantly more dissimilar. It would seem that with distance from the work that led to and followed the development of the national *Statements and Profiles*, the place of the learning areas, the curriculum structures that define them, and the nature of learning outcomes has become defined in increasingly different ways.

## Curriculum development 1994–2002

In the nine years (1994–2002) following the publication of nationally developed *Statements* and *Profiles*, all States and Territories developed and implemented local curriculum frameworks/syllabuses. (ACT 1994, 1997; NSW 1995, 2002; NT 1997, 1999, 2002; Qld 1997–2002; SA 1996, 2001; Tas 2002; Vic 1995, 2000; WA 1995, 1998). Curriculum review has frequently led to the redevelopment of the entire curriculum framework /syllabuses of a jurisdiction. The cycles of curriculum review and development range from 3 to 6 years. Between major reviews, numerous curriculum documents have been developed to supplement, comment, link and support these frameworks/syllabuses.

Numerous factors contribute to curriculum change. While there has been no attempt to correlate the incidence of curriculum change to the change of government within a jurisdiction, this was frequently a factor in the years immediately following the release of the nationally developed *Statements* and *Profiles*. Significant factors, identified in 2002 by States and Territories, as contributing to curriculum change include: the reduction of the number of outcomes at a level, phase or stage (NSW, NT, SA, Vic), the impact of vocational learning (NSW, Qld, Vic) Information and Communication Technologies (NSW, Vic), and the 'crowded curriculum' (NSW, Qld - New Basics, Tas - Essential Learnings, Vic). Other contributing factors include Indigenous issues (NT), the need to reduce or consolidate the number of curriculum levels (Vic 1995, 2000), the requirement to make standards more explicit (Vic), and the impact of the 'stages of learning' and the transition between these (Qld, Vic).

Early surveys of the use of national *Statements* and *Profiles* (Curriculum Corporation 1994, 1995, 1996) investigated the impact on, and take-up of, curriculum change by schools and teachers. The 2002 survey instrument did not seek this information although the question may still be valid given the extent of change described.

### Essential learnings

The concept of essential learnings was integrated into the South Australian and Northern Territory curriculum frameworks as a means of highlighting core and integrated learnings. During the development of the *NT Curriculum Framework*, the exclusion of the learning areas was considered, however their removal would have resulted in a transformational approach to outcome focused learning, which, through self-reporting, only 5% of Northern Territory teachers had identified as being within their frame of practice. More recently, essential learning frameworks have been developed (Tas - Essential Learnings, Qld - New Basics) that replace a curriculum based on learning areas. The Queensland New Basics Framework is an integrated framework for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that defines essential learning, appropriate and effective approaches to teaching, affiliated modes of assessment and standards and assurances about student development at key points of schooling.

**In the four States and Territories where essential learnings have been defined within, or as the curriculum, there is considerable diversity in how these learnings are categorised.**

**Table 2: Essential Learnings**

Northern Territory	Queensland (New Basics)	South Australia	Tasmania
Inner learner Creative learner Collaborative learner Constructive learner	Life pathways and social futures Multiliteracies and communications media Active citizenship Environments and technologies	Futures Identity Interdependence Thinking Communication	Thinking Communicating Social responsibility Personal futures World futures

### **Future curriculum development**

Four education jurisdictions have plans for further curriculum change during the years 2003–2005 (ACT, Qld, Tas, WA). Western Australia intends to align its Progress Maps with the *Curriculum Framework*. Victoria is looking at the issue of curriculum reform within the context of its middle years initiative linked to post-compulsory education and training and a specific initiative in the area of 'Design'. New South Wales, the Northern Territory and South Australia have no specific plans for curriculum change during this period, and are entering a period of curriculum consolidation.

### **Curriculum consistency**

Education systems are at widely different stages in the cycle of curriculum development. Several systems have well-established frameworks, some of which are now under review. Others have completed new frameworks. Others are in development, while others are about to commence development.

All of those with new frameworks are at various stages of implementation. These systems are well aware that successful implementation is dependent on school leaders and teachers believing that the new curriculum approach is a significant improvement and that it is unlikely to change substantially in the near future.

This report notes the increasing importance of cross, or trans-disciplinary constructs, the wide variation in the degree to which content is prescribed through outcomes, the association of expected outcomes with year levels in some States and Territories and not others, and the significant variation in the expected level and scope of achievement at a broad, given level of schooling.

## Curriculum structure

### **Relation to national Statements and Profiles**

National collaboration between 1989–93 produced a *Statement* and a *Profile* in each of the eight agreed areas of learning - English, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Languages other than English, Health and Physical Education, Studies of Society and Environment, and The Arts.

The *Statements* for each learning area provided a framework for curriculum development by education systems and schools. Each Statement was further divided into strands, which reflected the major elements of learning in the learning area. *Statements* described the range of experiences and achievements of students within four bands corresponding to four phases of learning. The *Profiles* sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning and provided a common language for reporting student achievement. In each Profile, the strands described student learning outcomes at eight levels through which a student would progress while in the P–10 years. *Profiles* additionally provided pointers and work samples to illustrate how a student might be seen to have achieved the single outcome at each level.

The eight *Statements* and *Profiles* provided for the first time in Australia, a common curriculum taxonomy and structure across each education jurisdiction. Most States and Territories have adopted variants of the structure and language of the nationally developed *Statements* and *Profiles*. The exceptions are those systems (Qld - New Basics, Tas - Essential Learnings) adopting an alternative to a curriculum based on learning areas. Given this, the Tasmanian Essential Learnings and the Queensland New Basics Framework still use an outcomes approach. Where it has been possible in the past to map State and Territory curriculums, often at an outcomes level, mapping of New Basics or Essential Learnings outcomes to those of the national *Statements* and *Profiles*, or to other State and Territory curriculum frameworks/syllabuses, has yet to be attempted.

\* The preceding pages are an extract from a substantial report prepared by Curriculum Corporation for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2003.