

Introduction to teaching



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A curriculum refers to a comprehensive course of study followed by a school, country or region. It defines the course contents, gives the course description and objectives. It also describes the achievements of the content covered. The world is experiencing a reform in school curriculum due to the advancement in technology where students can access information easily. The changes in political and economic structure have necessitated the need to modify the curriculum to keep the students abreast with the diversifications of the world and improve their competitiveness. The increased markets, discovery of new resources, realization that students learn very little in school, and the increased demand for faster communication and reduction of the world into a global village have necessitated the need for a reformed curriculum that will equip the students with the skills, knowledge and ability to adapt to changes in the world.

This paper is about the Australian curriculum. It compares the Australian curriculum with the curriculums in the rest of the world and shows how it addresses the needs of students in the 21st century.

Curriculum Development Process

According to the analysis, the Australian curriculum developed in four main stages. The first stage was the general outline of the foundation from the first year to the twelfth year called the initial advice paper that later developed into the Australian curriculum. This paper outlines the scope, structure, reasons and the organization of the study areas. It was drawn after consultation with experts and different stakeholders. Null (2011) asserts that the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority's

staff and other experts' panels facilitated the writing phase. They offered their advice in the structuring of a comprehensive curriculum. They also referred to the national and international curriculum research, materials on state and territory curriculum, and researched the general curriculum requirements and priorities. They developed the content and the quality of the education standards. The draft was released to the public for scrutiny and modification. The implementation stage was done by ACARA officials, territory and school authorities, in which the curriculum was circulated online to various schools. After the curriculum was introduced in the schools, ACARA, territory and school authorities evaluated its success towards achieving the goals of the curriculum. They also worked together to introduce new features that will facilitate the success of the curriculum goals. This curriculum gives an outline of what students should learn at the end of their time in school (Griffith, 2000).

The development phases were planned in years depending on the levels of students. Between the years 2008 to 2010, the foundation from kindergarten to year 10 was developed that constituted English, Mathematics, Science and History, the senior secondary curriculum in these subjects was completed in 2011. Between 2010 and 2012, the curriculum was developed for Geography, Languages and the Arts to the 12th year. The last phase is projected to be between the years 2011 to 2013. It focuses on health and physical education, design and technology, Civics, Economics, information and physical education, and citizenship. These subjects address the issues needed by the students in the 21st century as they are sensitized on the emerging issues in the world.

Relevance to the 21st Century Students

The analysis reveals that with the rapid changes and advancement in technology, economy and political environment, the Australian curriculum strives to cater for the general needs of students to make them accepted in the society and job market. The 21st century is marked by many economic, technological and social changes. The Australian curriculum inculcates all the relevant knowledge concerning these changes. By the introduction of Information and Communication Technology as a subject in the senior classes, the curriculum educates the students on the advanced technology. Economics and civics have been introduced to cater for the economic and political changes. Kelly (2009) confirms that the 21st century is marked by an increased demand for critical thinking to facilitate creativity and innovation. Students need the skills to learn about their environment and develop problem-solving techniques and critical decision-making. It also demands competence and dependence on new technologies for the processing and passing on information to other people.

The 21st century believes that everyone can achieve their potential given the same financial support to attend classes. The competitive nature of the job market leaves the students with no other option than to advance in their skills and knowledge. In order to address these issues, the Australian curriculum was developed in a comprehensive manner that involved all the ministers of education signing the 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians' that gives the specifications on the priorities that should be incorporated in the curriculum. The stakeholders also compare it with that of top overseas countries to evaluate its efficiency and

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relevance while making the necessary improvements. In order to build all-round students, it involves challenging achievement standards that facilitate the growth of the students socially, morally, spiritually and psychologically. The curriculum has been availed online to provide teachers with better management plans and working tools. This makes it easy for reference and amendments when deemed necessary. By doing the necessary adjustments, the curriculum accommodates the changing needs of the students in the 21st century. It equips them with the skills to think critically and creatively and to get accustomed to technological changes.

Australian Curriculum and the Queensland Curriculum Documents

The Australian curriculum writers have introduced four stages of learning, while the Queensland's has three stages of learning although the rationale of these stages is the same. This refers to the stages a student has to go through to have fully gone through school.

The Australian curriculum requires students in year 10 to have studied some English, Science, History and Mathematics. The Queensland's does not have these specifications.

In years 11 and 12, the Australian curriculum refers to the subjects as units 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 respectively. Since these are considered the senior years of the students, the Queensland's has courses of study separated in two years with no clear definition of the courses.

In the Australian curriculum, the senior classes are the years 11 and 12. This gives students more time to learn more in their primary school before they

join the senior school. The Queensland's year 7 is in primary, while year 10 is considered the beginning of the senior school.

Both curriculums were developed after rigorous consultations with experts and other stakeholders. For instance, the American core standards were obtained from the website on Education Week, newspapers from Editorial Projects in Education whose headquarters were in Bethesda. The Australian referred to journals from educational institutions, the website and other books. They also involved various stakeholders who considered the current situations in the world and tried to incorporate issues that will help the students fit in the changing society and make them useful to both themselves and the country as a whole.

English Year Three-Subject Description

The subject description concentrates on three areas, which include language, literature and literacy. The curriculum aims at improving students' knowledge and the ability to read, listen, communicate and create English concepts. The content descriptions in language include language variation and change, language for interaction, text structure and organization, developing and expressing English ideas. In literature, they include literature texts, responding to literature, examining and creating literature. In literacy – interacting with others and evaluating, analyzing and evaluating literature. In general, the students should be able to fluently speak English, analyze statements and situations and view them from different perspectives. Griffith (2000) affirms that through literature, they are also taught on critical and

creative thinking and the need to have an inner eye to see the hidden meanings in different circumstances.

The achievement standards by the end of the third year are that the students should be able to construct sentences with different language structures such as imagery, joining ideas and words using the correct conjunctions. They should also correctly read sentences with the correct punctuations. They should be able to use English to express their ideas clearly by including the relevant phrases in the sentences.

Models of the Curriculum According to the Analysis

Curriculum as content is one of the models in which the curriculum can be classified. This refers to the organization of the requirements for teachers as they teach different subjects. It outlines the details that are to be addressed by the teacher, how they are to be arranged with regard to their relationship to enable students better understand and be able to relate different subjects. It also ensures that the students are taught what they can understand with regard to their age and abilities. The objectives of the lessons are provided to the teachers so that they do not get out of topic to teach what is irrelevant. It also ensures that all areas of learning are addressed while those critical areas are given great attention.

Another model is curriculum as experience, which states that as the students advance they are not only covering the curriculum but also gaining experience and can be able to apply this knowledge in the real life situations. This prepares students for their lives outside school. It teaches them to be

creative and innovative, and be able to relate class work to the real life activities.

Curriculum as a framework is another model of curriculum that does not only give the content of what students should cover but also gives the objectives and guidelines of covering the syllabus. It also gives the qualifications of teachers and ensures that they are competent and committed to their jobs.

Another model is the outcomes-based curriculum that gives the expectations of the society from the students after completing school. The expectation is that students should be psychologically, morally, spiritually and socially upright. They should also be useful to themselves and the country by utilizing their knowledge in their workplaces. They should be creative and innovative to use the available resources to improve the living standards of people in the world. They should also be equipped with the ability to make appropriate decisions.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Australian Curriculum

The new curriculum is the advancement from the previous one as it is comprehensible and adequately worded, which makes it appealing to read and understand. Most teachers can go through it, understand its demands and be able to practice it with ease. The older one was heavily worded and could not be read easily. Most teachers ignored its contents and did the obvious things in the syllabus.

It addresses the interests of both students and teachers and ensures that the students are well equipped with the skills and knowledge before they get to

the job market. It also covers different areas that affect the changes in the world such as technological advancement, political and economic changes as opposed to the old one that was rigid and entailed a smaller coverage of the syllabus, and the students left school with no skills and knowledge.

Teachers are also motivated by the presence of the curriculum on the Internet as it makes access it easily, and procedures of assessment and planning are user-friendly. This is opposed to the previous curriculum that was not easily accessible, and one had to have the hard copy, which was cumbersome.

The structure of the syllabus is not balanced, and in some instances, it overloads the students. For instance, the content of Science and History in the primary upper classes is too much. This may affect the understanding of the students and cause them problems as they advance in their studies. Kelly (2009) asserts that some teachers may opt to avoid the complex parts of the syllabus in the hurry of completing the syllabus. These areas may be vital parts of the curriculum hence leaving the students poorly equipped.

It is not clear whether the teachers will understand the structure of the curriculum, and if they are equipped with the necessary skills and expertise to teach the students. Some will have to be retrained on the emerging issues, to ensure they are well equipped with the current issues in the economy and advancement in technology. The teachers may not also have a viable way of evaluating whether the students have understood the syllabus (Null, 2011).

In conclusion, the Australian curriculum is a major step of the government to ensure that the students are well prepared for life after school, and that they are able to adapt to the changing political, economic and technological advancements. These have been facilitated by the introduction of a comprehensive syllabus in ICT, Economics and Civics. It also ensures that the students cover all the academic areas by providing the guidelines and objectives of the lessons. The structure and the formation of the curriculum were done after consultation with various stakeholders and experts. It was then subjected to public scrutiny. This helps to ease the acceptance of the contents of the curriculum with minimum resistance. Apart from the excess content in Science and History in the upper classes, the rest of the curriculum is good enough to produce an all-round student who fits in the society.