

Definitions of curriculum its purpose and how it is developed



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The term “ curriculum” is not a simple word that can be defined nor its depth appreciated. Further investigation into this topic reveals that the art and science of curriculum building is a complex field that many authors, scholars or academic writers each have a different definition describing what curriculum means to them. This paper will focus on the Australian Curriculum and will attempt to address issues such as various definitions of curriculum, its purpose or goal, how it is developed, its structure, how it is influenced by different learning theories, the processes of teaching, learning and assessing it and how it relates to 21st Century learners. Incorporating these factors and understanding this information will allow the reader to formulate his or her own educated definition of the curriculum whilst recognising the primary features that entail the development and structure of the Australian Curriculum.

Definition of Curriculum and its Stakeholders

Several definitions surround the meaning of curriculum. Authors and academics Brady & Kennedy (2010, p. 5) simply state “ In seeking to understand better the role of the curriculum in the 21st century, the purpose should be to ensure that children and young people are well equipped to handle whatever it is that this century will call them to do and be”, while Marsh and Willis (2007, as cited in Marsh, 2010, p. 93) define curriculum as “ an interrelated set of plans and experiences which a student completes under the guidance of the school”. Other definitions of the curriculum surface dependant on the stakeholders in question. Stakeholders are people who have an interest in the curriculum’s formation and delivery. Marsh (2010, p. 24) provides a list of stakeholders with whom the National

Curriculum Board (NCB) now known as ACARA consult; they include “ Federal/State governments, education authorities, professional associations, school based groups, tertiary sector and the community”. The business community believes that the Australian Curriculum must be able to support students in their future employment opportunities while preparing them for the economic needs of society (Brady & Kennedy, 2010). Parent groups are concerned that the Australian Curriculum could be manipulated by government bodies for academic analysis instead of concentrating on equipping their children with the appropriate knowledge and experiences for a successful future (Brady & Kennedy, 2010).

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, better known as ACARA (2010d) describes the new Australian Curriculum as “ a broad scope and sequence of core learning. Critical decisions about the total educational program and how it will be implemented and adapted to meet the needs and interests of students will be the responsibility of education authorities, schools, teachers, parents and students”. From this information it is evident that the Australian Curriculum is complex, detailed and influenced by many groups. Fundamentally it is the groundwork for a broad plan that consists of goals/aims, content and achievement standards for each subject to be taught within Australian schools. Clearly the term “ curriculum” is a broad plan of the WHAT, HOW and WHEN of teaching, learning and assessment.

The purpose/goal/outcomes of the Curriculum and Education

In order to understand the purpose, goal or outcome of education we must understand who we are directing our learning to. Acknowledging the diversity of learners will assist in identifying the scope and range of the content to be covered by the Australian Curriculum. Brady and Kennedy (2010, p. 38) state “ Teachers must examine the curriculum carefully to ensure it does not exclude the diverse experiences that students bring with them to the classroom. More positively, the curriculum should highlight those experiences and make them the basis for discovery and learning”. The Kindergarten to Year 12 Australian Curriculum is directed towards students of all social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Developing their knowledge, skills and understanding of the major disciplines of Mathematics, English, Science and History students are provided with the skills necessary to further their knowledge and specialise in fields through further tertiary education or joining the workforce. In addition, the Australian Curriculum provides the foundation that allows young Australian citizens to deal confidently with issues that arise and enables them to make informed decisions regarding social and personal matters.

The development of the Australian Curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12 is the responsibility of ACARA, this development is directed by the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. This declaration commits to supporting learners with quality education and providing them with the skills necessary for future endeavours (ACARA, 2009a). The Australian Curriculum will outline the scope and sequence of key

learning areas, in other words WHAT and WHEN the subject matter is to be taught at schools. However, teachers will ultimately make the decision on HOW to organise, structure and deliver this information to benefit each and every student's learning experience (ACARA, 2009e). The educational outcomes " what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully" (Spady, 1994, p. 1 as cited in Killen, 2003, p. 41) for young Australian citizens focus on creating successful learners such as developing their capacity to be creative, resourceful and motivated individuals, their ability to think, obtain and evaluate evidence, work independently and in teams, communicate ideas, utilise current technology, make informed decisions and gain the necessary skills regarding their learning and employment directions. Further outcomes addressed through the General Capabilities aim to create confident individuals by providing the tools that promote a sense of self-awareness to be able to manage all facets of their wellbeing, develop values such as honesty, empathy and respect for themselves and others, form personal, social and professional relationships, and have the confidence to pursue further education and training. In addition, becoming active and informed citizens is addressed through the Cross-Curriculum Dimensions, which aim to instil an understanding and appreciation for Australia's indigenous history and diverse culture, and sustaining and improving our natural and social surroundings (ACARA, 2009d).

Structure and Development of the Curriculum

In 2008 under the Rudd Government ACARA was created to develop a Kindergarten to Year 12 National Curriculum. First phase of development involves four Key Learning Areas (KLA's) or subjects, Mathematics, English,

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History and Science including additional components of General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Dimensions working alongside these KLA's (Marsh, 2010). " The ten (10) General Capabilities are literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, thinking skills, ethical behaviour, creativity, self-management, teamwork, intercultural understanding and social competence, while the three (3) Cross-Curriculum Dimensions are Indigenous history and culture, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and Sustainability" (ACARA, 2010c). There are four stages in the development process of the Kindergarten to Year 12 Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2009c).

Curriculum shaping stage – This involves the development of the draft shape paper, where expert advice is requested and endorsed by ACARA's board for public feedback. This creates the final shape paper, consisting of an outline of the Australian Curriculum including design advice for learning areas

Curriculum writing stage – A team consisting of writers, curriculum experts, stakeholders and ACARA curriculum staff developing the Australian Curriculum. The information includes content description and achievement standards. The team refers to national and international research on curriculum, while also referring to current state and territory curriculums. After public feedback and necessary modifications, the Australian Curriculum for the particular learning area is ready for publication.

Implementation stage – Implementation plans are developed by ACARA, school, and state/territory curriculum authorities when the Australian Curriculum is delivered online.

Evaluation and review stage – Implementation feedback is reviewed carefully via processes that monitor this information.

The Australian Curriculum is methodically structured to enable the reader to locate valuable information effortlessly. Each KLA contains a statement of rationale, aims, content structure and descriptions, and achievement standards (ACARA, 2010a).

Statement of rationale – Why the content chosen is important and outlines the broad scope and sequence

Aims – What students will achieve from this subject

Content structure/organisation – How the subject is arranged/designed, and the information involved

Content description – Specifies what teachers are expected to teach for each learning area, year level, and also provides the scope and sequence of teaching. For example Kindergarten to Year 10 English consists of three (3) strands, Language, Literature and Literacy. Within each strand there are certain outcomes that need to be achieved before moving onto the next stage. ACARA (2010b) advises that “ it is imperative that all young Australians are provided with an education that enables them to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens”. For example

Year level – Kindergarten

Strand – Language

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Outcome – “ High-quality, culminating demonstrations of significant learning in context” (Spady, 1994, p. 18 as cited in Killen, 2003, p. 41).

“ Analysis of information – (learning, discussing and acknowledging) different languages are spoken by family, classmates, community and in the media (EKLNG1)”

“ Expressive language – (recognising) Language, images, body language, and facial expressions can be used to express and range of feelings and emotions (EKLNG2)”

Achievement standards – describes the quality of learning such as the understanding, knowledge and skills students are required to achieve at each year level.

Below are specific outcomes that should be achieved by Kindergarten students.

Listening and speaking – Students will listen and respond appropriately...

Reading – Students recognise several types of print texts...

Writing – Students write short texts of one or two sentences...

The structure of the Australian Curriculum is not an entirely new concept, it has been collated from different components of the eight state and territory curriculums currently in operation. However, ACARA has delved further into dissecting each subject and establishing it as an entity on its own, added General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Dimensions while the structure

within the learning areas remains consistent with curriculums from the states/territories in order to assist teachers with transitioning easily towards a 'familiar' Australian Curriculum.

In comparison, schools in New South Wales use the Kindergarten to Year 10 Curriculum Framework as the foundation of what, how and when the content is to be taught. However, the NSW Board of Studies acknowledges that schools and teachers take responsibility for the way in which the content is organised and delivered (NSW-BOS, 2002a). NSW primary teachers use the NSW Primary Curriculum Foundation Statements to find out what needs to be taught in each subject. The NSW Curriculum comprises of six KLA's for primary school and eight KLA's for secondary school. The six subjects within the NSW Primary Curriculum are English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) and Creative arts (NSW-BOS, 2002b).

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

"Curriculum must be of direct relevance to the child's social, cultural, environmental and economic context and to his or her present and future needs and take full account of the child's evolving capacities; teaching methods should be tailored to the different needs of different children" (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 1 as cited in Sullivan & Keeney, 2008, p. 38).

The Australian Curriculum has utilised the theory or philosophy of outcomes-based education (OBE) as its foundation. The Australian Curriculum is

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organised in a manner that clearly describes what is essential for students to be able to do and provides necessary instruction and assessment to make sure students benefit from their learning experiences. Teachers are required to provide high quality education by using appropriate real world experiences and personalised instruction enabling learners to gain the knowledge and skills required for the future (Spady, 1994, p. 1 as cited in Killen, 2003). This can be achieved through differentiated instruction.

Differentiation is a philosophy of teaching and is a teachers' response to learners needs. The aim is to focus on cognitive, language, creative, physical, social and emotional domains to provide access, equity and support for all students by guiding instructions that align with the standards of the curriculum (Marsh, 2010). Lo & Pong (2002, p. 3 as cited in Marsh, 2010, p. 252) stated that “ there are different ways of knowing and different ways of learning”. Teachers have a responsibility to be aware of their students' differences and act appropriately whether it involves modifying the lesson plan, developing activities that focus on students' strengths, providing the necessary scaffolding that will assist students in reaching their full potential or creating different levels and categories of assessments (Brady & Kennedy, 2010). As a result, the Australian Curriculum supports teachers, acknowledges the diversity of students and allows for greater scope. This includes differentiated classrooms and the dimensions of differentiation which include content, learning activities and assessment (Marsh, 2010).

Analysis of the Australian Curriculum clearly demonstrates that certain theorists and models have had a great influence over its structure and development. The first being Tyler's (1949) objectives model “ a logical <https://assignbuster.com/definitions-of-curriculum-its-purpose-and-how-it-is-developed/>

sequence of development” (Brady & Kennedy, 2010, p. 121) which poses four central questions in which the Australian Curriculum has answered.

“ What educational purposes should the school seek to attain (strand)

What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes (outcomes)

How can these experiences be effectively organised (sequence of outcomes)

How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained” (Wiles, 2005, p. 55). (achievement standards)

Piaget (1970, 1977), Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Bruner have all had substantial influence over the Australian Curriculum through their theories of cognitive development. Piaget’s stages of development and cognitive theory states students construct knowledge for themselves and this knowledge occurs primarily in the child’s interaction with physical objects.

“ Students think, act, and feel differently at different stages of development, and teachers need to respond to the differences as they plan” (Emmer et al., 2006; Evertson et al., 2006 as cited in Eggen et al., 2010, p. 357).

In addition, Vygotsky’s research indicated “ that construction of knowledge occurs when it is first socially constructed and then internalised” (Eggen et al., 2010, p. 49). Bruner’s theory is closely related to Piaget’s theory, although Bruner believed it is best for learners to discover facts and relationships for themselves through their own past experiences and existing knowledge (Learning-Theories, 2008). Through the Australian Curriculum

teachers are able to incorporate active engagement with the students to develop their creativity and problem solving skills which in turn will increase motivation, autonomy, responsibility and independence. “ Educators now see learning as an active process in which learners construct their own knowledge, instead of seeing as students passively receiving information. Piaget strongly contributed to this constructivist view of thinking” (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010, p. 43).

Bloom (1956) and Krathwohl’s (1956) taxonomies of objectives are used as tools for successful delivery of the curriculum. Blooms taxonomy provides teachers with a better understanding towards students’ thinking, decision making and problem solving processes (Eggen et al., 2010), while Krathwohl’s taxonomy provides teachers with direction and an understanding concerning student’s behaviour and responses. Blooms taxonomy consists of “ six levels of intellectual behaviour important in learning. They are remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating” (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2009) and Krathwohl’s taxonomy is “ ordered according to the principle of internalisation.

Internalisation refers to the process whereby a person’s affect toward an object passes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is ‘ internalised’ and consistently guides or controls the person’s behaviour” (Seels & Glasgow, 1990, p. 28 as cited in Huitt, 2001). For example, understanding the content and moving from one outcome to the next.

Havighurst (1972) identifies “ three sources of developmental tasks, physical maturation, personal sources and pressures of society” (McNair, n. d). These

human developments are addressed through the General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum.

How the Australian Curriculum relates to 21st century learners

Catering for the 21st century learner requires an understanding that a child beginning school in the Year 2010 will eventually complete primary and secondary studies in the Year 2022. Trying to envisage the future is quite difficult, although certain measures are incorporated throughout the Australian Curriculum for example through the General Capabilities; to assist the student of today to be better prepared for future changes such as social (terrorism), economic (housing crisis), environmental (global warming) or technological (computer and communication advancement) issues. These wicked problems are embedded into society, and as a society we have a responsibility to educate the next generation and provide them with the necessary tools to deal with these issues.

Within the NSW K -10 Curriculum Framework, part of the broad learning outcomes requires students to “ understand and appreciate the physical, biological and technological world and make responsible and informed decisions about it. Understand and appreciate diverse social, cultural, linguistic, political, geographical and historical contexts and participate as active and informed citizens” (NSW-BOS, 2002a, p. 4). It is apparent that the KLA’s incorporate specific outcomes that cater for 21st century concerns. For example, the subject of HSIE is to “ enhance each student’s sense of personal, community, national and global identity and enables them to participate effectively in maintaining and improving the quality of their

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society and environment” (NSW-BOS, 2002b, p. 3). This is also evident within the subject of PDHPE, which requires students to “ develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, values and attitudes students need to lead healthy, active and fulfilling lives, consisting of healthy choices, self and relationships” (NSW-BOS, 2002b, p. 3).

In comparison, ACARA has incorporated into the Australian Curriculum; the General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Dimensions to “ ensure that Australian students are able to learn across disciplines and build new expertise, as well as function effectively in the workplaces of the 21st century” (ACARA, 2010b). However Marsh (2010, p. 288) argues “ that the new National Curriculum subjects will not give a major emphasis to values education.” Values influence the way we behave and interact with society (Marsh, 2010). For example the NSW Curriculum incorporates values via the subject HSIE, but the Australian Curriculum has split HSIE into separate subjects of History and Geography. “ Studies of Society and Environment in Australian schools is an ideal subject to incorporate values issues because of the wide range of materials available and the integrated nature of the subject. However this might all be coming to an end in the near future” (Marsh, 2010, p. 278).

Conclusion

The Australian Curriculum is a broad plan of the what, how and when of teaching, learning and assessment, it is the foundation for learners, students and teachers and is influenced by the many stakeholders that want a share/input in its direction. The development of the Australian Curriculum goes through many processes and stages to reach the final draft and <https://assignbuster.com/definitions-of-curriculum-its-purpose-and-how-it-is-developed/>

includes many components that address teaching, learning and assessment. Throughout this paper it is evident that the Australian Curriculum has been modelled on Tyler's curriculum model, is influenced by the theories of teaching and learning from several theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and Havighurst, also Bloom and Krathwohl's taxonomies. In addition, we must keep in mind that by understanding our students changing nature and their diversities, incorporating values education, and addressing the constant changes in society, the Australian Curriculum has the opportunity to be in the forefront of teaching and learning in the 21st Century.