

## **Towards a global curriculum**

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Does anyone get the feeling that CSFII (the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework) is just CSFI that has had a few nips and tucks? It seems to me that every couple of years, just after teachers, students and parents have become used to the curriculum they have, it gets changed. Teachers then have to spend the next couple of years getting used to new standards, new frameworks and new assessment regimes. But if we step back a little bit and look at the curriculum in its entirety, it hasn't changed much at all. We still have English, Mathematics, the Arts, Health and Physical Education, Languages Other than English, Science, Studies of Society and Environment and Technology, just like we used to. In the 1980s it was Frameworks, also similar, in the broad general sense, to what we have now.

For someone like me, who has been lucky enough to see education systems in operation all around the world, the same thing happens everywhere else. Thus the curriculum in Australia is similar in perhaps 95% of subject areas to the curriculum in China, in South Africa, in the USA, the UK and Fiji. Not only is it similar now, but it always has been. Michael Barber in the United Kingdom has argued that if we replaced Technology Studies in the curriculum of today with Classical Studies, then the curriculum of 1900 and 2000 would seem almost the same.

We wonder why many young people fail to see the relevance of what they are taught, why they become difficult to teach and why they drop out. The truth of the matter is that students are not any more or less involved with the curriculum than their parents were. The curriculum of today is perhaps no more or less relevant than it was when their parents went to school, but back then only one in three of their parents completed school. In those days, people were able to get jobs that didn't require high qualifications, jobs in banks, in factories, on the land. Now those jobs are limited or non-existent and what jobs that are available to those who drop out have very low pay.

Perhaps it is time for us to refocus our attention as to what the curriculum is intended to do. For more than a hundred years the curriculum content has been the main subject of discussion. Now I think we are beginning to understand that, if we are to make every student a success, then the student should be the subject and we have to match our teaching and our curriculum to their capabilities and needs.

It would seem to me, that perhaps we should consider having a curriculum that, for at least fifty per cent of the time, focuses on what makes us human, perhaps twenty per cent of the time focuses on what makes us Australian, and for thirty per cent of the time focuses on the content that is important to us at the time. Thus the first fifty per cent of the curriculum could be considered the global curriculum, because it would be equally relevant to students, no matter what country they lived. Twenty per cent of the time would be spent on issues of relevance to us as a nation, which wouldn't change much over time. Thirty per cent of our time would be spent on the content knowledge that helps us to become employable, that prepares us for university and so on. This content would change as times change, with the introduction of computer studies being the perfect example. Thus we might have to review the content curriculum on a regular basis, the national curriculum perhaps once in a while and the global curriculum hardly ever. Surely this would be a much easier process than the two years of debate leading to CSF II.

In our book *Global Classrooms: Strategies for Engaging Students in Third Millennium Schools* (Hawker Brownlow, 1999), George Otero and I discuss the starting point for a global curriculum. We argue it should be what the curriculum hopes to provide in terms of student needs. Perhaps the best starting point for this is to consider the skills and attitudes that we want young people to have in our communities in the future. We argue that an education charter for the Third Millennium should be based upon four pillars:

- Education for Survival (once the whole curriculum, now the building block for everything else);
- Understanding our place in the world (how my own particular talents can be developed and used);
- Understanding Community (how I and others are connected); and
- Understanding our personal responsibility (understanding that being a member of the world community carries responsibilities as well as rights).

These four pillars join to create a new set of critical learning elements, a set of third millennium skills and attitudes. Those listed below are a first go at trying to construct a list of elements that might help to form a new curriculum for the future. They are not meant to be all-encompassing because individual schools will need to design a program that suits their own circumstances. The four areas of concern might build a curriculum something like this:

#### **Education for survival**

- Literacy and numeracy
- Technological capability
- Communication skills
- Planning and development capability
- Critical thinking skills
- Adaptability

#### **Understanding our place in the world**

- Exchange of ideas
- Work experience and entrepreneurship
- Awareness and appreciation of cultures
- Social, emotional and physical development
- Creative capability
- Vision and open mindedness
- Awareness of one's choices

#### **Understanding community**

- Teamwork capability
- Citizenship studies
- Community service
- Community education
- Global awareness and education
- Development of student assets

#### **Understanding our personal responsibility**

- Commitment to personal growth through lifelong learning
- Development of a personal value system
- Leadership capabilities
- Commitment to community and global development
- Commitment to personal and community health

We are not suggesting that the current curriculum be overturned or thrown out, but that teachers of the subject areas identified in CSF II should consider how to develop the human skills while teaching their subject. This can only be done if the focus moves from content to student and we think of innovative ways of engaging students.