

Documenting Curriculum

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Documenting Curriculum at Sample Secondary College

1. Preface

*'Schools that are successful in a standards-based accountability environment have a strong focus on aligning curriculum with the standards on which the accountability system is based.'*¹

Sound curriculum planning and documentation is a fundamental requirement for school success. However, in underperforming schools it is not unusual to find that there is sketchy and inconsistent articulation and documentation of the existing curriculum and poor mapping of the curriculum with VELS or any other standards framework. This is particularly the case in relation to Years 7-10 curriculum².

Some of the consequences of poorly planned and documented curriculum are that:

- students have uncertain exposure to essential learning as they progress through and beyond Years 7-10;
- students experience duplication in topics and become disengaged;
- students who thought they were doing well in one level discover that they were poorly prepared for the next level
- there is a large variation across classrooms (and schools) in what students learn and how much academic challenge they face
- new teachers do not have a curriculum document to guide them in their teaching;
- inter-faculty and cross-faculty collaboration and sharing of resources is impeded;
- possibilities for curriculum integration and extension are not realised;
- the timetable becomes fragmented and fought over annually as there is no overall plan for curriculum delivery;
- teacher quality and consistency of curriculum delivery suffers when teachers leave;
- developing strategies for students who are behind is treated as a problem for each teacher to solve alone; and
- new programs and initiatives are adopted with little analysis of how they fit in with or replace what is being done already.

This paper briefly describes the process adopted at Sample Secondary College to review and document its curriculum provision at Years 7-10. External support was provided to manage the curriculum analysis, curriculum and timetable restructuring, and curriculum documentation process.

2. Identifying current curriculum provision and documentation

A mapping of the current curriculum provision in Years 7-10 is required so that the curriculum provided to students can be analysed in terms of its:

- adherence to state-wide curriculum frameworks and standards
- coherence
- time allocation adequacy
- description adequacy.

¹ Corallo and McDonald (2002)

² These observations are supported by the recent report (OGSE 2010) which notes that of the 69 reported schools that underwent an extended diagnostic review in 2009, lack of curriculum documentation was an issue in 48% of cases.

2.1. Mapping current curriculum

The current timetable was used to identify subjects/units provided to students at each of the years 7-10. Titles of subjects/units and their time allocation were documented against the VELs framework for each term.

Outcome: A Curriculum Provision Chart showing Years 7-10 subjects/units and their time allocation.

2.2 Analysing current curriculum provision

The Curriculum Provision Chart was analysed to identify gaps in provision, duplication in provision, the adequacy of time allocations to subjects/units, both vertically and horizontally.

Outcome: Gaps and duplication identified, breadth and depth reviewed, time allocations reviewed.

2.3 Revising the curriculum

Suggestions for changing the broad curriculum provision (e.g. introduction of new subjects/units and suggestions for integrated units) were canvassed, as were priorities for changing timetable allocations (e.g. introduction of a homeroom time, core studies to be timetabled in the morning, introduction of an extension program, reduce sport time, etc.).

Proposals for re-shaping the curriculum discussed and agreed with the goal to have all areas of curriculum represented, appropriately sequenced and given a realistic time allocation; opportunities for integration identified and pastoral care time allocated. Faculty and year level discussions, written feedback, staff meetings, student leadership meeting, school council and key committee meetings were used to seek responses and arrive at a consolidated view about the re-framed curriculum provision. A rationale for, and a description of, timetable arrangements (e.g. doubles, semester units, selection requirements, etc.) was documented.

Implications for staff allotments were explored and a process for allotment development was adopted. A timetabling expert and timetabling software was used to develop the most efficient timetable.

Outcome: A Years 7-10 Curriculum Map documenting the overall time allocation to each learning area at each Year level 7-10. For example:

Learning Area	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
English	4 periods	4 periods	5 periods	5 periods
Mathematics	4	4	5	5
Humanities	3	3	2 (History, Geography, Economics)	2 (History, Geography, Economics)

Etc.

3. Curriculum documentation

3.1 Analysis of curriculum documentation

An analysis of current curriculum documentation was conducted to reveal:

- the extent of curriculum documentation
- the format/consistency of curriculum documentation
- the level of detail in documentation
- the extent to which documentation conforms with state-wide curriculum frameworks and standards

- the extent to which documentation corresponds with the revised Curriculum Map.

Faculties tabled their documentation of all subjects/units taught at the school. This process at Sample SC revealed:

- gaps in documentation
- a lack of consistency in the format and detail of documentation
- confusion in terminology used to describe the curriculum.

Outcome: A clear picture of documentation strengths and short-comings (i.e. inconsistencies, gaps, description inadequacy) and of how the documentation matched the new Year 7-10 Curriculum Map.

3.2 Scope and sequence development

Within the context of the new Year 7-10 Curriculum Map, each learning area reviewed and refined the scope and sequence of its program. (Scope refers to curriculum content and sequence refers to the order in which the content is to be taught term by term and year by year.) A uniform format was used to document each learning areas scope and sequence.

Outcome: A new Curriculum Scope and Sequence Chart that provides an overview of the curriculum to be delivered in each learning area each term from Years 7-10. This is a 'big picture' capture of the school's curriculum. The unit/topic content is used as the descriptor in the Scope and Sequence Chart.

The format for documenting the scope and sequence of a learning area was as follows:

Sample Secondary College			
Scope and Sequence Chart for			
Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*
etc	etc	etc	etc

3.3 Documentation of units of work

The college did not have a consistent format for documenting units of work, and there were gaps in the documentation. Learning areas documented their units of work employing a common format with the following features:

- Content
- Major resources
- Key student/class activities
- Student 'products'
- Learning outcomes:
 - Understanding and knowledge to be acquired
 - Skills to be demonstrated
- Assessment

The level of detail expected is what would go into a curriculum handbook for students and parents to give them an indication of the curriculum students will experience.

Outcome: Consistently documented units of work covering all the units provided to students in all learning areas in Years 7-10.

The format for documenting the teaching units in each learning area was as follows:

Sample Secondary College – Teaching Unit Summary	
Topic/Unit Learning area Year level Term.....	
Content	What will students be studying? As in scope and sequence chart but further elaborated (one paragraph). (E.g. Students will be instructed in how to execute a forward and backwards roll. Students will be studying the solar system.)
Major Resources	What will be introduced in to the classroom in order to facilitate student learning and activity? List the major resources that will be used; those without which the unit could not be taught. (E.g. photography kit, class set of a text, film, guest speaker, simulation game, etc.)
Key student/class activities	What will students be doing? List the central or defining learning activities in which the students will be engaged. (E.g. field trips, reading a common text, engaging in group or individual research, etc.)
Student 'Products'	What will the students have to show for their efforts? What is the culmination of students' efforts? (E.g. models, work folios, oral presentation, performances, research reports, website, etc.) Many of these 'products' will form the basis for assessment of performance.
Learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and knowledge to be acquired – as defined in VELS What new knowledge and understandings is this unit designed to promote? • Skills – as defined in VELS What new skills are this unit designed to promote? <p>Terms such as 'establish', 'consolidate' and 'enhance' could be used to add further description to the knowledge and skills to be acquired.</p>
Links to VELS	To what stages and standards outlined in VELS do the content and learning outcomes relate?
Major Assessment Tools	What will you use to gauge the students' success in achieving the stipulated outcomes? List a variety of assessment tools. What criteria will be used to measure performance levels?
Outcomes/Assessment Criteria	

3.4 Unit/Lesson Plans (teachers' working documents)

Unit lesson plans are elaborations of unit plans that help to guide the teacher when preparing for and taking the unit. Individual teachers have their own ways of documenting how they will conduct a lesson. Lesson plans generally outline what will be done and how a lesson will proceed so that the learning outcomes set for a unit are achieved. They would normally describe what needs to be done at key stages in a lesson.

<p>For example, a lesson plan could describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategies for introducing the topic and generating student interest and capturing their enthusiasm to engage with the planned learning • strategies for identifying what students know about the topic and any misinformation they may have • teaching tools that the teacher will use to explain or get students to explore key concepts or ideas • the instructional groups to be used (whole class, pairs, small group), when they will be used and for what activities • any handouts that will be used to help guide student learning activities and at what point in the lesson they will be distributed • key questions that the teacher will pose • what work students will be undertaking and how this will be done • what products students will produce as a consequence of their efforts • how the lesson will be concluded • what, if any, homework will be set to support the teaching and learning focus of the lesson

4. References

Corallo, C. and McDonald, D. (2002) *What Works with Low-Performing Schools: A Review of Research*, AEL
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OGSE (2010) *Analysis of Extended Diagnostic Review Reports*, Office for Government School Education, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schoolimprovement/default.htm