

Curriculum Development and Planning in Victoria: Ministerial Paper No. 6

Victoria. Education Department, 1984

Overview of the document

19 page document issued by the Minister of Education (Robert Fordham) in September 1984. The document contains a preamble and two sections: one on “Policies and Directions”, the other on “Guidelines for School Councils”. The document follows earlier Ministerial papers issued between 1982 and 1984 including: Decision Making in Victorian Schools (Ministerial Paper No. 1, March 1983); The School Improvement Plan (Ministerial Paper No. 2, October 1982); The State Board of Education (Ministerial Paper No. 3, March 1983); School Councils (Ministerial Paper No. 4, April 1983); and Regional Boards of Education (Ministerial Paper No. 5, September 1984).

Keywords

Access; success; effective access; real access; knowledge; understanding; competencies; multicultural society; democratic; community; cultural background; opportunities; achievable goals.

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Summary of Contents

FOREWORD

- States that “This Paper on curriculum, which was developed with the assistance of the State Board of Education, outlines in greater detail the kind of education which should be provided if all young people are to participate fully and productively in our rapidly changing world.” (p. 3)
- Acknowledges that Victorian schools offer excellent programs, but stresses that “too often students experience failure”. (p. 3)
- Notes that the paper is intended as a guide for schools in developing, planning and reviewing curriculum.

1. PREAMBLE:

- Notes that the paper takes up the issues of curriculum raised in Ministerial Paper No. 1: Decision Making in Victorian Schools (a very short document which provided the broad vision on two issues: “Schools and Curriculum” and “Devolution and Shared Responsibility Through Representative Bodies”).
- Notes that “Recent amendments to the Education Act 1958 make school councils responsible for school policy within guidelines to be issued by the Minister” (p. 7) and that this paper is intended to provide those guidelines.

SECTION A: POLICIES AND DIRECTIONS

2. GOVERNMENT POLICY

- Sets out Government policy, noting that for over a decade Victorian schools have been assuming increasing responsibility for the development of their own curricula, and that this document explains how policy applies to school curriculum.
- Acknowledges that for programs to be expanded, schools need to be adequately resourced.

3. WHAT CURRICULUM INVOLVES

- Argues that curriculum refers not only to the content of courses but also “the effects on student learning of such matters as staffing policy, facilities, teaching and learning styles, school organisation, and assessment and reporting processes”. (p. 8)
- Notes that “every curriculum is also an expression of values” and argues that if the values are explicit they can “provide a firm basis for curriculum planning”. (p. 8)
- Notes the difficulties of school communities reaching agreement about values but stresses the importance of identifying common values and finding ways of reconciling differences when values are in conflict.

4. THE CENTRAL PURPOSES OF SCHOOLING

- Notes that we are living in a time of increasing change.
- Proposes that the central purpose of schooling is “to prepare young people to enter fully into the life of their society”. (p. 8)
- Argues that schools must provide a broad general education for all students.
- Argues that a school’s educational policy should “include a statement of the knowledge, competencies and values the school will seek to develop. The curriculum is the medium for achieving these goals”. (p. 8)

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

- Notes that responsibility for curriculum is shared between central authorities and schools.
- Notes that schools can expect to be provided with a framework from which they can devise curriculum programs and that this is provided by this document.
- Stresses the importance of decision making to occur at the school level, stating “Unless the school is a place where significant decisions are made, it cannot provide a model which will assist in preparing young people for life in a democratic community”. (p. 9)
- Advances a collaborative approach in which the whole school community, including teaching staff, parents and students, contribute their views and help shape the sorts of programs and the type of learning.

- States that “Consensus about curriculum policy and its implementation is likely to grow best out of ongoing discussion and negotiation between all the parties concerned”. (p. 10)

6. AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

- Argues that school councils should make use of the expertise of teaching staff when making decisions about curriculum.
- Notes that support will be available from government and the education department in the form of curriculum materials and that support will also be available from the regions.

7. APPLICABILITY OF GUIDELINES

- Notes that Section B of this document summaries the guidelines for schools in developing their educational policy, but that schools may also include additional principles.

SECTION B: GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL COUNCILS

8. FUNDAMENTAL EXPECTATIONS

- Proposes that “Schools need to establish clearly-defined objectives and periodically review those objectives to ensure that they are contributing to the achievement of long-term goals.” (p. 11)
- States that “the Government’s fundamental expectation of schools is that they further the knowledge, understanding and competencies necessary for young people to be able to:
 - a) Participate effectively in the life of a multicultural society;
 - b) Undertake worthwhile work; and
 - c) Play an active role in the processes through which our society is regulated and improved.” (p. 12)
- Argues that the processes of schools themselves need to be democratic and involve parents and the wider community “in planning and reviewing the school’s curriculum policies”. (p. 12)

9. ACCESS AND SUCCESS

- Argues that all students should have access to educational experiences that are “challenging, purposeful and comprehensive and that result in all students improving their educational achievement”. (p. 12)
- Expresses concern with finding ways of overcoming disadvantage. States that “formal access is not enough” (p. 13) and that schools need to provide “real access” by taking into account factors such as cultural and social background and differential learning styles.
- Views sequential learning (building upon previous learning) as critical to the provision of “effective access”. Also notes the importance of ensuring that courses “are appropriate for, and reflect the lives, values and experiences of both boys and girls and of students from various social and cultural backgrounds”. (p. 13)
- Discusses other dimensions of access such as collaborative decisions about the allocation of students to classes and ensuring that measures of ability are not used to stream students into particular classes.
- Argues that success for all students depends upon real access and recognises achievement as something that is not simply measurable in terms of examination scores but is based on improvements in educational achievements.

- Argues that school curricula needs to be planned on the basis that all students have the capacity to continue learning and if students do not accomplish learning goals then they should be assisted to overcome difficulties. The document states that “low expectations lead to low performance, whereas high expectations encourage students to succeed”. (p. 14)
- Proposes that in providing access for all students, schools should provide a “caring and supportive environment”, make sure that students understand “what they are expected to accomplish” and ensure that policies do not emphasise comparison between students.
- Notes that access and success will be progressively extended to students with disabilities and those who have had problems in schooling. This will involve adaptation of teaching styles.
- Notes that students who transfer between schools should not be disadvantaged.

10. THE SCHOOL PROGRAM: APPROACHES TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

- States that “Approaches to teaching and learning should be suited to the individual needs, abilities and cultural understandings of students and to the objectives of the course”. (p. 15)
- Argues that students should: “develop a sense of themselves as learners”; enjoy learning; develop responsibility for their own learning; “gain satisfaction and confidence from their developing abilities”; “learn in a variety of ways”; and “relate learning to action”. (pp. 15-16)
- Notes that schools should consider issues of gender, class and ethnic background and where possible should develop bilingual programs for students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

11. THE SCHOOL PROGRAM: AREAS OF LEARNING

- Stipulates that schools ensure there are connections between different learning areas but is non-prescriptive about the way schools should organise programs.
- Notes that curriculum content should take into account those areas of knowledge which are “most relevant to the lives and needs of particular students and groups of students” and those areas of knowledge that are “most important, and most likely to enable people to assume power over their own lives”. (p. 16)
- Proposes that curriculum should cover the following seven learning areas:
 - Language and mathematics – including LOTE
 - The world and its people
 - Participation in Australian society
 - Literature and the arts
 - Personal fulfilment
 - Technical competence
 - Science, Technology and the Environment.