

Focusing on Outcomes: Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting

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Overview of the document

130 page document organised into three sections: curriculum provision, assessment, and reporting. The document is designed to provide guidance to schools and teachers regarding the move towards, and implementation of, outcomes-based education. Each section includes illustrative case studies from Western Australian schools, which include samples of assessed student work and assessment/reporting proformas.

Keywords

Outcomes-based education; Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 (1998); Outcomes and Standards Framework (1996); policy requirements; assessment and reporting of outcomes; curriculum provision; managing the change towards outcomes-based education; review of pedagogy; review of school plans; review of school assessment methods; review of reporting policies and methods; monitoring standards in education; using evidence; portfolios; summative reporting; inclusivity and diversity; student-centred approaches.

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WHY FOCUS ON OUTCOMES?

- Refers to the two key curriculum documents: Curriculum Framework and Outcomes and Standards Framework. Notes that these documents are directly linked to “Learning Area Outcomes” and “serve to inform curriculum provision, assessment and reporting”. (p. 2)
- Argues that frameworks will allow better accountability to students and parents and will help teachers make valid judgements to a range of audiences.
- States that “Outcomes must be the focus for curriculum provision, assessment and reporting.” (p. 2)

- Provides an overview of outcomes-focussed programs and compares them to “content-based programs” and provides an overview of key components in the “transition from content to outcomes”. (p. 4)
- Notes that teachers must consider the implications of the change to outcomes-based education by: “Understanding the outcomes”, “Deciding what needs to change” and “Planning with an outcomes focus”.
- States that a positive staff and parent climate will be necessary for the transition to outcomes based education and offers a dot point overview of the suggestions made in ‘Leading Curriculum Change: A Sourcebook of Ideas for School Leaders’ (Western Australia, Education Department, 1997).

CURRICULUM PROVISION

Introduction

- Emphasises the need for effective planning and monitoring processes in order to achieve effective transition and a “balanced curriculum.” (p. 10)
- Notes that curriculum planning should occur at “the individual student, classroom or whole-school level”. (p. 11)
- Notes that teachers need to organise appropriate structures to cater for individual student needs. Advises that when planning for outcomes-focussed provision, teachers need to review: student achievement, the learning environment, classroom approaches to curriculum provision, pedagogy, and the school plan.

Review Student Achievement

- Argues that planning for outcomes-based education should concentrate on “what it is that students achieve (what they can show they can do or understand) and what they need to do in order to make progress in relation to the outcomes”. (p. 12)
- Discusses the individual focus of planning and separates the planning process into classroom planning (individual classes) and school planning (developing a school curriculum plan).
- Discusses the planning cycle and notes that ongoing monitoring and assessment is integral and planning should focus on “developing and facilitating” the individual progress of each student. (p. 13)
- Emphasises that when planning, teachers should develop tasks that pride peer interaction, a variety of learning and assessment strategies, meaningful and relevant tasks and opportunities for students to demonstrate outcomes over a range of levels. Also notes that teachers should be able to demonstrate accountability through their practices.

Review the learning environment

- Argues that curriculum provision should involve a consideration of the overall teaching and learning setting. Suggests the following as aspects of the learning environment which could potentially be reviewed:
 - Working relationships between staff, students, parents, and the community.
 - Management of student behaviour.
 - Issues regarding inclusivity (including gender, culture, socioeconomic status, and other individual differences).
 - Access to resources.
 - Student grouping and arrangement in classrooms.
 - Time allocated for curriculum provision.
 - Learning opportunities outside the school.
 - Opportunities for students to negotiate the curriculum.

Review classroom approaches to curriculum provision

- Notes a shift from syllabus content delivered by Education Department towards content chosen by individual schools departments and learning teams.
- Suggests that quality curriculum provision will be a balance of the following three approaches:
 1. Subject content approach: emphasising short term goals and focusing “on students learning factual knowledge and gaining basic skills.” (p. 15)
 2. Competencies approach: emphasising longer-term goals and concerned with “what cognitive skills and affective attributes students should have when they leave school”, focusing on developing higher-order skills (such as critical thinking and complex problem solving) and linking understanding, processes and competencies across learning areas. (p. 15)
 3. Role performance approach: emphasising real-life and knowledges that may be required out-of-school through providing real-life learning situations that allow students to demonstrate “culminating understandings and skills”. (p. 15)

Review Pedagogy

- Notes that an outcomes focus requires student-centred approaches and that students feel ‘ownership’ of joint-planned learning activities.
- Notes the following regarding the question “How do students best learn?”:
 - Teachers should draw upon students’ interests when planning learning activities.
 - Teachers should consider individual learning styles and the socio-cultural contexts of their students.
 - A supportive learning environment is conducive to learning.
 - Students should be able to negotiate the curriculum and reflect on their learning.
- Notes the following regarding the question “What is good teaching practice?”:
 - Goals about learning, and relationships between outcomes and learning, should be made clear to students.
 - Learning experiences should cater for differences in student learning styles and abilities.
 - Tasks should be meaningful and provide opportunities for both independent and collaborative learning.
 - Learning should recognise students’ levels of development and facilitate their progress to the next level of outcomes.
- Notes the following regarding the question “How is assessment conducted?”:
 - Assessment should be balanced, “with a focus on criterion-referenced approaches”. (p. 17)
 - Learning experiences should “enable students to demonstrate their abilities over a range of levels”. (p. 17)
 - A range of monitoring techniques should be used.
 - Assessments should be meaningful to students and parents.
 - Students should be involved in the assessment process.

Review the school plan

- States that “The whole-school planning process needs to include an outcomes-based curriculum provision focus.” (p. 18)
- Suggests that strengths and limitations may be identified in line with the following five guiding statements and questions:
 - Understand diversity: Schools need to gather information about the social, cultural, economic and political context of the school community; inclusive

practices should exist which take into account language, gender, ethnicity and personal characteristics; and cultural diversity should be incorporated into the classroom curriculum.

- Maximise and expand the students' opportunities for learning: Learning experiences should ideally draw upon students' everyday experiences and should expand students' personal views of the world; teachers should consider the "preferred learning styles of different students" (p. 18) in their classrooms; and schools should consider how they will collect students' achievement data and how it will be used.
- Focus on common outcomes while catering for the differing needs of students: Teachers and schools should consider the outcomes measured in the Curriculum Framework and also consider the outcomes that are ignored; and teachers and schools need to consider whether they should devise "outcomes that are appropriate for your students but outside the frameworks". (p. 19)
- Plan access for all students to broad and balanced learning experiences: Schools and teachers need to consider how time is allocated for students to make progress in achieving the outcomes; what competencies transfer across the learning areas; how explicit teaching of competencies will be integrated into classroom practice; and how learning experiences are enriched by the inclusion of Aboriginal studies, cultures and language.
- Accommodate the continuous and integrated nature of learning: Links need to be made across learning areas and between in-and-out-of-school learning; and schools and teachers need to consider how learning can be made continuous from one year to the next and one developmental stage to the next.

Case Studies:

- Overviews the following case studies:
 1. Introducing a multi-age group approach – Sawyers Valley Primary School.
 2. Review the learning environment – Carnarvon Senior High School.
 3. A student-centred approach – Belmont Senior High School.
 4. Collaborative problem solving teams – Willandra Primary School.
 5. A collaborative approach – Warnbro Senior High School.
 6. Review Pedagogy – Armadale Senior High School.
 7. Managing the change process: beginning the movement to an outcomes approach – Hedland Senior High School.

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

- Notes that assessment of student learning in an outcomes-focused approach is an ongoing process that "centres on describing individual students' learning progress". (p. 50)
- Advises that using assessment information, teachers should make: on-balanced judgements, informed reports to students and parents, and planning decisions to direct future curriculum provision.
- States that "Identification of students at educational risk is part of monitoring individual student learning and planning for improvement." (p. 50)
- Notes that assessment should:
 - Identify students' achievement in relation to outcomes.
 - Allow students to plan and set goals for their learning.
 - Motivate students and improve their learning.
 - Allow schools and teachers to better plan and improve their effectiveness.

- Broaden home-school links that enable parents to assist with their children's learning.
- Draws upon Ruth Sutton (1994), stating that “the art of assessment is to find the best fit between purpose, validity, reliability and manageability”. (p. 51)
- Reiterates the importance of: using a variety of assessment techniques and methods; providing clear criteria; appropriate classroom management and time management to facilitate students' achievement; and involving students in assessment and evaluation.
- Advises that teachers need to work in groups and individually to review school and classroom approaches to assessment.

Review classroom approaches to student assessment

- In a review their assessment methods, teachers need to explore the characteristics of both ‘formative’ and summative’ assessment types.
- Teachers need to consider how they will “move between using an assessment practice for individual students, a small group or a whole class” (p. 53) and should understand they will have to frequently change their planning and/or teaching for different contexts and classes.
- Refers to the Curriculum Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines and reiterates importance of using “a variety of evidence” and making “on-balance judgements”. (p. 53)

Using a variety of evidence

- States that “Because of the complexity of outcomes and the diversity of students’ needs, a range of assessment techniques and strategies is required to provide sufficient valid information for teachers to make on-balance judgements.” (p. 54)
- Makes the following points regarding observation:
 - “Observation is probably the most powerful technique that teachers have.” (p. 55)
 - Teachers need to look for patterns in student behaviours to make judgements about their performance.
 - Recording demonstration of outcomes at particular levels will require ongoing observation records.
 - There are many different recording formats (listed) which should be chosen based on the learning activity and which can involve students and support students working at different rates.
 - Observations should be tailored to individual students who may be working at different levels and proceeding at different rates.
- Makes the following points regarding teacher journals:
 - Teachers are encouraged to keep journals or notepads that may be used “to record anecdotal evidence about students’ work” (p. 56) and to identify patterns of development and learning.
 - Journals can take various forms.
 - There are two ways main ways of recording observations in journals: by noting interesting and significant behaviour against a criterion-reference format; and by “identifying a particular child, area, activity or time of day for deliberate ‘targeting’.” (p. 56)
- Makes the following points regarding checklists and matrices:
 - Emphasises the importance of recording observations and assessments against specific/relevant criteria and headings.
 - Teachers should use a range of checklists/matrices, including those that incorporate: clear performance indicators; space for descriptive comments in relation to criteria; and ‘grouped criteria’: to demonstrate achievement of

outcomes at various levels and to facilitate judgements in relation to assessment strands and sub-strands.

- Makes the following points regarding criterion referencing:
 - Teachers “need to establish specific assessment criteria that are derived from the relevant outcomes, focused on the learning of specific students and made explicit to those students”. (p. 57)
 - Criteria should: clearly define the task and the elements/components that are being assessed by the task; clarify what achievement at each level looks like in relation to the learning activity; clarify the goals students are striving for; be explicit and provide students with useful feedback; be easy for students to understand; be useful to teachers; and be capable of improving decision making for future criteria validity/reliability.
- Makes the following points regarding self assessment:
 - Self assessment involves “the sharing of responsibility for assessment decisions between the teacher and the student”. (p. 59)
 - Self assessment provides students with opportunity to develop a better understanding of their own skill and knowledge.
 - Students need practice, feedback and structure to do this well.
 - Self assessment allows students to concentrate on the content of learning rather than the processes that produced the outcomes.
 - Well-designed self assessment activities take into account the experiences students bring to the task, the context in which the task takes place and the demands (subject matter) of the task.
 - Discrepancies between students’ self assessment and assessment by others must be discussed with individuals.
- Discusses peer assessment and notes that peer assessment and feedback are commonly linked with self assessment and can considerably enhance self assessment.
- Makes the following points regarding open-ended tasks:
 - Open-ended tasks revolve around problems that invite multiple solutions and many different ways to arrive at solutions.
 - These tasks help students: with problem-solving skills; to apply skills to real-life situations; and to move away from thinking there is only one right answer to a problem.
 - Open-ended tasks: should allow students to enter and exit at their own level; can be used to assess outcomes across a number of learning areas; and can incorporate cross-curriculum competencies.
- Discusses student-teacher conferences and notes that these take significant time but allow students to enjoy a teacher’s individual attention and involve “recognising the dual responsibility of teacher and student in the learning process”. (p. 60)
- Makes the following points regarding teacher-made tests:
 - Tests should be instructional and ongoing, to find out what students still need to learn rather than to test what students did not learn during a task/activity/unit.
 - Tests should capture diversity, allowing students to demonstrate what they know in a wide variety of ways.
 - Several pointers for good teacher made tests include: clarity of the test and the purpose of giving the test; question types should vary from simple to complex and allow for achievement at varying levels; tests must be appropriate for specific classroom contexts; and tests should include a variety of visual, aural and kinaesthetic tasks.
 - Quality feedback should be given to students after tests.

- Makes the following points regarding standardised tests:
 - Standardised tests can be used to support context-specific teacher tests and judgements.
 - Standardised tests are no substitute for teacher judgements and teachers “have a responsibility to question a standardised test’s validity and reliability before deciding to use it”. (p. 62)
 - Teachers should consider a provided list of questions before deciding to use a standardised test. The questions include: Does it relate to the Student Outcome Statements?; Is the test inclusive of all students and does it advantage a particular learning style?; What type of feedback is provided to students?; and Are there opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills?
- Makes the following points regarding Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE):
 - MSE is based on the Curriculum Framework and Student Outcome Statements.
 - MSE testing assesses the performance of students in particular learning areas, in particular school contexts, at particular times.
 - If there is an inconsistency between MSE test results and the teacher judgement, the latter is likely more accurate.
 - MSE tests function as a moderation tool and provides schools with the capacity to compare their students’ performance with state-wide performance.
- Makes the following points regarding student journals:
 - Student journals are essentially private dialogues between individual students and their teacher.
 - Journals can provide information about students’ conceptual understandings, as well as written communication and reflective skills.
 - Journal writing, however, overemphasises writing skills and students should be encouraged to include visual elements.
- Makes the following points regarding portfolios:
 - Portfolios of selected piece of student work provide “clearer and fuller pictures of each student as a learner”. (p. 63)
 - Portfolios can contain a range of assessment types and may cover one or several learning areas.
 - They can be stored in a school and passed on to teachers from one year to the next.
 - Portfolios: provide students with opportunities to discuss and share work with peers and parents; document students’ development and allow students to set new goals; exhibit different learning styles; and position students to make critical choices about what they select to include.
 - Schools and teachers should consider a number of questions when deciding to use portfolios or not, including: How are items to be selected and on what basis?; Will portfolios be evaluated/assessed? If so, how?; Should they be organised across learning areas and across the school?; Will portfolios stay in the school and be passed on from year to year?; and How will they contribute to the overall monitoring of students achievement in relation to Student Outcome Statements?
- Makes the following points regarding Individual Education Programs (IEPs):
 - IEPs are set up to attempt to identify why an individual student “is not achieving certain aspects of his or her personal, social or cognitive development”. (p. 65)
 - A successful IEP will contain elements associated with: analysis of the student’s strengths, to plan how to address the identified learning difficulty; the setting of long and short term goals; being developed around criteria for success and a plan to move/develop student learning in small sequential steps; an outline of

outcomes for teaching/learning in very specific terms that can be understood by student; use of teaching strategies that focus on the student; and evaluation of the teaching/learning from perspectives of both the teacher and the student.

- Makes the following points regarding negotiated evaluation:
 - Draws upon Helen Woodward (1993), who proposes that teachers, students and parents should be involved in the process of evaluation, and should share achievements and expectations when the assessment has occurred. Outlines Woodward's (1993) 'eight steps' for negotiated evaluation between teachers, students and parents.
 - Negotiated evaluation is claimed to allow teachers to: enable specific negotiated behaviours/skills to be observed; have increased accountability; plan more specifically because gaps in students learning and the provision of learning activities are clearer; and negotiate with all students for equal amounts of time, including those less readily noticed in the classroom.

On-balance judgements

- States that "Judgements about students' learning need to be based on teachers' knowledge of the students and their work, gained over time and in a range of situations." (p. 67)
- Advises that teachers should make initial judgements about students' levels of achievement and then refine these over time (emphasises a requirement for evidence over time). Notes that achievement of an outcome cannot be confirmed until a student consistently demonstrates at that particular level.

Review the school assessment policy

- States that "Whole-school policies and procedures on assessment should be outcomes-focused and meet the requirements outlined in Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines." (p. 68)
- Provides several questions for schools to consider. These questions are clustered in relation to the four following requirements, which state that policies must: 1. Support the implementation of an outcomes-focused approach; 2. Be developed collaboratively; 3. Apply assessment processes consistently; and 4. Ensure common judgements are made by teachers within and across schools.

Case studies:

- Overviews the following case studies:
 8. Commencing a self assessment process – East Hamilton Hill Primary.
 9. Involving others in the assessment process – Dampier Primary School.
 10. A buddy system to support assessment – Hainsworth Primary School.
 11. Portfolio assessment – Mindarie Primary School.
 12. Portfolio assessment – Ballajura Community College.
 13. Individual education program – Malibu School.
 14. Negotiated evaluation – Graylands Intensive Language Centre.

REPORTING

Introduction

- States that "Effective reporting requires the use of a broad range of formal and informal, oral and written communication strategies to provide parents with accurate and relevant information about their children's achievement and progress." (p. 96)

- Suggests that reporting should involve two-way communication between home and school, foster home and school partnership, and allow parents to be:
 - Informed about learning outcomes and receive regular evidence.
 - Consulted on effective reporting strategies.
 - Encouraged to contribute knowledge about their children.
 - Included in class or school activities and part of the formative assessment process of their children.
- Notes that schools and teachers need to review current reporting policies and practices in order to plan for approaches consistent with outcomes-focused education.

Review Reporting Methods

- Notes that schools and teachers need to develop close links with parents to inform them how reporting works in an outcomes-focused approach.
- Sets out a number of ways to communicate students' progress to parents, as follows:
 - Interviews: Notes that individual student performance can be conveyed in three-way interviews with parent/s, teacher and student; during interviews, the student's progress is discussed and new learning goals are set; and the outcome of interviews should be recorded for program planning purposes.
 - Information sessions: Notes that parent information sessions allow teachers to discuss the progress of students at various times throughout the year and other sessions or information nights may deliver curriculum or assessment information, or information about other initiatives.
 - Conferences: Notes that conferences can be held routinely or when the need arises; that parents and staff involved with a student are encouraged to make decisions regarding student's progress and future programs; and that parents can request staff they would like to attend conference.
 - Learning journeys: Notes that this involves planned visits to classrooms/schools in which students may be responsible for showing their parents workbooks, files, displayed piece of work, etc. Notes that students must lead the journey and be able to explain to parents what they learnt and accomplished, as well as what they need to improve upon or change in future.
 - Portfolios: Notes that students' portfolios are used for linking school and home communication and are enhanced when they include: an information sheet to explain their purpose; annotated work samples to explain outcomes that students are working toward; a future plan of action for students learning; and student self-evaluations/reflections.
 - Communication books: Notes that these are written forms that move between school and home on a regular basis, to exchange messages with parents about students' progress and can be organised for teacher, student and parents comment.
 - Summative reports: Notes that in an outcomes-based approach, summative reports should indicate the Learning Area Outcomes that the student is achieving and the level.
 - Levels: Notes that the Outcomes and Standards Framework levels allow teachers to create profiles/maps of student performance; that the task of the teacher is to use the Student Outcome Statements to make on-balance judgements about students' based on a range of assessment methods; and that reporting of outcomes/levels must be easily able to be interpreted and understood by parents.
 - Strand performance: Notes that the Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines requires school to report on all learning area strands at least

once every two years. Lists several questions and considerations to help schools determine the cycle of reporting strands.

- Achievement in context: Notes that the Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines indicates that reporting of learning outcomes ‘in context’ should occur where appropriate. Advises that schools should only report in this way if the underlying knowledges, skills or understandings required can only be demonstrated in ‘different contexts’. For example: LOTE (using different languages), Physical Education (skills and outdoor pursuits), The Arts (drama performances, media) Technology and Enterprise (materials such as woodwork, mechanical systems produced).
- Benchmarks and standards: States that “It is the responsibility of the school, in consultation with its community, to decide how non-referenced information, such as benchmarks and standards, are to be communicated in relation to individual student performance.” (p. 101)

Review the school reporting policy

- Advises that when reviewing the school reporting policy, schools need to consider the following main points:
 - The school community’s rationale and philosophy.
 - The school community’s beliefs about the agreed learning outcomes, good teaching, and good assessment and reporting.
 - The framework for making judgements about student performances.
 - The stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities.
 - The plans for implementation, review and maintenance.

Case studies:

- Overviews the following case studies:
 15. Review reporting methods – Sawyers Valley Primary School.
 16. Interviews – Takari Primary School.
 17. Interviews – White Gum Valley Primary School.
 18. Portfolios – Huntingdale Primary School.
 19. Summative reporting – Warnbro Community High School.
 20. Summative reporting – Carnarvon Senior High School.
 21. Summative reporting – Bridgetown High School.