

To: Draft Curriculum Feedback (Freepost)
Ministry of Education
P O Box 1666, Thorndon, WELLINGTON

Section A

Q 1 Institution

School Name: AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
Location: School of Education, Akoranga Campus, North Shore City
Type: University

Q 2 Contributors

Contributors: Group of staff of AUT's School of Education
Teacher educators: 6 (from pre-service [ECE, Primary. & Secondary], in-service, and postgraduate programmes)

Our next 1½ pages of responses and comments are general ones which we feel are more important than our specific comments on questions 3 to 10 which give little feedback about what else is needed.

SOME GENERAL RESPONSES (We see these as more important than Q3 – 10)

a) We appreciate the dilemma between:

- a minimal curriculum (that allows for the empowerment of teachers, recognizes their professionalism, and strengthens school autonomy), and
- a detailed curriculum (that provides guidance and support at the expense of professional freedom).

We believe that while many teachers seek support and guidance, the empowerment principle is very important. We therefore see the need to seek a third way and assume that this might be facilitated by the Ministry providing "support material".

b) We do not see this curriculum as being of much use to parents, it is too general and philosophical. We would prefer a 'parent-friendly' document to be prepared parallel to the curriculum outlining how schools will develop their 'school schemes' from the official curriculum with exemplars showing how this might be done.

c) From our experience in the past we believe that most teachers will read through the first part of the document once, be impressed by it, but then ignore it as they use the pages after page 34 for their planning.

d) We were disappointed that the last half of the curriculum (the foldouts) is merely a list of subject content. This reinforces schooling as, in some learning areas, being learning facts. It reverses the emerging 90s trend where processes as well as content were beginning to be emphasized. It tends to go against any notion of an integrated or holistic curriculum. It makes no attempt to integrate the key competencies within each subject—we believe that each subject has at least four overlapping dimensions:

- knowing (content)
- doing (process)
- thinking (including using language, symbols and text [multiple representations])
- socializing (including managing self, relating to others, and participating and contributing)

And that all these dimensions need to be emphasized in all learning areas.

e) While thinking is generally subdivided into critical, creative and meta-cognitive thinking and these three aspects relate to all subjects, there are many aspects of thinking that relate more specifically to one or two subjects. We believe that as thinking is an addition to previous documents it needs more explanation. For example, we see generalizing, visualizing, and using multiple representations as aspects of thinking that are particularly relevant in mathematics and statistics and see other aspects of thinking as important in other subjects.

f) We see the notion of futures education or education for sustainability as important. We acknowledge that it is implied within the vision (care for the environment), and within the competency participating and contributing (sustainability ... environments.) However, we were disappointed that this theme was not really noticeable in the subject part of the curriculum.

g) In terms of 'knowing' there is a growing awareness that this involves much more than individual rational knowing. We had hoped that a curriculum for the 21st century might at least allude to these to legitimate work within schools. We believe that social knowing, emotional knowing, spiritual knowing (including moral knowing), and the awareness of bodily knowing and intuition all impact on teaching.

h) We were very disappointed to find so little mention of the Treaty, of tikanga Maori, and of the Maori people, we feel these deserve special mention and should not be subsumed under 'diversity'. We see Te Whariki as being an important document that had picked up a maori dimension for all and are disappointed that this curriculum does not build on its strengths.

i) We recognize that we live in a culture that values accountability, however, we see the new curriculum as providing freedoms and therefore approaches to accountability need to be designed so as not to constrain or control schools.

SUPPLEMENTING THE CURRICULUM:

We see one way forward as being the provision of a comprehensive but non-compulsory curriculum to supplement the final version of "The New Zealand Curriculum". Such a document could be used by teachers or schools who lack the confidence or the resources to develop their own curriculum, and as an additional resource for those who are developing their own. We envisage such a curriculum as providing a structured way to help schools build their curriculum expertise.

We assume that such a guide will not be merely 'a curriculum' but will include numerous alternative approaches with rich learning activities showing how the curriculum at each level can be taught and learnt in many ways.

We see the need for suggested learning activities that interweave doing, knowing, thinking, and socialising; and at the same time can be used for multi-level learning.

We are concerned that if a more comprehensive guide document is not available then some levels of schooling will be dominated by the assessment industry's interpretation of curriculum.

Q 3 Intent and direction

Responses and comments

- (i) 4 We agree that the overall intent reaffirms some desired direction, but the direction is not clear and the draft allows schools to stay with the status quo.
- (ii) 2 It informs but puts little pressure on schools to move as much can be interpreted in terms of the past. It also informs by providing a platform for critique
- (iii) 2 It maximises flexibility which we believe is good, but support is needed for schools to use this productively.
- (iv) 3 The direction is rather ambiguous in many respects.

Generally this document, as a statement of intent for future curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand shows no serious willingness to include te Ao maori holistically in the essential learning areas. Maori seemed only to be mentioned twice in the document— How sad! And, what an indictment on the progress of bicultural education in this country. While we accept that a Maori draft may be produced we must acknowledge that most Maori and nearly all other students are in bicultural classrooms.

Q 4 Overall clarity

Responses and comments

- 1 Very easy to understand, though also capable of being interpreted in many ways. One interpretation being that the Ministry has given up. In fact it is too easy to read, as a stand alone document it over simplifies the complexity of curriculum, it is too vague, and could be seen as a way of ‘dumbing down’ current curriculum.

Q 5 Likely Impact

- We believe that the impact will depend on what the Ministry do after the gazetting of the curriculum to encourage development and to provide directions. This is not a negative comment, this draft does begin the discussion process, and we do see it desirable for schools to have more freedom to make professional decisions. And we hope that there is much more to follow this draft.

Q 6 Implementation Challenges

- 1 We believe that schools could make no changes and justify themselves as having implemented this curriculum. We believe, from past experience, that stated aims of education, that the principles in the 1993 framework, and that the various introductory sections of the 90s curriculum documents, are often ignored while teachers focus on lists of topics, and we see this as likely to be repeated with this new curriculum. We see the changes needed as major but, using a simile, we see this document as ‘pushing out a canoe without a paddle’.

Q 7 Clarity of each part

Vision

- 1 But nothing more than motherhood and apple pie. In fact one could argue that currently education disempowers many young people, but even when that is acknowledged nothing much happens!

Principles

- 1 Good principles, nothing really new and no more likely now than in the past to actually be put into practice

Values

- 1 All fine, but teachers would say this is nothing new. One criticism might be the lack of acknowledgement that values are developing and continually changing, both for individuals and for society

Key competencies

- 1 The statement of key competencies is reasonable. They seem more like aims of education that are desirable rather than capabilities that are needed (and possibly could be assessed at various levels!). We feel that many teachers will say “what’s new!” while others with a subject rather than a learner focus may ignore them. It would be interesting to have a curriculum written in terms of these competencies if they are really KEY.

Effective pedagogy

- 1 We accept that how one teaches is as important as what one teaches, but see a two-page summary on ‘effective pedagogy’ as adding nothing to the debate for teachers. It may fit within a parents’ version of a curriculum, but see it as adding little for teachers. More detailed notions about pedagogy might perhaps fit better within supplementary guide material with examples of various learning tasks/activities that might contribute to good learning.

Designing a school curriculum

- 1 The intentions of the curriculum writers are quite clear, but we disagree with many of them. In particular:
 - we see a conflict with ‘planning with a focus on objectives’ and ‘planning for the development of (the key competencies). Education is about growth and development, and the complexity of the educational process means that sometimes objectives are not attained and at other times they are surpassed—failure or achievement. The aim should be to develop all aspects of the child including helping them develop their understanding in subjects and develop towards the aims of education (that is, the key competencies).
 - we do not see the provision special need material or enrichment/acceleration opportunities as important as the provision of rich learning activities that are accessible to all students at the start but are also able to be extended in many directions to suit the needs of the range of learners.
 - we see it as desirable to have all ‘National Education Goals’ and ‘National Administration Guidelines’ that are relevant to curriculum to be explicitly listed in the curriculum, in particular in a draft curriculum so that teachers can provide feedback on them.
 - we see the place of assessment as too dominant. No one get’s taller by being measured more often! The most important form of assessment is students’ self assessment which is a skill young children have and that needs to be fostered if we are really concerned with developing life-long autonomous learners. We believe that assessment far too often

teaches children that they cannot do things and disempowers them. We see the so-called uses of assessment as grossly overstated (and resulting from previous government initiatives that suggested to parents that they want more trivial information than they really do, and less of what they regard as important). We see the emphasis put on national assessment (including NCEA) as being uneconomic and unproductive, and working against the notion that all students should have an entitlement to further education of their choice after their school experiences.

- in the section “Planning for coherent pathways/the key competencies: cross sector alignment” (page 33) links are made to the Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). While these links show an alignment between the strands of Te Whāriki and the Key Competencies, we believe that this does not do justice to the significance of the early childhood phase of education. By contributing so little commentary on this phase it reduces the significance and thereby perpetuates the distinctive seams between educational periods. The writing of the new curriculum affords the Ministry with the opportunity to close this gap more significantly and we urge the writers to reconsider the depth (or as currently documented, the lack of depth) of their reporting on the links between these two Curricula. Greater reference to Te Whāriki and to current research on early childhood curriculum would add both the depth and knowledge necessary for teachers to understand early childhood pedagogy. It must be noted that Te Whāriki currently refers to the links to the current essential learning areas in greater depth (Ministry of Education, 1996, pp. 93-98).

Generally—easy to read, but difficult to apply or understand as it can mean different things to different people. And, while it talks of children contributing to the well-being of NZ socially, economically and environmentally, it excludes tangata Whenua in content and pedagogy.

Q 8 Usefulness of each part

We have largely included comments on usefulness within clarity as we assumed that clarity implied clearly showing teachers possible directions for movement from their current positions. Summarizing this we would say

Vision

- 4 Nothing new, and not likely to cause a change

Principles

- 4 The only really new notion is thinking, and this is not developed in a way that teachers will find useful.

Values

- 4 Hardly new, and not influential with an assessment regime that emphasises knowledge in learning areas.

While the link between rights and responsibilities is referred to on p 11 under *participating and contributing*, in point four under values, the values are: *respect for themselves, for others, and for human rights*

We argue that human rights should be acknowledged with a direct link to responsibility, ie. the responsibility of the individual, first, within the contexts of community and society. While any values statements relating to schools/curriculum smacks of social engineering, schooling is firmly entrenched in a socially engineered paradigm. If the intent is to foster socially competent citizens, then we do not believe that human rights as experienced in a first world country such as NZ can be viewed in any way other than as a connection between those rights and the responsibilities that are embedded in them. In the past few years there have been cases of child abuse which pose this imbalance between rights and responsibilities and we would advocate that from the earliest age children grow up with the realisation that with rights come responsibilities. These values should be explicit and central to pedagogy. Thus, the point on p 10 could for example be changed to
*students are encouraged to value:
respect for themselves, for others and for human rights and the responsibilities that are attached to such rights.*

Key competencies

- 4 These might have been useful if they were embedded within the learning areas.

Effective pedagogy

- 4 Patronising!

Designing a school curriculum

- 4 (or 6) Our concerns here are major and were listed under clarity.

Generally—useful a source of discussion, but much more is needed.

Section C

Q 9 Learning area descriptors

The descriptors of the eight learning areas are all reasonable (2) as far as they go. But teachers will find them of little value. They continue to reinforce a ‘silo’ mentality of learning subjects that gives an artificial partitioning of knowledge, to give a content focus (rather than a process or thinking focus) and they give no indication how vision, principles, values, and key competencies might impact on the curriculum.

Q 10 Statements of outcomes

We rate the statements of outcomes as 4 (not at all useful). We see them as largely reflecting a linear behavioural model of learning and teaching that is outmoded, and the objectives as being too narrow. At the same time we believe that more conservative teachers will feel that they provide little guidance in terms of designing coherent programmes year by year and avoiding repetition (which they also saw as a difficulty with previous curriculum documents). The value of these objectives will be more evident when/if non-compulsory guidance material is produced to interpret the curriculum and to suggest ways in which schools might work with a curriculum such as this draft. Such material needs to be designed by a cross-curriculum team who keep in mind the vision, principles, values, and key competencies as well as the artificial portioning of the learning areas.

We thank the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to comment on this draft.

To MotE / Curric Feedback

From A/Prof Andy Beggs
on behalf of AUT, School of Ed, Curriculum Team.

On 20.11.06.

Dear Colleagues

Thanks for the chance to comment
I hope our feedback is useful.

Andy.