

Curriculum Review – Draft Response

COPY 102

The big picture :

There are a lot of good features : the broad structure makes sense – it has coherence, builds on past and present best practice, refers to current research and is also forward thinking and offers a view into the future (pages 8-33):

- Vision
- Principles
- Values
- Key Competencies
- Learning Areas
- Effective Pedagogy
- Designing a School Curriculum
- Planning : Focus on Outcomes – Key Competencies – Purposeful Assessment – Coherent Pathways

A challenge will be weaving this into a coherent learning programme from Year 1-13. Different curriculum models may emerge. There needs to be some national leadership and trialing around this. Although the theory of giving schools and communities some autonomy to best meet local needs and the needs of learners has initial and philosophical appeal the issues of time, expertise and resources to do this will be major barriers to overcome. An outcome of very different curriculums across schools is not desirable. Having a core of national consistency ('the essentials of learning') with room for local flexibility and choice (but within broad parameters) is a more pragmatic model. Local curriculum development may produce superb outcomes in some schools but in others be a disaster. Not all innovation will necessarily be a success despite the best of intentions.

Any new NZ curriculum will only improve on what we have now, and be of benefit to learners, if there is PD available for teachers and if supported by the production of new resource materials. A fragmented set of local curriculums will not allow for the PD and resource support to happen.

At Whangaparaoa College we have used 'integrated teaching and learning', and the framing of learning around 'key ideas/rich ideas', in Years 7-10 as we have developed new learning programmes in the new school. A tension and problem has emerged of ensuring 'specialist subject skills, knowledge and understanding' are taught effectively in an integrated learning environment. This is an unresolved issue for us at the moment. This is the kind of very real problem that needs careful consideration as we move ahead. Our new 'Whangaparaoa curriculum delivery model' although reflecting current research and thinking and being developed to meet learner needs of the 21st century has run into very real practical difficulties. From theory to practice is easier said than done. Replacing old models of curriculum delivery and learning with new approaches without extra time, teacher training and ongoing professional development is a huge challenge

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Social Sciences :

The problem is to respond in a way that does not appear totally critical. The concerns and questions raised become dominant in a response because the good parts get the applause and tick with little more said.

If the Social Science learning area (page 22) and the Social Science Achievement Objectives Levels 1-8 get approved and official status as they are, it would not be a disaster : there would be a workable framework for course development in 'Social Science' :

1. The AO's contain a lot of what is familiar and generally works quite well.
2. They allow for flexibility and choice at school, teacher and learner levels in the specific content and contexts to be used to provide for understanding and exploration of the Achievement Objectives.
3. They contain a progression through the levels from 1-8.
4. The name Social Sciences (learning area) as opposed to 'Social Studies' is also apt. It has a better educational ring to it, and is frequently the label used internationally and within tertiary institutions for this area of learning. The name means a lot – Social Sciences is a forward looking name!

(The same positives do not apply to Geography at levels 6-8 where I have huge concerns and much critical comment. History and Economics at levels 6-8 appear also to have similar problems but subject experts in these curriculum areas will be best placed to comment)

Criticisms :

1. The major criticism is of the Social Science purpose statement on page 22. (This has a narrow 'participation' focus. Knowledge and understanding of ideas appear to be relegated to the periphery or are non-existent. These need to become core and to be recognized as such. To accommodate a refocus on knowledge and understanding a suggested broader rewording of the purpose statement would be :
"The Social Sciences learning area is about people, society and the world we live in. It examines how people participate in society and how society operates. Through understanding society and the world it allows people to act to create a sustainable future and an improved world for people of the future to live in. Social Sciences have significance for people in their everyday interactions as members of communities in New Zealand and the world"

This purpose statement is critical as it underpins the structure and detail of the Social Science learning area.

2. Throughout the document the word 'citizen' keeps appearing. My reaction to the use of this term is negative. The term 'citizen' has an implicit 'obligations and set of duties attached to it' (- a 'big brother overseeing' and a 'control of authority' ring to it -) and the undertone that it is only by acting and thinking in a particular way that you become a 'citizen'. My strong preference is to use the word 'people' in place of 'citizen'.

3. The 'social inquiry' focus throughout the Social Science section of the draft I question and in the end reject. I cannot see how this advances our curriculum area or that it has academic rigour and acceptance as the 'only way of learning'. I could say that I am particularly concerned about this in relation to senior geography where the social inquiry process seems to have no relevance to studies in physical geography' or where spatial analysis is being undertaken, but my rejection carries across in the social studies area as well. I would prefer a statement like :

"Learning in Social Sciences can be undertaken in a variety of ways that reflect the contexts and themes of study and meet the interests and needs to the learners.

Learning approaches could include(if we must have such approaches listed it needs to be wide ranging and it could be here that social inquiry is amongst those listed, my view though is that such a list of approaches is not necessary and that the approaches taken can be best left to teachers and learners). Learners will ask questions and examine issues about people, society and the world in context and in relation to values, perspectives, current issues, social decision making and social action. In doing so, learners will gain an understanding of people, how societies and the world function and how they as young people and adults can participate in such functions in an informed way, in New Zealand and global contexts”

4. The Strands : the four sets of statements on page 22 are repeated in each of the Achievement Objective Levels 1-8 outlines. They are important. Acknowledgement needs to be made that Social Science as a curriculum area is an amalgam of specific disciplines. Unlike Maths, English and Science for example, Social Science has no academic tradition in its own right. The academic disciplines that contribute to the Social Science learning need to be explicitly acknowledged. If the four strands were renamed as :

1. Identity, Culture and Organisation
2. The Geographic World
3. The World of History
4. The Economic World

By naming Geography, History and Economics their contribution to learning in Social Science would become more obvious and their contribution would become sharpened.

‘Place and Environment’ (preferably renamed as ‘The Geographic World’) : the strand statement is geographic in nature, but fails to capture the essence of geography. Even if ‘Place and Environment’ is retained as the name, this statement would provide for a more appropriate coverage of the geography learning area :

“In the Geographic World strand (or Place and Environment strand), students learn how to describe, analyse and understand places at different scales and in different locations both in New Zealand and across the world.. Students learn how people perceive, represent, interpret, and interact with places and environments. Through such learning students come to understand the relationships that exist between people and the environment ”

Geography in the Social Sciences – particularly up to and including Year 10 (AO levels 1-5)

How much should the distinct senior level subjects of the Social Sciences (Achievement Objectives 6-8) be reflected in the Level 1-5 AO's? - More so than is evident in the draft – Economics is the model to follow, if History and Geography were referred to explicitly then their contribution to learning in Social Science would become more obvious and their contribution would become sharpened.

For example instead of Place and Environment and the strand statement that appears on page 22 and is then repeated at each level from 1-8 replace it with a 'Geography' statement :

"In the Geography world strand (or Place and Environment strand), students learn how to describe, analyse and understand places at different scales and in different locations both in New Zealand and overseas. Students learn about how people perceive, represent, interpret, and interact with places and environments. Students come to understand the relationships that exist between people and the environment and through such understanding are able to act to ensure a better future world for people and society".

Geography is not strong in the Social Science AO's at levels 1-5 of the national curriculum (and it seems to have lost strength in this draft from its place in the present curriculum document) – this is a concern as the final new document will set the scene for curriculum, learning and teaching over the next 10 years. Places and People are Amazing : Geography is the key to understanding what makes them so. Geography seeks to ensure the future of people and the world are sustainable. A clear contribution of geography in the curriculum of the 21st century is vital.

It is in Years 9 and 10 that students need exposure to explicit geographic education within Social Science. It is from these two year levels that students will begin to consider taking a specialist course in geography in year 11 and beyond. The contribution that geography can make within the Social Science level 5 learning programme would be enhanced if the draft bullet point :

'The way people manage resources has impacts for environmental and social sustainability' was replaced by this statement :

'The way people interact with and manage places has impacts for environmental and social sustainability'

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Geography in the Social Sciences – particularly in the senior school Y11 -13(AO levels 6-8)

The Geography AO's at levels 6,7 and 8 of the draft as it stands have deficiencies and beg many questions.

The key problem is that the present 'pink booklet' geography syllabus (MOE 1990) which underpins existing geography courses in the senior school forms 11-13, and which is also the basis for the Geography Unit and Achievement Standards at levels 1-3, is a thirty one page document. Geography in the new draft curriculum is covered in six bullet points – and these are brief bullet points at that. Worse still, these six bullet points (two for each level in the new curriculum – levels 6,7 and 8) do not flow and offer progression.

I assume that two bullet points for Geography per level was all that was 'allowed' in the draft document and this then posed the impossibility in providing not just a framework but a scaffold for Geography from level 6 to level 7 to level 8.

At curriculum level 6 the two geography statements are broad and capture a flavour of geography (they do not however match with what is taught at present in Year 11 nor do they relate to the level 1 Unit and Achievement Standards – this may or may not be a problem depending on the answer about the status of the existing syllabus in geography and of the existing achievement and unit standards – see comment later about this which seeks clarification).

Level 7 has a much narrower focus with 'change' as a key theme that differentiates this level from the others. Much however of the Level 7 AO concepts could in fact be included legitimately when studying and exploring the Level 6 – processes studied at level 6 for example would operate and change 'over time' to help shape natural and cultural environments.

At Level 8 of the curriculum the first bullet about 'interacting natural processes' is likely to repeat ideas studied already at Level 7. The second bullet at level 8 I would not like to attempt to decipher. I cannot understand what it means – if ever there is a need for plain English it is here!

Given these concerns about potential 'overlap' across these six Geography AO's, what is it that is going to distinguish Geography from level to level? – is the intent to distinguish by depth and sophistication of study but with repetition of content areas? – or is the intention to distinguish by scale and location of studies changing from level to level?

Building a new senior school Geography programme (as I assume is the intention) out of the six AO's will not be easy.

The draft begs another omission – there is nowhere any attempt to define what Geography is as a discipline or area of study. Geography is more than 'people – environment' which seems to be the implicit view of Geography throughout the draft. Geography is the discipline that studies "PLACE" – Geography seeks to describe, investigate, analyse and understand places. People and the environment sit under this Place umbrella, but so too does the pure Physical Geography and pure Human Geography. This Place focus needs to be communicated to learners and to the community. Through studies in Geography learners can become involved sharing the wonder of Places and in shaping better Places.

Another concern for Geography : the very general and non-prescriptive nature of the Geography AO's at levels 6,7 and 8 means many subjects could be moving into learning about key issues and themes like sustainability, global warming, globalization and aspects of citizenship education that seem to have a natural home in Geography. These themes and issues need to be stated explicitly as areas of study in Geography - they are important parts of the World of Geography and Learning in Geography.

An alternative to the present AO's for Geography Levels 6,7 and 8 – an attempt to retain the best of what we have now from the current syllabus and current school programmes, but to include some forward planning and updating of Geography to 2007 and beyond. These AO's would provide the framework for a rewrite of the present Geography syllabus document and the development of a new school geography learning programme in the senior school.

Level 6 :

- Describe and explain natural and cultural features of the geography of New Zealand
- Investigate and explain geographic issues of global concern and/or of global significance

Level 7 :

- Describe and analyse natural and cultural features of the geography of contrasting overseas regions; identify and examine the processes that have created these features.
- Investigate and analyse contemporary geographic issues within New Zealand

Level 8 :

- Investigate and analyse people – environment relationships locally, regionally and globally
- Investigate and analyse the natural and cultural forces and processes bringing about geographic change in different places that are helping to shape our future world

Clarification Needed : NCEA and Geography in the future :

Will the present unit and achievement standards remain?

Will new standards be written that reflect the new national curriculum?

Will any such new standards BE ADDED to the existing ones – or will it be a new ones replace the old ones approach?

What curriculum support documents are planned to support the final version of the national curriculum – what layers of support will there be to expand/amplify etc the subject frameworks that are finally gazetted?

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