



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Klenowski, Valentina](#) (2012) The Australian curriculum : implications for teaching and assessment. *Primary English Teaching Association Australia, 186*, pp. 1-8.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/53543/>

© Copyright 2012 Primary English Teaching Association Australia

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

The Australian Curriculum: Implications for teaching and assessment

Val Klenowski

Teachers will be aware of the raft of educational changes introduced recently and also of the associated challenges and opportunities that such educational reforms present. This PETAA Paper commences with an overview of the major educational changes and how they impinge on teachers' classroom practice in the teaching of English and makes explicit the implications for policy support. This article aims to provide teachers with some insight into how they might respond in their teaching to develop their own assessment and pedagogic practices and in so doing support students to improve in their learning and to achieve higher standards. A group of teachers' classroom practice, which has applicability to both Upper Primary and Middle School English teaching, is analysed to demonstrate how these teachers have pedagogically incorporated some of the 'general capabilities' and a cross-curriculum priority of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' into their classroom practice.

In the move to an *Australian Curriculum*, states and territories maintain responsibility for assessment and teaching practices that support high quality and high equity educational outcomes for all young Australians. The *Australian Curriculum* for all Key Learning Areas Foundation to Year 12 (F–12) comprises both content descriptions and achievement standards. Individual states and territories remain responsible for the assessment, reporting and certification of student achievement in relation to the achievement standards. Although this article has national relevance, it is based on a study of teachers' classroom practice conducted in Queensland where the Queensland Studies Authority and the Department of Education, Training and Employment of Queensland have supported research of teachers' practice and have developed resources such as new assessment tools in the form of Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks (QCATs) and curriculum support materials called Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C). Teachers have also had professional development opportunities to improve their teaching and learning.

Context

The changes to classroom practice initiated by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the *Australian Curriculum* and the Achievement Standards have profound implications for teachers' pedagogy. It is imperative in an era of such reform that the policy context is supportive of teachers to develop the necessary capabilities and to provide resources to facilitate the implementation and development of the reform. Teachers need this level of support and opportunities to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to address the increased demands that such reforms bring. Major change in the curriculum is often accompanied with implications for the other message systems of assessment and pedagogy. These issues are now considered following a brief overview of the current context.

Curriculum demands

In addition to the curriculum change related to content descriptions and achievement standards, teachers are also required to provide opportunities for students to develop general capabilities, such as skills, behaviours and dispositions applied to content knowledge that will support them in becoming successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. The ways in which teachers are providing students with the necessary curriculum and learning opportunities to develop these capabilities will vary in classroom teaching and learning practice. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) requires schools to ensure that throughout their schooling, students will develop and use these capabilities in their learning across the curriculum, in co-curricular programs and in their lives outside school. The general capabilities include:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competence
- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical behaviour
- Personal and social competence
- Intercultural understanding
(<http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum.html>)

It is the latter of these capabilities, intercultural understanding, and the first of the three cross-curriculum priorities, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures', that have relevance for the analysis of how teachers in a Northern Queensland school are developing assessment and pedagogic practice to align with these new curriculum demands in the of teaching English. The cross-curriculum priorities are to be embedded in all learning areas as appropriate and have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to the learning area.

The first of these addresses 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' to allow all young Australians the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, their significance for Australia and the impact these have had, and continue to have, on our world.

The second relates to 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' to allow all young Australians to develop a better understanding of the countries and cultures of the Asia region.

The third cross-curriculum priority is 'sustainability' to allow all young Australians to develop an appreciation of the need for more sustainable patterns of living, and to build the capacities for thinking and acting that are necessary to create a more sustainable future
(<http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum.html>).

In addition to these curriculum demands, teachers are also adapting and developing their assessment practices. Students receive an A to E report card every semester in every year in every subject. School-based assessment comprises the NAPLAN tests conducted in May, students receive their results

in September, and the school receives diagnostic information in December or January. In Queensland, the Queensland Studies Authority developed the QCATs conducted in Years 4, 6 and 9. These tasks are designed to assist teachers to understand the qualities needed in student work indicative of the achievement standards. The tasks are considered to be 'rich tasks' and are intended to demonstrate to teachers how they can design assessment to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate understanding, as well as higher order skills, such as reflection and critical thinking. Other forms of testing at the school level are localised and include classroom testing and diagnostic testing with the use of tests such as the Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading (PAT-r) developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The Department of Education, Training and Employment of Queensland has prepared the C2C package that underpins the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The package includes:

- planning documents that detail what students need to learn – a whole school plan template, year level plans, unit plans, lesson overviews, assessments and marking guides (where applicable)
- how to support student learning – lesson plans and resources
- multi-year level materials – P-7 semester overviews, conceptual maps, unit plans, lesson overviews, assessments and marking guides (where applicable), and lesson resources
- planning materials for differentiation for students with diverse learning needs – model unit plan and example lesson.
(<http://education.qld.gov.au/projects/educationviews/news-views/2011/oct/united-in-pursuit-c2c.html>)

As Australia embarks on the implementation of a national curriculum and achievement standards reflecting on the implications of a 'futures-oriented' curriculum for classroom practice becomes timely.

Assessment

Before proceeding to the pedagogic analysis of the group of Northern Queensland teachers' teaching practice to identify how they have addressed both the development of general capabilities and incorporated the cross curriculum priority of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' the message system of assessment needs to be discussed. For as indicated, the changes brought about by the curriculum reform have implications for the way in which teachers are using assessment both for summative or 'end point' testing and for formative means for improving learning and teaching. Assessment has been defined as 'the purposeful and systematic collection of information about students' learning' (ACACA, 2012: 5). The central purpose of assessment as defined here is for teachers to identify and attend to the students' learning needs through monitoring progress and identifying how teaching and learning can be modified (Ministry of Education, 2010: 13).

Here the development of the **principles of assessment** to inform policy development and support valid assessment practices from Foundation to Year 12 (F–12) has been significant. These principles provide a valuable tool for designing assessment in classrooms, schools and school systems, and for policy and accountability purposes. They have been endorsed and are available from the Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) (<http://acaca.bos.nsw.edu.au/>). The intent has been to explore how the states and territories can continue to work collaboratively with ACARA in the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum* to explore possibilities for achieving greater national consistency in assessment and reporting, including, as stated in the document:

- *continuing to improve on the good practice that currently exists within states and territories*
- *ensuring the common achievement standards are supported by examples of excellence in assessment practice, and*
- *supporting the use of assessment for both formative (feedback) and summative (reporting) purposes.*

Currently different approaches to assessment have been adopted across Australia with students assessed at different times and in different ways to address principles of equity and excellence. As outlined in Principles of Assessment F–12 ‘it is not necessary to assess all students across the nation at the same time and in the same manner to implement the *Australian Curriculum*’ (ACACA, 2012: 3).

The principles that follow have been developed to be useful for teachers, schools and jurisdictions to:

- plan assessment programs
- audit current assessment practice(s) and programs
- inform and develop teachers’ professional learning to ensure teachers have assessment capability.

Principles of assessment

- 1 The main purposes of assessment are to inform teaching, improve learning and report on the achievement of standards.
- 2 Assessment is underpinned by principles of equity and excellence. It takes account of the diverse needs of students and contexts of education, and the goal of promoting equity and excellence in Australian schooling.
- 3 Assessment is aligned with curriculum, pedagogy and reporting. Quality assessment has curricular and instructional validity – what is taught informs what is assessed, and what is assessed informs what is reported.
- 4 Assessment aligned with curriculum, pedagogy and reporting includes assessment of deep knowledge of core concepts within and across the disciplines, problem solving, collaboration, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking.

- 5 Assessment involves collecting evidence about expected learning as the basis for judgements about the achieved quality of that learning. Quality is judged with reference to published standards and is based on evidence.
- 6 Assessment evidence should come from a range of assessment activities. The assessment activity is selected because of its relevance to the knowledge, skills and understanding to be assessed, and the purpose of the assessment.
- 7 Information collected through assessment activities is sufficient and suitable to enable defensible judgements to be made. To show the depth and breadth of the student learning, evidence of student learning is compiled over time. Standards are reviewed periodically and adjusted according to evidence to facilitate continuous improvement.
- 8 Approaches to assessment are consistent with and responsive to local and jurisdictional policies, priorities and contexts. It is important that schools have the freedom and support to develop quality assessment practices and programs that suit their particular circumstances and those of the students they are assessing.
- 9 Assessment practices and reporting are transparent. It is important that there is professional and public confidence in the processes used, the information obtained and the decisions made (ACACA, 2012: 5-6).

These principles are evident in the portrayal and analysis of the assessment and pedagogic practices of some teachers from the study of a Northern Queensland school, which has a stated aim of embedding Indigenous perspectives into all curriculum areas.

Analysis

We shall now consider how teachers address the new curriculum demands at both the national and state levels to embed the cross-curriculum priority of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' and how they raise their students' 'intercultural understanding' by applying the principles of assessment for the support of learning and the reporting of achievement. In this short article only one explicit example of the work samples from the state education department's C2C program is given. The example focuses on representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in texts, with an account of the processes for assessing the students' learning being analysed critically.

Curriculum and assessment

The *Australian Curriculum: English* stipulates that students in Upper Primary and Middle School learn about how language and stories are central to the way people can represent their experiences, identity, points of view and feelings. This was the focus of the lessons observed in which students, at the time of the study, had been taught how the choices made by text producers such as authors, script writers or poets can impact, and position, the audience to think, feel and respond in particular ways. The class had been reading and interpreting a variety of Indigenous literary texts that help tell about identity

and history and had considered the use of **the** language of affect and how this has impacted on the way sense is made of the stories being shared.

The assessment task, which has curricular and instructional validity (assessment principle 3), was the following oral presentation:

The library has decided to make a collection of important stories from our area that help to share and celebrate the many experiences of being Australian. The stories will be available to any members in our community who want to share these stories, but the library thinks they will be of particular interest to school students, historians and tourists to the area.

This chapter of the collection is focused on the stories and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. You have been invited to participate in this exciting project with a multi-modal presentation.

There are two stages involved in this submission:

Part A: An emotive reading of your selected text.

Part B: An analysis of your selected text, demonstrating the language of affect and how you constructed your reading to have an emotive response with your audience.

The teacher identified the necessary steps for the students to ensure that they addressed both parts of the assessment task. To illustrate the explicitness of the instructions to the students only Part A is provided:

a Find a literary text or text excerpts (poetry or prose) relating to representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Use the library and the websites provided to select your text(s). Check with your teacher that your text will be suitable for the task.

b Make sure you read and understand this text – What is it telling and sharing in its representation? Are there any historical or contextual references that you will need to find out more about?

c Practise your presenting techniques for this task – think about the MOOD you want to create with your words and how you will represent this story with your storytelling elements.

d Prepare and present your multimodal elements that include:

Your presentation of the text(s). This can be presented 'live' during our lesson OR you can choose to record your presentation at home and screen it to the audience.

For Part B the teacher was again explicit and comprehensive in explaining the steps involved to complete the analysis of the writer's and their own choices. The teacher instructed the students to explain how they understood the language of affect in the author's work and emphasised how this part would be presented in class in front of the audience. Seven steps outlined briefly here included: the use of paragraphs; an introduction of the text the student had chosen to read; an overview of the ideas and viewpoints to be included; an explanation of how the language choices of the selected text positions the audience; the choices the student made in the multimodal presentation; a conference and draft to be presented to the teacher and preparation and presentation of the final copy.

Discussion

From this example the teacher has demonstrated how she has applied the assessment principles 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (listed on page 5). The assessment is clearly designed to inform teaching and improve learning, which will be reported using a grade of A – E (assessment principle 1). The diverse needs of the class are considered by tailoring the task to the needs of the students and the context to promote equity (assessment principle 2). Here the teacher explained to the researchers:

The assessment was an adaption of the task provided to me, the C2C tasks feel like they lack a context or real life / life-like purpose in their descriptions, so this is an element we were looking to add. It lets students identify the role they are taking on, in the presentation, and focus in on the way they want to use language to establish the relationship, I think.

The salient KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING element [assessable element or criterion] is around how well students can identify and articulate the 'language of affect' in other people's work, in particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander texts. This is pretty abstract and tough! NANBERRY was one of the texts the C2C units used, but again I had to make adaptations and links for my own context and learners.

...

The teacher indicates here what is understood from established research (Ramsay, 1985) to be an important factor for improving student learning. Teachers in 'successful' schools devote more time to the development of their own teaching materials than those in 'less successful' schools and they change the content of the prescribed syllabuses to make the program more interesting and meaningful to their students (Ramsay, 1985). This is particularly appropriate for students from different cultures such as Indigenous students. In this school, teachers were required to make use of the C2C materials, provided by the Queensland Education and Training Department. There is an obvious opportunity for teachers to take each lesson and teach it without modification. This was not apparent in the lessons observed.

The assessment task has been adjusted to make it authentic and more real for all students with the features of the completed work to be assessed made explicit at the outset (assessment principle 5). Too often an assessment task

is set by the teacher with limited explication of the criteria and standards to illustrate to the students how the task will be assessed. The student does not have an understanding of what is required nor what qualities the teacher is looking for that will be assessed, if this is not made explicit at the outset. The oral presentation required students to demonstrate skills in analysis, research, critical inquiry, use of technology and presentation and illustrate an understanding of how the text positions audiences. They were required to illustrate their understanding of the variety of language, images and vocabulary that are used to represent different ideas and issues. It is in this way that the teacher has applied assessment principle 4, with the focus held firmly on assessment of substantive knowledge of how language is used to position the audience as well as skills of problem solving, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking. At the outset the teacher provides the students with a package of information to guide and support them in the completion of the task. The package incorporates:

- a comprehensive outline of the task (Parts A & B as described above)
- a planning document to scaffold the student's planning and organisation of the task
- an annotated commentary to further help scaffold the student's response
- an exemplar that has been completed by the teacher
- an annotated version of the exemplar to highlight how the teacher has addressed the key requirements of the task
- a rubric that outlines the criteria and standards by which the task will be assessed.

The teacher explains why the provision of this level of detail is necessary to the researchers and in so doing shows how she is also addressing assessment principles 6, 7, 8 and 9:

For my assessment, I always aim to make explicit the language features so I do the task myself as my exemplar. The 'Good Morning Invited Guests' work is my unpacking of the task [*The teacher provided her example*]. Then, in class as part of our joint deconstruction and construction phase, we went through our copies to identify what is going on to drive the text. I can see the students in this class picking upon the establishment of a clear role, language choices as experts and expanded nominal groups, for example, because they are elements we learnt to do in class.

The assessment task is inclusive of a range of activities that focus on knowledge, skills and understanding (principle 6), the students have an exemplar to guide them in the completion of their own efforts and the teacher provides feedback to the students on their draft work so that evidence of improvement is compiled over time (principle 7). The assessment task meets the state requirements and has been adapted to meet the particular circumstances of these students in regional Queensland (principle 8) and the assessment processes are transparent (principle 9) so that in:

pursuing the goals of effective assessment for learning, ... teachers and students ... grow in a community of practice where nothing in the assessment

process is hidden and all hurdles are understood clearly and explicitly. It is only then that assessment will be fully understood as the most important tool for effective learning. (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002: 255)

Conclusion

The teachers' lessons observed at this school were analysed pedagogically. As illustrated here the nature of the task and the degree of support provided enabled teacher and students to engage in substantive conversation with connections to the world beyond the classroom and pertinent to the region and local circumstances. These conditions are more likely to support standards that move beyond the acquisition of 'reproductive knowledge' to opportunities for the development of more generative knowledge and understanding (Anyon, 1981). In a context where teachers are facing increasing pressure to focus on the improvement of NAPLAN scores, they may feel obligated to pursue 'the basics' to the neglect of intellectual demand and development. Anyon's findings (1981) illustrated the insufficient nature of this kind of enacted curriculum, describing four standards associated with quality, authentic pedagogy: higher order thinking, deep knowledge, substantive conversation and connections to the real world beyond the classroom. These four standards provide a framework for understanding pedagogical and assessment practices in schools.

For a 'futures oriented' curriculum aiming for a more sustainable and generative future for the next generation we need to move beyond the basics and reproductive knowledge that Anyon described all those years ago in the schools she studied. In Northern Queensland, with the resources and support that teachers have utilised, together with their professionalism and commitment to the improvement of learning for all students, the author of this PETAA Paper felt privileged and honoured to observe such exemplary enacted pedagogic and assessment practices.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the teachers, students and principal of this school who generously allowed her to observe and talk with them about their teaching and learning practices. They gave willingly of their time, their resources and assessment tasks to be shared with others. For confidentiality reasons the names of the school, teachers and students had been kept anonymous.

References

- Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA), 2012, Principles of assessment F1–12. Accessed June 24, 2012
<http://acaca.bos.nsw.edu.au/>
- Anyon, J 1981, 'Social Class and School Knowledge', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11(1), 3–42.
- Education Queensland 2012, Thumbs up for C2C ahead of Australian Curriculum, Accessed July 30, 2012
(<http://education.qld.gov.au/projects/educationviews/news-views/2011/oct/united-in-pursuit-c2c.html>)

Elwood, J & Klenowski, V 2002, 'Creating Communities of Shared Practice: the challenges of assessment use in learning and teaching', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(3), 243–256.

Ministry of Education Te Tahuhu o te Matauranga, 2010, Ministry of Education Position Paper: Assessment (Schooling Sector), New Zealand, Accessed on 3 March 2011 at

www.minedu.govt.nz/.../TheMinistry/MOEAAssessmentPositionPaper

Ramsay, P D K 1985, 'Social Class and School Knowledge: A Rejoinder to Jean Anyon', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 15(2), 215–222.

About the author

Val Klenowski is a Professor of Education at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. She has research interests in the use of social moderation in the context of standards-driven reform, culture responsive assessment and pedagogy and the use of digital portfolios. Val has published in the fields of curriculum, evaluation, assessment and learning.