



The Australian Curriculum, which underpins the teaching and learning in all Australian schools, is currently under review. One of the main aims is to declutter the curriculum to allow more time for teachers to linger longer on topics so as to ensure all students understand what they being taught and are given the opportunity to deepen their understanding of core concepts.

One of the ways we at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority are doing this is by clarifying the relationship between the three dimensions of the curriculum, that is, the learning areas, the cross-curriculum priorities, and the general capabilities.

There has been a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about the cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities. They are not “add-ons” to the learning areas that crowd out the teaching of core knowledge or undermine a knowledge-rich curriculum. In fact, the opposite is the case: they enrich the knowledge of the content that is being taught.

The eight learning areas – that is – English, Mathematics, Science, the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Technologies, Health and Physical Education and Languages – are what is taught. They have primacy of place in the curriculum. It is through the teaching of these learning areas that students develop the general capabilities, namely literacy, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, ICT literacy, intercultural understanding, ethical understanding, and personal and social capability. These should not be taught separately as if they were in addition to the learning areas.

Likewise, it is through the teaching of the learning areas that students are exposed to ideas from the cross-curriculum priorities – that is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Australia’s engagement with Asia, and sustainability. Similar to the general capabilities, they are not separate subjects that are taught separately.

Furthermore, not every cross-curriculum priority and general capability can be addressed in every learning area. Some learning areas are better suited to the development of particular general capabilities than other learning areas, and each of the three cross-curriculum priorities find more natural homes in certain learning areas.

The priorities provide national, regional and global dimensions which will enrich the curriculum through development of considered and focused content that fits naturally within learning areas.

For example, last year ACARA released new elaborations for the Australian Curriculum: Science (Foundation to Year 10) that demonstrate the connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and core science concepts in the Australian Curriculum. The elaborations acknowledge that Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have worked scientifically for millennia and continue to contribute to contemporary science. By making use of these elaborations, teachers can simultaneously and seamlessly deepen their students understanding of scientific concepts and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. These elaborations also have the potential to make learning more relevant for

OFFICIAL

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and, as a result, help increase their participation in STEM subjects.

In the Australian Curriculum, the general capabilities are addressed through the content of the learning areas. For example, literacy and numeracy are primarily, but not exclusively, developed through the teaching of English and Mathematics. Critical and creative thinking are developed in any subject that builds knowledge through a process of getting students to generate possible explanations and then decide between them as to which is more likely to be true. Science and Technology and the Arts are the learning areas – but not the only ones – where ICT literacy capability is developed. Geography, as a subject within the Humanities and Social Sciences, and Languages are well suited to the development of students' understanding of other cultures.

Good teachers are able to integrate the cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities appropriately and authentically into their teaching of the learning areas in a seamless way, so that there is no distinction or disjointedness. But this task should not be made difficult. The revised Australian Curriculum will make this easier by improving the quality of the content descriptions and the elaborations by embedding them where it is most authentic to do so. This way, teachers should feel confident that if they teach the content of the learning areas they are developing their students' general capabilities and enriching their understanding of the cross-curriculum priorities. We will do the work for them in the presentation of the learning area content.

The centrality of the learning areas – what parents might know by the more traditional titles of 'subjects' or 'disciplines' – cannot be emphasised enough. The Australian Curriculum is a knowledge-rich curriculum, and it will stay that way. All Australian children are entitled to have access in common to powerful knowledge about the world, knowledge that, in combination with associated skills and dispositions, will enable them to shape their own future and that of their communities and society more broadly. That is our most important responsibility as adults. If you'd like to have your say on matters covered in the review's Terms of Reference, which you can find at www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum-review, please contact us at engagement@acara.edu.au. Thanks for listening.