EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

for the development of curriculum and test materials

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Contents

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to support the development of curriculum and test materials that enact the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles. It is designed for Council project officers and outsourced developers of Council materials.

Equity principles

The Council believes that social justice can be developed through curriculum and testing programs that challenge inequities by:

- acknowledging and minimising unequal outcomes of schooling for different groups of students in curriculum and test programs;

- identifying and minimising barriers to access, participation, active engagement, construction of knowledge and demonstration of outcomes;

- using the knowledge, practices and dispositions of all students as a basis for their learning and for enhancing the learning of others in the community;

- developing understanding of, and respect for, diversity within and among groups;

- making explicit the fact that knowledge is historically, socially and culturally constructed;

- making explicit the relationship between valued knowledge and power relations;

- identifying and promoting the capacity of each key learning area of the curriculum to develop knowledge, practices and dispositions that challenge injustice and inequity and empower students.

Further details about these equity principles are provided on the Council's website at www.qscc.qld.edu.au/office/PDF/equity_principles.pdf.

Equity issues

The equity areas discussed in this document are:

- Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures;

- cultural and linguistic diversity;

- disabilities and learning difficulties;

- gender and gender construction;

- gifts and talents;

- rural and remote locations;

- socioeconomic circumstance and poverty.

Curriculum and test materials must acknowledge the cumulative and interrelated impacts of students' social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances that may place them at educational risk. The diversity that exists among students within and across the various equity areas must also be recognised, valued and incorporated into curriculum and test materials. The information in this document supports a holistic approach to the development of curriculum and test materials and reflects the interrelated nature of the equity areas. The overriding need is to produce clear, unambiguous and useful materials that help teachers to disrupt inequitable outcomes for students.

In this document, the term 'curriculum materials' includes syllabuses, sourcebook guidelines, sourcebook modules, initial in-service materials, learning–teaching activities, and assessment instruments and techniques. The term 'test materials' refers to test items/tasks in the Queensland Years 3, 5 and 7 Testing Program in aspects of literacy and numeracy.

The information presented here is intended to enhance awareness and understanding of the major equity areas. Sections entitled 'Strategies' and 'Reflection' are included in each of these areas. The 'Strategies' section should be read prior to and throughout the development of materials. The 'Reflection' section should be read following the development of draft materials to ensure that the strategies have been implemented.

Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Definition

Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, both individually and collectively as a community, define themselves by their culture, not by the colour of their skin. Only Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples can determine who are and who are not Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The cultures of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a rich and important part of Australia's living heritage. Aboriginal histories, cultures, languages and societies are distinct from Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and societies, and each group needs to be recognised accordingly. Diversity exists both within and across these groups in terms of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances. Curriculum and test materials need to reflect this cultural diversity and encourage an understanding that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not an homogenous group.

Population

According to the 1996 Census of Population and Housing, there were approximately 27 000 Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 12–25 years living in Queensland, which is 28% of Queensland's Indigenous population and 3.9% of the Queensland youth population. Children and young people (0–25 years) represent approximately 61% of Australia's Indigenous population (Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development 1999, pp. 5, 7).

Terminology

The following conventions apply to terminology relating to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- To signify diversity, the plural term 'peoples' is always used.
- When referring to Indigenous Australians, the word 'Indigenous' has an initial capital.
- In general text, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is written in full; in diagrams or tables the shortened form 'A & TSI' may be used (note space before and after the ampersand) but not 'ATSI'.
- Acceptable terms are 'Aboriginal students', 'Torres Strait Islander students', 'Indigenous students' and 'Indigenous Australians'.

Terminology used within curriculum and test materials should be appropriate and free from any cultural bias. Guidance on this matter is provided in documents such as *National Principles and Guidelines for Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies: K–12* (Commonwealth of Australia 1995) and *Preschool to Year Twelve Guidelines and Framework for the Teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Queensland Schools* (draft) (Education Queensland 1997).

Issues

Indigenous young people are less likely than non-Indigenous young people to remain at school until Year 12 and to obtain formal qualifications or attend university. In addition, Indigenous young people are significantly over-represented in Queensland youth detention centres (Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development 1999, p. 7).

When working with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is important to be aware of, and follow, their protocols. This involves respecting their customs and lores and

communicating in a way that is relevant to them. Generally, communities will have some common ground and similarities. While it is necessary to acknowledge these for future reference, it is more important to be aware of the differences and recognise that each community has its own protocols that should be followed. Further information on protocols is provided in the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development publications in the 'References and resources' section. Confidentiality and privacy are also major protocol issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, www.abc.net.au/message/proper/protocol.htm).

Curriculum and test materials

Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students may experience various barriers at school. These barriers have limited, and continue to limit, their access to and participation in schooling and the opportunities and benefits it can provide.

Curriculum and test materials need to include and to value the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to acknowledge the unique place of the many Indigenous cultures, histories, languages and societies in Australia. Materials developers must acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity within and across Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures. They must also recognise that many of these students have Standard Australian English as a second or a subsequent language and that in their homes/communities many speak Aboriginal English, Aboriginal Kriols, Torres Strait Islander Creoles and/or their community languages. The curriculum needs to focus both on the education of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students and on the education of all students about Indigenous Australians.

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that the test results of some Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.

- Respond to the interrelated impacts of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances on Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students.

- Recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander home/community languages, including Aboriginal English, Aboriginal Kriols and Torres Strait Islander Creoles, are an integral part of the students' respective backgrounds, and that Standard Australian English may be a second or a subsequent language.

- Ensure prescribed resources and learning experiences do not inhibit Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students from having access to and participating in schooling.

- Ensure protocols are observed by consulting with local communities when developing learning experiences about matters such as Indigenous ceremonies and cultural practices and beliefs. (These are examples only, not an exhaustive list of matters on which consultation is needed.)

- Involve Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in decision-making processes and in the design and delivery of curriculum on their cultures for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

- Gain as much knowledge and understanding as possible about Indigenous Australian cultures through research and consultation.

- Ensure that materials reflect the cultural diversity of Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within and across a broad range of communities.

- Depict the diverse lifestyles (e.g. urban, rural and remote) of Aboriginal peoples and of Torres Strait Islander peoples and their activities (e.g. everyday situations, traditional activities), thereby avoiding stereotypes (e.g. Aboriginal peoples represented only as dancers).

- Promote events celebrating Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures, such as Mabo Day, NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week.

- Provide opportunities to challenge representations of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the analysis of misconceptions and stereotypes.

- Encourage students to consider Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as traditional landowners.

- Include learning experiences that examine and challenge representations of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in earlier curriculum materials and textbooks.

- Include information and exploration about the government policies of protection, assimilation and self-determination and their impacts on Indigenous Australians.

- Include and value the contributions of Indigenous Australians to the key learning areas

- (e.g. bush medicine, oral histories and technology practices).

- Make explicit the power relations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous contact throughout history and in contemporary contexts.

- Provide learning experiences to help students develop knowledges, practices and dispositions that support reconciliation.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve equitable educational outcomes?

- Does the testing program acknowledge that many Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students have Standard Australian English as a second or a subsequent language?

- Are appropriate protocols for communicating with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples outlined in curriculum materials?

- Are the contributions of members from diverse Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities embedded in key learning areas?

- Do curriculum materials involve Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as consultants and participants?

- Have Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities been involved in the development of curriculum and test materials?

- Do curriculum materials include diverse Aboriginal perspectives and diverse Torres Strait Islander perspectives?

- Do curriculum and test materials contain text and/or images that are relevant to the diverse contexts of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities across Queensland?

- Do curriculum materials acknowledge the complexity of the religious, spiritual and value systems and the social structures in Indigenous Australian cultures?

- Do curriculum materials reflect the interrelatedness of social, cultural, geographic and economic factors on Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students?

- Do curriculum and test materials make explicit the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledge?

- Do curriculum materials acknowledge unequal power relations between some Indigenous and some non-Indigenous Australians?

- Is there appropriate acknowledgment, which provides due respect to intellectual and cultural property rights, of materials sourced from Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

- Do curriculum materials promote and develop an understanding of reconciliation issues?

- Do curriculum materials explore issues of racism and challenge ethnocentrism and racial stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

- Do curriculum materials acknowledge and challenge the 'exotic' representations of Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures?

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Cultural and linguistic diversity

Definition

Students in Queensland come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Student diversity also exists both within and across groups in terms of social, geographic and economic circumstances.

The term 'cultural diversity' refers to 'the positive value to society as a whole of understanding and sharing between different cultures'. However, 'there are often conflicts of interest, and differences in power and status between different groupings, and therefore also between different cultures', all of which occur at the political, social and economic level (Runnymede Trust 1993, p. 58). This imbalance can lead to the devaluing of cultural diversity, which results in a society where the power of the dominant culture remains unquestioned and unchanged, leaving no space for peoples from other cultures to participate equally in the shaping of the national identity and citizenship (Education Queensland 1998b, p. 2).

Linguistic diversity is an important characteristic of Australian society. Numerous students are bilingual and multilingual. Many of these students are first-generation Australian, but a considerable number are second and third generation. In the home and social environments of many students in this latter group, English is either not the main language or it shares the dominant place with another language (Education Queensland 1998b, p. 2). Other students may identify with their cultural background but not their linguistic background.

The Queensland School Curriculum Council's glossary of generic terms includes the following definitions related to cultural and linguistic diversity:

- *Culture*: the diverse knowledge, beliefs, values and perspectives that members of a group share and embody in their rituals, roles, relationships and customs.

- *Cultural context*: the frame of reference in which systems of knowledge, beliefs, values and perspectives and their embodiment in roles, relationships and customs are experienced.

- *Cultural identity*: an individual's perception of self that is developed through belonging to particular ethnic, religious or social groups.

- *Cultural inheritance*: the systems of knowledge, beliefs, values and perspectives, many of them held unconsciously and taken for granted, that members of an ethnic, religious or social group have received from their predecessors.

Population

The following population details are cited by Education Queensland (1998b, p. 14). They are based on statistics from the 1991 census and information provided in *Queensland's Young People: A Statistical Profile* (Crockett, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme & Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993):

- Of the total population of Australians aged 12–25 years, 13% were born overseas. Of these, 33% were born in a non-English-speaking country.

- Approximately 14% of young people in Australia had a parent born in a non-English-speaking country.

- Almost 9% of young people in Queensland spoke a language other than English at home, Italian being the most common, followed by Japanese and Cantonese.

- The unemployment rate of people aged 15–25 years from a non-English-speaking background was 25%, compared with 18% of total young people.

Terminology

The following conventions apply to terminology relating to cultural and linguistic diversity:

- The preferred term to use is 'students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds'.
- The meanings of ESL, LBOTE and NESB are significantly different. In general text, the following terms may be used:
    - 'students for whom English is a second language', not 'ESL students' — for example, 'Students for whom English is a second language performed higher than the cohort';
    - 'students from a language background other than English', not LBOTE students;
    - 'students from non-English-speaking backgrounds', not 'NESB students'.
- In display work and tables, the shortened forms ESL students, LBOTE students and NESB students may be used.

Issues

In the context of equity, the term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' refers to the positive value to society of understanding and sharing within and across cultures. Inequities in the political, economic and social power of various groups, however, result in inequitable participation in, and outcomes from, schooling for students of certain cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

It is important to recognise that there is a range of knowledge about, and proficiency in, English among students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) and English as a second language (ESL). Further, there is a need to recognise that there is a range of proficiency among students in their first language.

Curriculum and test materials

Students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may experience various barriers at school. These barriers have limited, and continue to limit, their access to and participation in schooling and the opportunities and benefits it can provide.

Curriculum and test materials should value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students by promoting understanding, recognising their richness and actively drawing on each student's experiences and perspectives. The diversity within Australian communities illustrates the need for all students to develop the knowledges, practices and dispositions to participate fairly and effectively in such communities, now and in the future.

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that the test results of some students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.
- Respond to the interrelated impacts of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances on students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their access to and participation in schooling.
- Provide opportunities for students to use and further develop their first language as a tool for learning and to assist in their development of English as a second language.

- Provide learning experiences that develop students' understandings of the impact that racism can have on individuals and groups.

- Provide resources and learning experiences that represent a range of cultures.

- Consult with local cultural communities in the design and delivery of curriculum and test materials and abide by protocols.

- Reflect the diversity of perspectives within and across a broad range of cultures (e.g. perspectives of women from a range of cultural backgrounds).

- Depict the full range of lifestyles (e.g. urban, rural and remote) of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their activities (e.g. everyday situations, traditional activities), thereby avoiding stereotypes (e.g. representing cultural groups only as dancers).

- Give recognition to other cultures through the promotion of events celebrating particular cultures — for example, Paniyiri (Greek) and Chinese New Year — in such a manner that they are not considered quaint or exotic.

- Acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of peoples from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Australia's history (e.g. gold rushes, Snowy River Scheme, authors, artists, scientists).

- Provide opportunities for students to value and explore the diversity within and across a range of cultural groups in their constructions of knowledge, demonstrations of learnings, and problem solving.

- Make explicit the historical, social, and cultural constructions of knowledge in curriculum and test materials.

- Acknowledge unequal power relations within and across various cultural groups in curriculum materials (e.g. status of women, the poverty-and-wealth divide, religious conflict).

- Value the knowledges and perspectives of a range of cultures in history, including the diversity within and across the cultural groups (e.g. women, generational backgrounds).

- Provide opportunities to examine and challenge representations of peoples from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including the analysis of misconceptions and stereotypes.

- Provide learning experiences that develop students' acceptance of, and respect for, the diversity of peoples.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to achieve equitable educational outcomes?

- Do curriculum materials endorse and promote safe and supportive school environments?

- Are students encouraged to use their first or subsequent languages, as well as Standard Australian English?

- Do assessment tasks and test materials provide opportunities for students to demonstrate learnings in a variety of communication modes (e.g. written, oral, signed, first language)?

- Do curriculum and test materials cater for students' learning styles (e.g. visual, kinaesthetic, tactile)?

- Do curriculum and test materials indicate when students with English as a second or a subsequent language may use dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries?

- Are assessment tasks and test materials contextualised linguistically for students with English as a second or a subsequent language?

- Are the contributions of members from diverse cultural groups embedded in key learning areas?

- Are the experiences of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds valued and not considered quaint or exotic?

- Are multilingualism and cultural diversity included and valued?

- Are curriculum and test materials inclusive of diverse cultures in their assumptions and reference points (e.g. linguistic features, perspectives, learning styles)?

- Are members of Australia's diverse communities represented not only in mainstream activities and settings but also in roles that are specific to their cultures?

- Do curriculum materials actively engage in the sharing of cultural knowledges?

- Do curriculum and test materials show a range of appearances representative of Australia's multicultural societies (e.g. skin colour, hairstyle, dress, facial characteristics)?

- Do curriculum and test materials show culturally diverse groups contributing in various ways, not only to their local community but also to the wider society?

- Are the contents of curriculum and test materials free from cultural bias and stereotyping?

- Whose perspectives are constructed in curriculum and test materials?

- Whose perspectives are silenced in curriculum and test materials?

- Do curriculum materials acknowledge and challenge unequal power relations within and across diverse cultural and linguistic groups?

- Do curriculum materials develop in students the knowledges, practices, and dispositions to challenge stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, racism, ethnocentrism and heterocentrism?

- Do curriculum materials provide opportunities for critical examination of a range of perspectives within societies and the impact of these on diverse groups?

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Disabilities and learning difficulties

Definition

Students with disabilities include those with vision, hearing, speech–language, physical or intellectual impairments; multiple impairments; autistic spectrum disorders; or social emotional disorders.

Students with learning difficulties are those whose access to the curriculum is limited because of short-term or persistent problems in one or more of the areas of literacy, numeracy and learning how to learn (accessing, selecting, organising, memorising, monitoring and applying appropriate knowledge and strategies and linking these to established knowledge).

Students with learning disabilities are one small group of students with learning difficulties who because of the neurological basis of their difficulties have persistent long-term problems and high support needs in one or more of the areas of literacy, numeracy, and learning how to learn. These students do not have generalised intellectual impairments but rather demonstrate idiosyncratic learning styles, which are determined by the nature of their specific disorders and inhibit their learning at school (Education Queensland, www.education.qld.gov.au/corporate/doem/curristu/cs‑13000/cs-13000.htm).

The information here is also relevant to students who demonstrate significant behavioural and adjustment difficulties and students who have significant medical conditions.

Students with disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioural and adjustment difficulties, and medical conditions are not homogenous groups; there is diversity within and across each of the groups. Diversity also exists both within and across all these groups in terms of social, cultural, geographic, and economic circumstances.

Population

Disability

Students with disabilities make up approximately 3% of the state school population (Queensland Department of Education 1993, p. 9). This figure is derived through ascertainment, which is the process used to recommend the level of specialist educational support needed by students with disabilities.

Learning Difficulty

'In view of the national uncertainty about definitions of learning difficulties, it is not possible to be authoritative about prevalence of learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy. The mean national school survey estimate that 16% of children experience learning difficulties is consistent with the previously published Australian estimates that range from 10% to 20%' (Louden et al. 2000, p. 8).

Terminology

In both speech and writing, the appropriate way to refer to students is to commence with the stem 'students with' as in the example 'students with vision impairment'.

Issues

Information about issues associated with disabilities and learning difficulties are provided on the Queensland School Curriculum Council's website (www.qscc.qld.edu.au/office/equity.html).

Curriculum and test materials

Students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties may experience various barriers at school. These barriers have limited, and continue to limit, their access to and participation in schooling and the opportunities and benefits it can provide.

Curriculum and test materials should include and value the experiences and perspectives of students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties, be inclusive and free of stereotypes about people with disabilities or learning difficulties, and empower students to be self-determining. Curriculum materials should provide opportunities for students to gain knowledges, practices and dispositions that enable them to challenge injustices and inequities in relation to the past, present and futures of people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties.

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that the test results for some students with disabilities and some students with learning difficulties may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.

- Design and provide a variety of assessment tasks and processes to enable students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties to demonstrate what they know and can do with what they know.

- Suggest the use of adaptive technologies (e.g. communication boards, keyboard pointers) for some students with disabilities and some students with learning difficulties.

- Use generic terms such as 'communicate', 'present', 'create', instead of 'speak', 'talk', 'listen', 'look', 'draw' and 'write' when constructing learning outcomes and assessment tasks. Specificity can limit the participation of students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties and discriminate against them.

- Include signing, communication boards, augmentative communication devices, and computers as legitimate forms of communication to maximise access to and participation in learning experiences for students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties.

- Include and make visible within curriculum materials the knowledges, practices and dispositions of people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties in Australian societies.

- Depict people living with their disability or learning difficulty in a positive light.

- Depict the diverse lifestyles of people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties in a range of everyday activities.

- Explore the historical, cultural, and social constructions of knowledge about people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties (e.g. misconceptions of people's abilities and rights).

- In curriculum materials, analyse and challenge unequal power relations within and across various groups of people with and without disabilities or learning difficulties (e.g. condescending behaviours, paternalistic attitudes, access to public services).

- Question and challenge social contexts that inhibit full participation of particular groups or individuals with disabilities or learning difficulties.

- Provide learning experiences that develop students' acceptance of and respect for people with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties to achieve equitable educational outcomes?

- Are students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties able to access curriculum materials and participate in learning experiences?

- Are buildings and services discussed in curriculum materials accessible to people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties?

- Do learning experiences accommodate different learning styles?

- Are people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties depicted in everyday activities?

- Are people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties depicted actively participating across a range of activities (e.g. shopping, playing sport, working)?

- Do curriculum materials include the historical, cultural and social contributions of people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties?

- Do curriculum materials acknowledge and challenge unequal power relations within and across groups and/or cultures?

- Do curriculum materials value the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties?

- Do curriculum materials develop in students the knowledges, practices and dispositions to challenge stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination?

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Gender and gender construction

Definition

The term 'gender' is used to describe '… a culturally ascribed pattern of behaviour recognised as "feminine" or "masculine". It is a socially constructed, learned behaviour. Accordingly, gender differs from one society to another and across social classes, ethnic and cultural groups within the same society' (Queensland Department of Education 1996, p. 49).

The Queensland School Curriculum Council's glossary of generic terms defines gender identity as 'an individual's perception of self within socially constructed masculinities and femininities'.

Terminology

The following conventions apply to terminology relating to gender and gender construction:

- Neutral terms are used where the sex is not specified, obvious or relevant (e.g. 'person' instead of 'man' or 'woman').

- Use of the plural in the terms 'masculinities' and 'femininities' is a way of drawing attention to the fact that there are many different ways of being male and female — that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are not single static entities within an homogenous culture. Boys and girls should be presented with many 'masculinities' and many 'femininities' within popular culture, in formal school areas of learning and within their own environments, and experiment with a range of masculine and feminine ways of being (Queensland Teachers' Union 1999, p. 60).

Issues

Understandings of gender construction should include knowledge about the relationship of gender to other factors, such as social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances. These factors may have a greater impact on some individuals and some groups of males and females than on others. Gender equity is achieved when both boys and girls have the competencies and commitment to recognise and challenge inequities based on gender especially where social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances are factors.

Homophobia is the fear or dislike of an individual based on his or her perceived failure to conform to dominant local norms of masculinity and femininity. The term has come to refer particularly to hatred of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and the harassing behaviour that it produces. Homophobic harassment can be described as both verbal and physical harassment, including social exclusion and violence, which arises from individual or group homophobia. Homophobia can create a limiting environment in a school for young people wishing to exercise choice in relation to subject choice, cultural and recreational activities, relationships, attitudes and behaviours. It represents the exertion of power by a dominant group over girls and boys who are perceived to be different (Queensland Teachers' Union 1999, pp. 59–60).

Curriculum and test materials

Curriculum and test materials should be inclusive of both boys and girls and free of gender stereotypes. The perspectives and experiences of both male and female students should be included to ensure equity of access and participation.

Curriculum materials should facilitate an understanding of the social and cultural constructions of gender in order to promote attitudes and behaviours that foster equal and non-violent relationships for students. It is important not to construct girls and boys as distinctly homogenous, monolithic or oppositional groups (Nayler 1997, p. 15).

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that test results and subsequent analyses for some girls and some boys may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.

- Ensure that materials do not contain text, illustrations or references that may be offensive to members of one sex.

- Provide references to objects and ideas that are equally familiar to males and females.

- Use examples that show girls and boys and women and men in diverse and non-traditional roles.

- Recognise and value the contributions of both females and males to history and contemporary societies.

- Include experiences and perspectives of both sexes within and across social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances.

- Include a balance of family compositions (e.g. single-parent households; children living with grandparents or other relatives, in extended families or with same-sex parents).

- Depict females and males from a variety of groups in a variety of paid, non-paid and voluntary roles (e.g. caring for children, housekeeping, repairing, playing sport).

- Analyse and challenge employment stereotypes (e.g. female teachers, male road workers).

- Explore the historical, cultural and social silencing and marginalising of women's contributions (e.g. voting rights, participation in the workforce, status).

- Explore and challenge constructions of masculinities and femininities.

- In curriculum materials, analyse and challenge unequal power relations between women and men within and across various social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances.

- Ensure that both female and male characters are 'the actors' — that is, both females and males are doing things and controlling activities rather than being in secondary positions.

- Provide opportunities to examine and challenge representations of women and men, including the analysis of gender constructions, misconceptions and stereotypes.

- Provide students with learning experiences that promote understanding and respect for diversity of people's lifestyles and sexual identity.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for boys and girls to achieve equitable educational outcomes?

- Are curriculum and test materials free of gender bias?

- Does an analysis of the test results by gender influence the development of future test items?

- Are both boys and girls able to access curriculum materials and participate in learning experiences?

- Do curriculum and test materials use the knowledges, practices and dispositions of both boys and girls as a basis to learning?
- Do curriculum and test materials contain a balance of males and females portrayed in a wide range of roles and activities?
- Do learning experiences provide a balance of contexts and interests for males and females from a variety of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances?
- Do curriculum materials reflect an acceptance of the many ways of being masculine and feminine?
- Do curriculum materials explore and analyse the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledge by men and women?
- Do curriculum and test materials include males and females within and across a range of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances?
- Do curriculum materials equip girls and boys to actively participate in contemporary societies characterised by changing patterns of working, civic and home life?
- Do curriculum materials explore the relationship between valued knowledges and power of men and women?
- Do curriculum materials provide opportunities for students to explore and challenge gender constructions?
- Do curriculum materials develop in students the knowledges, practices and dispositions to challenge stereotypes, discrimination, homophobia and sexism?

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Gifts and talents

Definition

Students with gifts and talents are those who excel, or have the potential to excel, in general or specific ability areas (Queensland Department of Education 1993, p. 3). Gifts and talents are evident in students from diverse cultural, social, economic and geographic circumstances and with a range of abilities.

Although the term 'gifted and talented' is generally accepted to refer to an individual's very high ability in any worthwhile area of human endeavour, it has become increasingly popular to define gifts and talents separately (Hewton 2000, p. 9). Gagne's Differential Model of Giftedness and Talent (1997, p. 1) defines giftedness as *natural abilities or aptitude domains*, and talent as *superior mastery or performance* (within the top 10% in any field). Gagne argues that the developmental process is facilitated (or hindered) by the action of two types of catalysts: intrapersonal (physical and psychological) and environmental (macroscopic and microscopic).

The concept of giftedness continues to alter with current understandings of intelligence, creativity, brain function, self-concept and disadvantage. These understandings influence, and are influenced by, social and cultural contexts. The acceptability of definitions of giftedness depends upon what societies recognise as valuable performance areas. Defining giftedness in great detail can also pose problems of labelling and exclusivity. The following are some respected authors who add to the weight of literature in the area of giftedness: Eddie Braggett, Francoys Gagne, Howard Gardner and Joseph Renzulli.

Terminology

The following terms are integral to the education of students with gifts and talents:

- *Acceleration*: fast tracking a student's progress through the curriculum. This can include such practices as year skipping or access to higher year levels in areas of strength.

- *Enrichment*: the broadening of concepts, content, understanding, processes and skills beyond the core curriculum and at a level appropriate to each child's developmental level.

- *Extension*: engagement in depth of studies and the ability to apply or integrate one's knowledge at a deeper level of conceptualisation (Braggett 1994, p. 42).

- *Curriculum compacting*: a systemic procedure for modifying or streamlining the regular curriculum to eliminate repetition of previously mastered material, to upgrade the challenge level of the regular curriculum, and to provide time for appropriate enrichment and/or acceleration activities (Renzulli 1994, p. 25).

Issues

It is important to identify students with gifts and talents so that they can be provided with a curriculum that meets their needs and abilities. Students with gifts and talents are not an homogenous group and come from diverse social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances. Students exhibiting disruptive behaviour may in fact have gifts and talents that have not been identified or developed and engage in such behaviour to relieve their boredom. Teachers who implement gifted education strategies report that behaviour problems disappear when students feel challenged and fulfilled (Hewton 2000, p. 10).

Curriculum and test materials

Curriculum and test materials should include and value the experiences and perspectives of students with gifts and talents. These students require access to resources (human and material) that provide challenge and allow exploration in both the depth and breadth of the key learning area. Several factors influence the achievement of students' potential. These include:

- recognition from their own cultures;

- acquisition of necessary skills to facilitate achievement;

- development of a positive self-concept;

- appropriate home, community and school support.

In particular, those with the potential to excel require extension, enrichment, and compaction of curriculum to maintain their self-esteem and overcome stereotypical viewpoints of what constitutes giftedness. 'Programs planned, implemented and assessed using a framework of multiple intelligences and higher-order thinking will often reveal previously unsuspected gifts' (Hewton 2000, p. 10).

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that the test results for some students with gifts and talents may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.

- Provide learning experiences of an abstract, complex, varied, creative, open-ended or problematic nature, which involve critical, higher-order thinking and metacognition to challenge, enrich and extend students.

- Provide opportunities in curriculum materials for self-evaluation and reflection that encourage students to use metacognitive strategies to critically analyse their learning processes and products.

- Promote the use of varied assessment techniques and instruments and reporting formats in curriculum materials.

- Include the following models in curriculum materials and learning experiences: Renzulli's Enrichment Triad, Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognition, Krathwohl's Taxonomy, Parne's Creative Problem-Solving Technique, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, and de Bono's 'Thinking Hats'.

- Promote negotiated learning experiences to accommodate students' areas of interest and pace and depth of learning.

- Include learning experiences and materials that are age and interest appropriate.

- Include open-ended questions and a range of test items that enable students to demonstrate their abilities.

- Provide opportunities for students to engage with integrated or cross-curricular learning experiences.

- Provide learning experiences that develop students' acceptance of, and respect for, the diversity of people's intellectual, physical, aesthetic and creative abilities.

- Provide learning experiences for students to critically analyse the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledge, and to challenge subsequent injustices and inequities.

- Provide opportunities for students to examine and challenge representations of people with gifts and talents, including the analysis of misconceptions and stereotypes.
- In curriculum materials, analyse and challenge unequal power relations and knowledges that are valued within and across various groups of people.
- Empower students to develop robust self-esteem and to embrace their gifts and talents.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for students with gifts and talents to obtain equitable educational outcomes?
- Do curriculum materials provide learning experiences that offer students opportunities for depth of inquiry, research, and independent study?
- Do curriculum materials provide students with opportunities to challenge, enrich and extend their learnings?
- Do curriculum materials recognise, value, and cater for the needs and abilities of students with gifts and talents within and across diverse social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances?
- Do test materials provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their gifts and talents in aspects of literacy and numeracy?
- Do curriculum materials support a constructivist approach?
- Do learning experiences provide a balance of contexts and interests for students with gifts and talents from a variety of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances?
- Do curriculum materials reflect an acceptance that there are diverse manifestations of gifts and talents?
- Do curriculum materials explore and analyse the historical, social and cultural constructions of people with gifts and talents?
- Do curriculum materials explore the relationship between valued knowledges and power relations within and across groups of people?
- Do curriculum materials develop in students the knowledges, practices and dispositions to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes?

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Rural and remote locations

Definition

Students in rural and remote locations may have restricted access to and participation in those social, cultural and educational experiences that result in quality educational outcomes. This category of students includes, but is not limited to, those who are:

- residing in the west of Queensland;
- residing in the north of Queensland;
- residing outside of regional centres;
- attending small or community schools;
- enrolled in a School of Distance Education;
- studying from home;
- travelling;
- itinerant.

Population

Approximately 90% of Queensland has been identified by the Commonwealth as geographically isolated (Queensland Department of Education 1994, p. 21). There are therefore many students in the State who live and receive their schooling in areas regarded as remote or isolated.

Terminology

The following conventions apply to terminology relating to rural and remote areas:

- In general text, the term 'students in rural and remote locations' is used (or where appropriate 'boys in …' and 'girls in …') not 'rural students' (or 'rural girls' or 'rural boys') — for example, 'Students/girls/boys in rural and remote locations performed higher than the cohort'.
- In display work and tables, the shortened form 'R & R students' may be used.

Issues

The Queensland Department of Education (1994, p. 21) has identified some challenges and strengths associated with remote areas. The challenges may include:

- hidden poverty;
- lack of peer stimulation;
- experience of isolation;
- limited local job opportunities;
- further distances for students to travel to school;
- restricted access to specialist/professional services (e.g. health and welfare);
- difficulty in participating in cultural and sporting activities.

The strengths include:

- family-like atmosphere;
- cross-age contact among students;

- different lifestyles;

- sharing of resources, facilities and activities;

- teamwork and community support;

- opportunities for leadership development.

There is a greater chance of students in rural and remote locations being affected by natural disasters such as flood, drought and fire, and experiencing the impact of the associated social and economic consequences.

Curriculum and test materials

The Human Rights Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education adopted five criteria in evaluating the provision of education for students in rural and remote locations. The criteria state that education must be available, accessible, affordable, acceptable and adaptable for every student without discrimination of any kind (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/rural/education).

Curriculum and test materials must be relevant to the perspectives and experiences of students in rural and remote locations. The real-life experiences of these students should be used as a basis of their learning, and there should be recognition of their prior learning. The diversity of social, cultural and economic circumstances of students in rural and remote locations should be acknowledged.

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that the test results for some students in rural and remote locations may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.

- Respond to the interrelated impacts of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances on the access and participation of students from rural and remote locations.

- In test materials, include the experiences of people from rural and remote locations as contexts for questions and stimulus material.

- Promote the use of varied assessment techniques and instruments and reporting formats in curriculum materials.

- Provide opportunities for integrated or cross-curricular learning experiences.

- Ensure prescribed resources and learning experiences in curriculum materials are inclusive of students from rural and remote locations.

- Include, and make visible, the diversity of knowledges, practices and dispositions of people from rural and remote locations.

- In curriculum and test materials, ensure examples include rural, remote, metropolitan, urban, suburban and small town locations.

- Provide learning experiences that develop students' acceptance of, and respect for, the diversity of people from rural and remote locations and their contributions to societies.

- Provide opportunities to critique historical and contemporary representations of people from rural and remote locations, including the analysis of misconceptions and stereotypes (e.g. cowboys/girls, rich landowners, and the experiences of Indigenous station hands).

- Include learning experiences that enable students to examine representations of people from rural and remote locations in earlier curriculum materials and textbooks and to consider how the perceptions evident in these materials may have changed.

- In curriculum materials, analyse and challenge unequal power relations and knowledges that are valued within and across various groups of people.

- Empower students to develop robust self-esteem and to value their life experiences.

- Provide learning experiences that help students develop the knowledges, practices and dispositions to challenge injustices and inequities within rural and remote locations and between rural and urban locations.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for students from rural and remote locations to obtain equitable educational outcomes?

- Do curriculum materials provide students with opportunities for access to and participation in a full range of learning experiences?

- Do curriculum and test materials provide a balance of contexts and interests for students from rural and remote locations?

- Are the experiences of students living in rural and remote locations included and valued in curriculum and test materials?

- Do curriculum materials recognise, value, and cater for the needs and abilities of students from rural and remote locations within and across diverse social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances?

- Do curriculum and test materials provide a balance of locations within and across rural, remote and urban locations?

- Do curriculum materials explore and analyse the historical, social and cultural constructions of people from rural and remote locations?

- Do curriculum materials explore the relationship between valued knowledges and power relations within and across groups of people?

- Do curriculum materials acknowledge unequal power relations within and across groups of people in rural and remote locations and between rural and urban locations?

- Do curriculum materials provide opportunities for students to explore and challenge constructions of people from rural and remote locations?

- Do curriculum materials enable students to develop the knowledges, practices and dispositions to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes associated with people from rural and remote locations?

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Socio-economic circumstance and poverty

Definition

Students' socioeconomic circumstances refer to the social and economic factors affecting educational access, participation and outcomes. Income, occupational status and security, level of educational qualifications, housing and unemployment are some indicators of socioeconomic circumstances (Queensland Department of Education 1994, p. 33). Students in low socioeconomic circumstances may experience a lack of emotional resources as well as material possessions.

'Officially, poverty designates the economic status of those living below the Henderson "poverty line" (an arbitrary line established by the Henderson Commission of Enquiry into Poverty, 1975–76). Along with economic deprivation, there is associated social, psychological and educational disadvantage' (Smith 1993, p. 56).

Population

The diversity of socioeconomic circumstances in Australia is evident in the following statistics compiled by the Brotherhood of St Lawrence (www.bsl.org.au/library/povupdte.htm).

- In 1996 an estimated 11% (at least 1.6 million people) of the population were living in a household with an income below the poverty line. More than one in seven children (over half a million) lived in a household with an income below the poverty line.

- The top 10% of Australian households held more than 50% of all household wealth while the bottom 50% held only 3% of all household wealth.

- The richest 30% of Australians receive more than half of total income, while the poorest 30% receive only 10% of total income.

- In January 2000, 370 000 families with one or more children under 15 years had no family member employed.

- In December 1998, more than one and a half million adults were reliant on federal government payments and allowances for at least 90% of their income, due to sickness, disability or unemployment.

- Approximately 1.8 million children lived in families who received government support to assist with the costs of their children, a recognition of the family's low income.

Unemployment, living in a sole-parent family, culture/ethnicity and disability are key factors associated with poverty.

Terminology

Terminology should reflect the circumstances of the particular cohort of students being referred to — for example:

- students from diverse socioeconomic circumstances;

- students from low socioeconomic circumstances;

- students living in poverty.

Issues

About one in four Queensland school children live in poverty. These children live in locations ranging from the outer suburbs and inner city areas of Brisbane to provincial towns and more remote locations, including Indigenous communities. Families move in and out of employment, due to fluctuations in labour markets and in the local and broader economy. While economic vulnerability is a central feature of poverty, there are also psychological and cultural effects. These largely result from the feelings of social exclusion that people living in poverty experience (MACEM 1997, p. 1).

According to MACEM (1997, p. 1), children living in poverty tend to:

- score poorly on basic literacy and numeracy tests in primary school;
- leave school early;
- have poor results at the end of their secondary schooling;
- not attend university.

This is particularly the case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in poverty. The financial demands of schooling place a very heavy burden on families living in poverty.

Curriculum and test materials

The financial hardships experienced by children living in poverty most often mean they have not had the range of cultural and social experiences that enable them to relate confidently and easily to many of the taken-for-granted cultural assumptions of schooling. Schooling can do something about this through curriculum, teaching, and community-related initiatives. The parents of children living in poverty have the same high educational aspirations for their children as other parents do (MACEM 1997, p. 2).

Curriculum and test materials need to be inclusive of the perspectives and experiences of students from diverse socioeconomic circumstances. In particular, it is important to recognise the combined impacts of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances on students and how these might influence their achievement of equitable educational outcomes.

Strategies

The following are strategies for applying the Queensland School Curriculum Council's equity principles in the development of curriculum and test materials:

- Acknowledge that the test results of some students from low socioeconomic circumstances may not be indicative of their abilities and promote this understanding with students, parents/carers, teachers, administrators and the broader community. These results need to be looked at in conjunction with the information about students already collected through observation, consultation and other focused analysis techniques.
- The financial costs of learning experiences should be considered to ensure access and participation for students from low socioeconomic circumstances.
- Provide learning experiences that broaden students' social and cultural capital.
- Acknowledge and respond to the interrelated impacts of social, cultural, geographic and economic circumstances on students' access to curriculum materials and their participation in learning experiences.
- Consult with local communities in the design and delivery of curriculum and test materials.
- Value, respect, and include the experiences and perspectives of students from diverse socioeconomic circumstances.
- Avoid stereotypes by depicting a range of lifestyles of people from diverse socioeconomic circumstances.

- Provide opportunities for students to value and explore the diversity within and across socioeconomic circumstances in their constructions of knowledge, their problem solving and their demonstrations of learnings.
- Make explicit the historical, social, and cultural constructions of knowledge in curriculum and test materials.
- Acknowledge unequal power relations within and across individuals and groups from various socioeconomic circumstances in curriculum materials (e.g. the poverty-and-wealth divide, interaction of social and economic factors, class).
- Provide opportunities for students to examine and challenge representations of people from diverse socioeconomic circumstances, including the analysis of misconceptions and stereotypes.
- Provide learning experiences that develop students' acceptance of, and respect for, the diversity of people.
- Provide learning experiences that help students develop the knowledges, practices and dispositions to challenge injustices of social and economic poverty and understand the power of social and cultural capital.

Reflection

The following questions are provided as a guide for determining whether curriculum and test materials promote the Council's equity principles:

- Do curriculum and test materials provide opportunities for students from diverse socioeconomic circumstances to obtain equitable educational outcomes?
- Are curriculum and test materials inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of students from low socioeconomic circumstances?
- Are learning experiences financially viable for students from low socioeconomic circumstances?
- Are suggested resources accessible to all students?
- Do curriculum and test materials reflect the experiences and perspectives of students from diverse socioeconomic circumstances?
- Do curriculum and test materials cater for students' learning styles (e.g. visual, kinaesthetic, tactile)?
- Are the assessment tasks and test materials contextualised linguistically for students from low socioeconomic circumstances?
- Are curriculum and test materials void of value-laden language that devalues certain groups, interests, pastimes and occupations?
- Are curriculum and test materials inclusive of diverse socioeconomic circumstances in their assumptions and reference points (e.g. linguistic features, perspectives, learning styles)?
- Do curriculum materials actively engage in the sharing of sociocultural knowledges?
- Do curriculum and test materials show a range of appearances that are representative but not stereotypical of diverse socioeconomic circumstances (e.g. hairstyle, dress)?
- Do curriculum materials explore social and economic power relations within the Australian and global context?
- Whose perspectives are constructed and silenced in curriculum and test materials?
- Do curriculum materials challenge stereotyped expectations of students from low socioeconomic circumstances?

- Do curriculum materials develop in students the knowledges, practices, and dispositions to challenge stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination?

- Do curriculum materials provide opportunities for critical examination of a range of perspectives within societies and the impact of these on diverse groups?

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