



Show Me Session

Western Cape College

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This 'show me' session will address two challenges presented by the implementation of New Basics Curriculum, and in particular the Rich Tasks, within the context of the Western Cape College (Years P-12):

- 1) Embedding the demonstration of depth of knowledge and understanding in the primary curriculum.
- 2) Developing a trans-disciplinary approach to curriculum development and delivery in the upper middle school and retaining the desired depth of knowledge and understanding.

To demonstrate how the teachers and administration developed a successful and prosperous Professional Learning Community, so vital to the implementation of the New Basics Curriculum, I will use a Suite 2 Rich Task (RT 6#6 Design, Make and Display a Product) and a Suite 3 Rich Task (RT 9#3 Built Environment: Designing a Structure).

Context

The Western Cape College was created in 2001 and formally launched by the Minister for Education, Anna Bligh, in 2002. The college was formed from the original schools of Weipa North State School, Mapoon State School, Aurukun State School and Jessica Point State School, spread out over 300 kilometres. The objective of the formation of the college was to fundamentally address the educational outcomes for all students of the Western Cape. Education outcomes for the cohort of Indigenous students reflected the national picture of endemic

failure including a continuing decline in overall outcomes. Training and employment outcomes were equally poor despite the availability of substantial employment opportunities at Comalco Ltd in Weipa. The signing of the Western Cape Communities Co-Existence Agreement (WCCCA) in 2001 is central to the focus of much of the work of the college, and creates significant partnership opportunity between the College and Comalco in the provision of education, training and employment.

The focus of the college has been on achieving organisational effectiveness and individual teacher accountability as the fundamental driver of improving education, training and employment outcomes.

A journey to reality of accountability: the Western Cape College the first three years

With the amalgamation of the four campuses, it became evident that a consistent curriculum, catering to the diversity of needs, learning styles and the range of abilities of students was required. One of the four campuses, Aurukun, was already a Phase 1 New Basics School. This, as well as the fact that the Weipa Campus had not yet made any developmental steps towards the writing of programs to implement the KLA Syllabus, gave reason for a serious consideration of what the New Basics Curriculum had to offer. New initiatives, including Staged Schooling, as well as Year 10 being a 'stock take' year, closely tied with the grouped suites of Rich Tasks

offered by the New Basics Curriculum. Concerns had been raised at P&C meetings with regard to the grading of student work, the reliability of this information, and to state-wide comparability. A combination of all of the above, led to the implementation of the New Basics Curriculum at Western Cape College.

The Rich Tasks

The Rich Tasks are highly complex assessment tasks requiring students to demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding from a range of disciplines. A Rich Task is a culminating performance or demonstration that is purposeful and models a real life role. Rich Tasks are specific activities that students do that have real-world value and use. Each Rich Task will draw upon

- Repertoires of practice - the cognitive, cultural, linguistic and social skills that need to be acquired.
- Operational fields - the New Basics plus other disciplinary Key Learning Areas and/or trans-disciplinary fields of knowledge that will have to be brought into play.

New Basics: Theory into Practice

Western Cape College Models for the implementation of the New Basics Curriculum and Rich Tasks

Anyone who is contributing to the collaboration process is managing and is a manager. (Limerick, Cunnington and Crowther, 1998)

The New Basics was used as a vehicle for Staged Schooling (Junior School P-3, Middle School 4-9, Senior School 10-12) in the Western Cape College and is the basis for middle schooling reform. It was recognised that to successfully complete the Rich Tasks to the desired level, models would have to be developed that provided the necessary support for teaching staff as outlined below.

Model 1: Rich Tasks Suite One (Years 1-3) and Suite Two (Years 4-6)

Teachers as Trans-disciplinary Agents: Based on the typical primary school structure this model requires teachers to work in vertical and horizontal teams to complete tasks. The class teacher leads and completes the Rich Task. Due to the complexity of the Rich Tasks which require students to demonstrate deep knowledge and deep understanding, many primary teachers are 'out of their depth' when it came to some aspects of the tasks. This requires specialist IT, Environment and Technology, Health and Physical Education, Music, LOTE and Multiliteracies staff to assist teachers to complete tasks. These specialists are drawn from across the community and secondary school.

To support such a model, new team meeting structures were designed namely Horizontal and Vertical Teacher Teams. Horizontal Teacher Team meetings focused primarily on teachers in the same year level meeting together to plan towards the completion of the Rich Task. These meetings often involved the Heads of Junior and Middle Schools so that they could provide the necessary support where needed. Within year levels, often a teacher would display a particular interest in a task or a component of a task and would take over the leadership of the task. A non-competitive element is the key to the overall success for the completion of tasks. As a result of the state-wide moderation process, the teachers developed networks with other teachers from New Basics Schools.

The Vertical Teacher Teams are vital to the success of New Basics. The meeting is vertical in structure by having all teachers in the Years 1-3 pod or 4-6 pod involved in the curriculum development. Juncture year teachers contribute to the backward mapping of tasks to help in the development of the three-year curriculum

plan. Primary juncture year teachers often lacked the required specialist knowledge and application to complete tasks. To cater for this, specialist secondary teachers are involved in team meetings to assist in the planning process and in some cases teaching components of the tasks. The local community is also used as a specialist resource.

The logistics of such team meetings are enormous considering the vast distances between campuses. The college is committed to these meetings and provides teachers with the necessary travel requirements (four wheel drive vehicles and light aircraft) as well as teleconferencing and the use of the college curriculum website.

Model 2: Rich Tasks Suite Three (Years 7–9)

Teachers as Lead Agents: This involves a 'Lead Agent' teacher being assigned a Rich Task. The Lead Agent then 'subcontracts' out various components of the Rich Tasks to other subject specialists who work towards the completion of the task. The Lead Agent is accountable for the completion of the task and has to monitor the progress of the specialist teachers and keep the task on track. The trans-disciplinary approach, use of specialist staff and community business and expertise is the key to developing and implementing the New Basics Curriculum. (See the PowerPoint™ presentation for diagram.)

In the Years 7–9 pod, the Horizontal Teacher Teams consist of teachers from a variety of specialist areas that teach across a year level. The Rich Task is the common element that combines the teachers, and team meetings function solely around the completion of tasks. The Rich Task Lead Agent leads the team. Very important in the context of Indigenous education is the high level of planning time needed to develop the necessary scaffolding

(incorporating productive pedagogies) of tasks to assist students. Most Years 7–9 teachers are operating across a variety of Rich Tasks.

Vertical Teacher Teams in the Years 7–9 pod differ greatly from the primary model. The teachers are organized into subject areas based on the four New Basics Curriculum organisers, namely Life Pathways, Active Citizenship, Environment and Technology, and Multiliteracies. A subject area coordinator is the team leader and is accountable for the development and implementation of work programs covering Years 7–9.

Ultimately it was the development of the Professional Learning Community in the Western Cape College that led to the successful implementation of the curriculum. Very early on, teachers and administrators recognised that the New Basics was a new and innovative approach to teaching and learning and that it was not just the old curriculum in a new package. Outlined below are the key actions of teachers and school administrators in the development of the Professional Learning Community in the Western Cape College. (See the PowerPoint™ presentation for diagram.)

Teacher actions

- Recognised that this was a new approach to teaching and learning not just something old in a new package. Even though there were very experienced teachers in the college, the new curriculum was a real leveler as no one teacher or administrator could claim to be the curriculum expert.
- A cooperative approach to curriculum development and delivery. There was an understanding that for this curriculum to work all members of the team had to be pulling their weight and in the same direction.

- Commitment to a full and balanced curriculum by the expectations that all tasks are to be completed.
- Commitment to developing a curriculum that caters for all students. There is no 'dumbing down' of tasks. The teachers are committed to using the productive pedagogies to develop the necessary scaffolding to cater for all students.
- Teachers committed to the curriculum through clear understanding of accountabilities and achievable goals.
- Ownership of the curriculum reform; teachers as curriculum leaders
- Honesty, and prepared to admit when they are out of their depth and seek the necessary support and advice (New Basics Moderators, specialist staff, community input).
- Fully engaged in the moderation process, described by teachers as the 'best professional development they had ever had'.
- High expectations of students with regards to behaviour, attitudes to learning and completion of tasks.
- Presented a positive public promotion of the reforms.
- Devolution of responsibilities through clear role statements and accountabilities.
- Regular teacher and administration meetings focusing on curriculum development.
- Provided direction for curriculum development.
- Responsive to the needs of staff during a time of massive structural and curriculum change.
- Positive public promotion of the New Basics.
- Commitment to a Supportive School Environment with high expectations on student behaviour, attitudes and attendance.
- Development of a curriculum website as a professional development tool for teachers across the college.

Administration actions

- Total commitment to the New Basics Curriculum. The Heads of Junior school and Middle School are accountable for student outcomes and embraced the challenges presented by the New Basics Curriculum. There is an expectation by the college administration that the curriculum will be completed in its entirety.
- Designed systems and structures through timetabling and teacher teams for completion of tasks.
- Responsive and appropriate resource allocation and management for the implementation of the curriculum.
- Appropriate staff recruitment.

Conclusion

What has been described in this paper in no way does justice to the organisational change that has occurred over the last three years in the Western Cape College. The implementation of the New Basics has demanded enormous changes in college structures and organisational culture. The way forward for the college, and for that matter Cape York, relies heavily on the continued development of the Professional Learning Community despite the constraint of high staff and administration turnover, which is unavoidable in the remote Indigenous communities of Cape York. Despite all the challenges educators face within these remote communities, the New Basics Curriculum framework and the vigorous assessment agenda through the Rich Tasks provide a connectedness of purpose and, in a sense, are creating a Professional Learning Community across Cape York.

References

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