

## **The crowded curriculum: Reality or myth?**

For some time primary teachers have been concerned about the seemingly crowded curriculum that they teach. As each new K-6 syllabus has been implemented, teachers have found themselves under pressure to teach all the outcomes and required content in the syllabuses. While no one doubts the pressures that are on teachers to meet all the expectations of the curriculum, testing programs, community activities and general school activities, here is a checklist that might help ease the stress.

### **1. Teach the syllabus.**

Teachers in government schools are required to teach the syllabuses while in non-government schools the syllabuses are still not mandatory and the Board of Studies minimum curriculum requirement have to be met. Some schools teach units of work that are not required. They can be favourites from a previous school or course or BOS units that are suggestions and not the syllabus. For example, in HSIE many teachers still use the BOS support document with 28 units of work without even realising that they are suggestions only and not the syllabus. While a good way to start the new HSIE syllabus back in 1999, there have been many better units produced since and often with schools. HSIE scope and sequences can be more creative when directly taken from the syllabus rather than slavishly following these units. Not letting go and embracing the new syllabuses can make an overcrowded curriculum.

### **2. We're a literacy and numeracy school.**

Some schools pride themselves on being focused on literacy and numeracy to such an extent that the other KLAs struggle to be presented in the curriculum. These schools need to realise that Science and Technology, HSIE and PDHPE can provide the context for teaching literacy and numeracy and assist in achieving English syllabus outcomes. If these contexts are not used in this way, teachers find themselves developing other contexts and contributing to the crowded curriculum.

### **3. Not another special program/event/day/competition.**

Primary schools, sometimes under community pressure, take on special programs, day, events and competitions without first checking to see if they can be integrated into the curriculum. Some of these features can become part of classroom learning and form contexts for learning, while others can not. Selecting the ones that can be used to support learning outcomes is one way to prevent overcrowding.

Especially troublesome is the maintenance of certain days and traditions where sometimes the meaning itself has been lost, for example, Easter hat parades. Originating in England to celebrate the beginning of spring and then picked up by Christians as a symbol of new birth (resurrection), Easter hat parades still go on in many schools. Why we would celebrate a spring festival in autumn is beyond me and the Christian significance has been well and truly forgotten in most cases. In fact, many primary schools use this activity as a substitute for doing anything religious at Easter. This too is curious because the HSIE K-6 syllabus has religious celebrations as a focus and schools could teach about what Easter means to Christians and what Passover means to Jews. But no, they have an Easter hat parade that in preparation and implementation consumes time and upsets many parents who loath making hats. The curriculum is overcrowded in these schools, but whose fault is that?

### **4. Busy work**

There is a joke about HSIE being about colouring in and while such skills can come in useful in HSIE and other lessons, work that is focused on presentation, time consumption and avoidance of anything too demanding might be seen to be just as useless. This is a particular concern in secondary schools where some teachers don't believe that students from low socio-economic areas can learn and deliberately keep the work simple involving lots of mindless worksheets, copying and colouring in. By not focusing on the syllabus demands and the dimensions of Quality teaching some primary classroom can also waste time and contribute to overcrowding.

#### **5. Too much assessment**

This feature of primary schools had been recognised and the new reporting examples indicate that teachers will no longer need to accumulate data and report on student achievement of individual outcomes. This should release teachers from the burden of assessment and give them more time to teach. Horray!

Now with these five matters addressed, is the curriculum really overcrowded?