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CONTENTS

Are Transversal Competencies the 'New Black'?

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ABSTRACT

"The debate surrounding what constitutes quality education and learning in the 21st century is ongoing" UNESCO (2015 p.1). While traditional disciplines such as English, mathematics and science continue to have a strong hold, there is a concern that the current educational focus is not addressing the 'new generation' of skills, often referred to as '21st century' or 'soft skills'. The questions Australian educators must ask include: What are these competencies, what is their significance and where, if at all, are they addressed within the Australian Curriculum? This article examines the acting forces and key organisations involved in developing international skills frameworks. It discusses where and how these competencies are addressed in the Australian Curriculum and how they could be embedded and consequently assessed more thoughtfully and strategically in the classroom. We suggest that these "transversal competencies" are already present in our curriculum as the General Capabilities, therefore, there is no new framework to consider - they are not the 'new black'. The challenge for educators, however, is to recognise these competencies, provide strategic learning opportunities, and collect evidence to ensure their students attain the necessary skills to be ready for the future.

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of reports are espousing the importance of the so-called '21st century' or 'soft' skills. For example, the OECD (2012a) states that "Skills have become the global currency of 21st century economies" and McKinsey (2017) suggests that as machines are becoming more capable of (AI) artificial intelligence, workers of the future will need to focus more on activities that require skills rather than content knowledge. Gonski (2018, p.36) stated, "every student needs to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to navigate a rapidly changing world", indicating both skills and knowledge are equally important. In Australia this trend will impact 4.3 million young people who will be required to make this shift towards balancing skills and knowledge and consequently the Australian education system will need to equip young people with the necessary skills and capabilities required in the era of the 'new work smart' (FYA 2017, p.8). It is imperative then, that we identify shortcomings in our current curriculum and develop bold strategies to create a progressive education system that develops a 'new work smart' workforce of the future (OECD, 2012 p.124).

A QUESTION OF TERMINOLOGY

Various terminologies are currently used in an attempt to capture, compartmentalise and name this shifting cluster of skills and competencies. Within research communities, educational institutions and international organisations, however, there is no definitive list or title to describe them collectively (Gonski 2018 p.39). Terms in use include '21st century skills' or '21st century learning' (e.g. the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills [ATC21S] Partnership for 21st century skills [P21], 'key competencies' (OECD 2005), 'soft skills', 'new collar skills' (McKinsey 2017) and 'entrepreneurial skills' (New Work Smarts). '21st century skills' is widely used, but many argue that the skills and capabilities referred to were important before the 21st century, while also noting that with rapid change, century-long milestones are inappropriate (Voogt 2015, p. 301). Another term, "transversal competencies", is re-emerging as a way of describing these broad-based skills, knowledge and understandings. For the purpose of this article, the authors will be referring to this cluster of skills as "transversal competencies" (tVCs).

In April 2018, the European Parliament and Council (EU) 2018/646, articulated a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass), acknowledging that "transversal or soft skills, such as critical thinking, team work, problem solving and creativity, digital or language skills, are increasingly important and are essential prerequisites for personal and professional fulfilment and can be applied in different fields". (European Commission 2018). The European Commission also suggests that transversal knowledge, skills and competences are the building blocks for the development of the 'hard' skills and competencies required to succeed in the labour market (European Commission 2018). ATS2020 (2018) describe tVCs as a broad set of key skills that are known to be critically important to success in school, further education, and the world of work.

TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCIES IN THE CURRICULUM

There is evidence that education systems from a number of countries around the world have taken steps to redesign their curriculum and explicitly embed 21st century competencies such as problem-solving, collaboration, global awareness, and communication skills in the curriculum (New Basics 2017, p 8).

UNESCO (2015) suggests that there are two main approaches to this process:

• an **analytic** approach where learning of tVCs is facilitated through a cluster of learning areas or learning experiences, each intended to provide the learner with a particular competency (e.g. the Australian Curriculum's General Capabilities); and
• an **holistic** approach in which tVCs are introduced as a scheme or programme that conveys an overall message. All participating countries use the analytical approach, except for Japan, which sought to engage in an holistic approach called 'Zest for Living', (UNESCO 2018).

The UNESCO Report also identified a number of challenges facing educational institutions in their efforts to address tVCs in the countries they canvassed and identified them as Definitional, Operational, and Systemic (Table 1).

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

There is significant evidence that within the Australian Curriculum the General Capabilities provide the main mechanisms and structure for developing tVCs. This was recognised by UNESCO (2015, p.1), which stated

the Australian Curriculum implicitly and explicitly includes transversal competencies in every educational activity. To this end, the Australian curriculum provides detailed information on each capability and how it can be adopted across each subject.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA 2017) reiterated this:

The Australian Curriculum identifies seven capabilities that play a significant role in equipping young Australians to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century.

The recent Gonski Report (2018, p.74) also stated that the General Capabilities provide a "clear list that has been nationally agreed and established as part of the Australian Curriculum" and that they "need to be at the core of our curriculum and teaching practice" (p. 36). It is important that Australian teachers understand that these skills are already deeply embedded in the Australian curriculum, though not explicitly identified as "transversal competencies". Table 2 illustrates how frequently these "transversal competencies" are presented within the Australian Curriculum.

Table 1. Challenges to the Implementation of Transversal Competencies in the Curriculum

Definitional	Operational	Systemic
• Lack of, or a vague definition of transversal competencies in policy documents, such as education plans and curricula. • Lack of clarity in scope of transversal competencies • Lack of clarity in the desired outcomes of the teaching of transversal competencies	• Lack of assessment mechanisms • Insufficient teaching/ learning materials and teaching guides • Lack of incentives • Insufficient capacity of teachers • Lack of budget (policy-budget inconsistency) • Additional burden on teachers	• Large class size • Overloaded curricula • Pressure to achieve academic success • Inconsistency with high-stake exams • Lack of understanding among parents and other stakeholders • Overall school/ community culture

MAJOR OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATORS

ASSESSMENT

A major challenge associated with the implementation of '21st century' competencies or tVCs concerns their assessment. Gonski (2018) suggests there is a lack of support surrounding the General Capabilities as there is no consistent method of assessment. Many scholars agree that there are few research-based tools or assessment models for use in education settings that facilitate the assessment of "transversal competencies".

Despite the attention and importance given to the general capabilities, teachers and schools are insufficiently supported to teach and assess them. (Gonski 2018, p. 39).

The focus of assessment has traditionally been the measurement of factual knowledge and not the more complex competencies of problem solving, critical thinking, and communication, which require students to complete complex tasks applied to real world situations across multiple settings and diverse situations (Hipkins Boyd, & Joyce 2005). In most educational settings this is difficult to achieve given the current timetable structure, time constraints and subject-siloed learning that occurs in schools. Therefore, the challenge involves the development of new assessment procedures and instruments that create opportunities to apply these competencies in authentic contexts, and facilitate the collection of evidence across multiples contexts (Pepper 2011). It is important to note that the achievement of these skills are lifelong achievements and therefore the role of assessment is formative and developmental.

PEDAGOGY, PRACTICE AND PROFICIENCY

Another challenge related to the teaching of tVCs is teacher expertise and proficiency. The acquisition of 21st century competencies requires specific pedagogic techniques such as problem-based learning, co-operative learning, experiential learning, and formative assessment (cf. Dede 2000). Gonski (2018, p.40) supports this by suggesting that teaching and assessing the General Capabilities, particularly in an embedded form, is a highly complex task requiring teachers to have a sound understanding of how to teach these capabilities and to interweave their teaching into different learning areas. Some solutions include the introduction of inquiry, problem-based, or project-based learning in authentic real-world contexts. To develop in-service and pre-service teachers' pedagogy in this area, the requisite skills need to be embedded in initial teacher education and ongoing professional development. As with most professional learning, it is recognised that the designed activities need to be sustained, involve the development of teaching materials, and be integrated into teachers' daily teaching work (Rand 2012).

INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES

A number of education systems around the world are offering project and problem-based learning experiences that go beyond the classroom environment. These include working with local businesses or facilitating arts and film projects in local communities. These learning experiences are designed to develop transferable career management and enterprise skills that will be critical for future success (OECD 2014). These support the development of the tVCs in real life contexts.

The European Union's *Assessment of Transversal Skills 2020 (ATS2020)* Project was designed to provide a comprehensive learning model for the enhancement of transversal student skills within their curriculum. It introduced new approaches and innovative tools for the development and assessment of these skills. The project's consortium consisted of 17 partners from 11 EU countries, and involved over 1,000 teachers. There are extensive materials available for review on their website for those interested in the ATS2020 approach. (www.ats2020.eu)

CONCLUSION

The term "transversal competencies" (tVCs) is becoming increasingly popular to describe the essential skills and competencies needed to operate effectively in today's world - some might call it the 'new black'. Freeman (2014, p.86) suggests "while it will be important to keep up to date with the contemporary thinking surrounding these skills…, the title we give them is less important than the focus we need to place on their teaching and development".

The General Capabilities exist at the core of the Australian Curriculum and reflect what are widely recognised internationally as "transversal competencies". These will become increasingly important as more pressure continues to be placed on educational systems through political and economic agendas to prepare a transversally-competent workforce. The next stage must focus on mechanisms for capturing rich evidence of a student's acquisition of these competencies.

Some future questions include:
- How well do our teachers understand the concept of tVCs?
- How is our school currently addressing the General Capabilities?
- Are we capturing evidence of the General Capabilities? If so how?
- Are there some competencies (such as affective ones like empathy and resilience) that we need to focus on?
- What non-formal opportunities do we provide that might allow us to capture evidence of tVCs (e.g. extra-curricular activities, clubs, etc.)?
- How might this evidence be collected (e.g. through the LMS, digital portfolios, digital badges)?
- What pedagogical approaches could we implement that support the development of these competencies?
- What programs are already in place (e.g. ATS2020) that we could emulate or modify?
- What pedagogical practices would help us ensure these skills are developed within our curriculum (e.g. inquiry learning, problem-based learning, integrated units of work)?

The worldwide trend of recognising the importance of "transversal competencies" as essential for the future world of work has elevated the importance of the General Capabilities in the curriculum. The challenge for Australian schools, therefore, is to ensure they are given the necessary attention at both a school and systemic level.

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Table 2. Key skills and competencies from the UNESCO Transversal Competencies Framework and General Capabilities from the Australian Curriculum (AC)		
UNESCO tVCs	**Key Skills and Competencies (* indicates frequency presented in AC)**	**Australian Curriculum General Capability**
Critical Innovative Thinking	creativity (*53), entrepreneurship (55), resourcefulness (3), application skills (1104), reflective thinking (449), decision-making (1282)	**Critical and Creative Thinking**
Interpersonal Skills	presentation skills (1312), communication skills (1777), leadership (64), organisational skills (1138), teamwork (37), collaboration (155), initiative (90), sociability 1046), collegiality (86), empathy (83), compassion (7)	**Personal and Social Capability**
Intrapersonal Skills	self-discipline (637), independent learning (1651), flexibility (860), adaptability (19), self-awareness (880), perseverance (3), self-motivation (606), compassion (7), integrity (14), risk-taking (527), self-respect (900)	**Personal and Social Capability**
Global Citizenship	awareness (2163), tolerance (9), openness (20), respect for diversity (634), intercultural understanding (2611), conflict resolution (99), civic / political participation (190), respect for the environment (950), national identity (1080)	**Intercultural Understanding**
Media and Information Literacy	accessing information (2667), locating information (2704), communicating ideas (2177), participating in democratic processes (1039), analysing information and media (3468), evaluating information and media content (3011)	**ICT Capability Critical and Creative Thinking**

Biographies

Leonie McIlvenny, Library and Innovation Consultant is an experienced educator of 35+ years with interests in the transformative power of learning in a connected world.

Dr Rachel Sheffield is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Curtin University and is passionate about innovative and engaging STEM education.

VIEW FROM THE STATES

say non-STEM) subjects play in an increasingly complex school curriculum as changes to the Queensland Senior Schooling Curriculum and Assessment have come into effect this year.

According to the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) "For success in work and life, young Queenslanders in the 21st century need to be innovators, entrepreneurs, lifelong learners, valued employees and responsible global citizens". 2019 has seen the introduction of the first 'wave' of changes to the curriculum and assessment system for all Queensland schools, commencing with Year 11 students. Students commencing Year 11 this year and graduating Year 12 in 2020

will receive an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) which replaces the current OP ranking used in Queensland. The way students are assessed is also changing. The majority of subjects will see students assessed using three school-based assessments and one external assessment set and marked by QCAA. The changes to the senior schooling curriculum are aimed at ensuring Queensland's education system is keeping pace with a 'transforming society and economy' and to ensure Queensland school leavers have the 21st century skills they will need for the future.

Earlier this year, the federal government inquiry into the status of teaching held its Brisbane hearings. According to reports, one

in three Australian teachers leave the profession within their first five years. According to the Queensland Minister for Education, Grace Grace, "Analysis by the Queensland College of Teachers indicates that around 14 per cent of new teachers leave the profession within four years'. Further to this, the Queensland College of Teachers have cited several articles reporting that "between 30 per vent and 50 per cent of Australian teachers leave the profession within the first five year". The inquiry has officially been closed due to the recently held Federal Election. The College will continue to monitor and report on the outcomes from the inquiry and ensure that members are afforded every opportunity to actively contribute to this important and ongoing discussion.

Committed to Learning
A History of Education at The University of Melbourne
Juliet Flesch

Reviewed by Anthony Mackay AM

Author Juliet Flesch notes that accounts of administrative changes do not make for racy reading! However, in her History of Education at The University of Melbourne, administrative changes coupled with personalities, politics and institutional changes do make for compelling reading.

This is a remarkable story of the transformation of Education at the University from " Cinderella to Star " - on the local , national and International stage.

It is a play of four acts spread over 110 years - taking us on a journey encompassing the amalgamation of the University and College, the inauguration of the Melbourne Model, and the transition from Faculty of Education to the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

It is a journey that reveals the reasons why MGSE is consistently rated amongst the world's five best faculties of Education.

For those of us who have a strong affinity with and deep affection for "Education @ Melbourne" the leading actors come to life in a way that strengthens our admiration for outstanding scholarship & thought leadership, ground breaking research and development, quality teaching & learning, world leading professional & clinical practice, highly influential policy formulation & advocacy, administrative acumen, disciplined innovation & experimentation - and above all superb leadership.
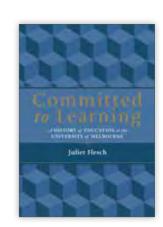
Many who will read this wonderful account have been participants & contributors - fellow travellers - happy to be implicated in the past, present and immediate future of what is a highly respected institution.

Other readers , once removed - educators, historians, and those drawn to the drama of a "compelling story" with a cast list of Australia's outstanding educational leaders - will find from the pen of this professional historian a narrative of drama, twists and turns , volitilty, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity and success - a work worthy of a VUCA world.

Reputation of the order that MGSE now enjoys is hard won - and retaining & further enhancing that standing is even tougher in today's global environment where sustainability is the ultimate prize.

The Foreword to *Committed to Learning* reminds us that public discourse on education in Australia is poor at best. At a time when learning has never been more important to our individual and collective well-being the role of Faculties of Education is crucial.

Judith Flesch's History of Education at the University of Melbourne is a celebration of the extensive influence of one institution's contribution to an educated society. It is good to have this story now to inspire all of us to lift our game to ensure we have the service of the next generation of equally outstanding educational leaders.

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