The Victorian Curriculum: F-10 capabilities

By Monica Bini

Snapshot

Monica Bini, the Capabilities Curriculum Manager of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) discusses the capabilities and describes how they work with the F to 10 curriculum. Bini also considers assessment and resources for the capabilities.

Introduction

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 includes four Capability curriculums:

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Ethical Capability
- Intercultural Capability
- Personal and Social Capability.

The Capabilities are included in the Victorian Curriculum as they underpin flexible and analytical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across Learning Areas to develop new expertise.

Each of the Capabilities has their own **rationale and aims, structure, content descriptions and achievement standards**. It is worth familiarising yourself with these in order to gain an insight into the intended curriculum and how the content descriptions are connected to each other and to the achievement standards. The achievement standards describe what students are expected to be able to understand and do. These are linked to content descriptions that identify what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn in order to progress towards the achievement standard.

The Victorian Curriculum F-10: Revised curriculum planning and reporting guidelines states that schools report on student achievement in each of the Capabilities in the course of each two-year band of school, in accordance with the whole-school teaching and learning plan, with F-2 only requiring reporting against Personal and Social Capability. The Department of Education is responsible for reporting and can provide further advice.

Planning for effective teaching and learning

In one sense, all teachers across the school share the Capabilities and as such a whole school approach is required. In general implementing the Capabilities involves building:

- Deep familiarity with the curriculum
- Proficiency in best practice pedagogy and assessment methods
- Proficiency in practices to foster learner engagement and transferability

- A school community culture that values the Capabilities

Drilling down, key questions when planning for the introduction of Capabilities content to students include:

- What do students already know? What are they able to do, and how well?
- What existing knowledge and skills require further consolidation?
- What new knowledge and skills should be introduced to enable progress in student learning?

As for any new learning, students undertake activities to learn and become confident with newly introduced knowledge and to build their skills as they progress towards an identified achievement standard.

Once new learning is consolidated through familiar background contexts drawn from prior learning, students can be prompted to apply their understanding to new learning area contexts, so as to deepen their responses when undertaking learning activities.

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The intention of the Victorian Curriculum: F-10 is that these Capabilities are recognised as having discrete knowledge and skills and yet they should be taught in and through the Learning Areas. This means that the Capabilities need to be explicitly taught. They are, however, too abstract to be taught on their own. Each Capability will benefit from case studies, examples, scenarios and perspectives that arise out of the learning areas. On the other hand, successful outcomes in the learning areas can be enhanced by explicit teaching of the Capabilities.

For example, Personal and Social Capability includes the following content at Levels 7 and 8 (extract):

Perform in a variety of team roles and accept responsibility as a team member and team leader, assessing how well they support other members of the team (Personal and Social Capability Levels 7 and 8)

This underpins the following Personal and Social Capability Achievement Standard at Levels 7 and 8:

They explain the extent to which individual roles and responsibilities enhance group cohesion and the achievement of personal and group objectives.

Unpacking the content descriptions involves identifying key concepts and ideas (the specific knowledge and skills) that underlie each content description and then teaching them in such a way that student learning progresses. Taking the time to become deeply familiar with these

will enable you to set clear and consistent expectations for assessment, making sure the focus knowledge and skills are transparent for students; undertake pre-assessment as the key knowledge and skills that underpin and support the learning have been identified and therefore can be pre-assessed; identify links between the capabilities and other curriculum areas more easily.

For example, meeting the Personal and Social Capability Achievement Standard using the underpinning content description given above will involve students explicitly being taught:

- Different team roles typically found in collaborative projects
- How team roles and responsibilities interact with achievement of group objectives
- How both a team member and team leader can help to enhance group cohesion through their roles
- Criteria to judge how well they performed in their team roles

This knowledge is discrete from Learning Areas and yet can be brought to life through contexts from Learning Areas. It can readily be seen that students with a good consolidated background in the discrete Capabilities knowledge and skills will be well placed to deepen their understanding of learning areas, resulting in higher quality explanations, analysis and evaluations from students.

This works best when there is a natural fit between the Capabilities and the Learning Areas. When there is a natural fit, the explicit teaching of the Capabilities is efficient and worthwhile in that students will draw on their Capabilities knowledge and skills again and again whilst continuing to engage with the learning areas. A natural fit can be found through consideration of the content descriptions and achievement standards in other Learning Areas.

It may not be the case that all learning areas will be a natural fit for all the Capabilities. Some learning areas may be better than others as a means to introduce students to new knowledge and skills in the Capabilities and decisions about which learning areas to use are made at the school level.

Consider the following content descriptions that relate to collaboration found in a range of learning areas:

- Participate in collaborative activities and events that involve planning, making arrangements, transacting and negotiating (Languages/Spanish/Levels 7 and 8 (all language curriculums have similar)
- Manage, create and communicate interactive ideas, information and projects collaboratively online, taking safety and social contexts into account (Digital Technologies/Levels 7 and 8)
- Practise and apply personal and social skills when undertaking a range of roles in physical activities(VCHPEM139) (HPE levels 7 and 8)
- Scientific knowledge and understanding of the world changes as new evidence becomes available; science knowledge can develop through collaboration and connecting ideas across the disciplines and practice of science (VCSSU089) (Science Levels 7 and 8)

Which of the learning area/s above would provide the best case studies, scenarios, examples etc. to build learning activities on collaboration? Is it one or all of these? Note that any particular course on collaboration or any other Capability content could draw on a number of learning areas. This is up to the school to select and design. The Victorian Curriculum: F-10 describes broad categories of what students learn not how it should be organised or brought together into a rich teaching program. That is a school decision.

Remember that in our Personal and Social Capability example, the focus is on collaboration and team roles. Which learning area/s are more suited to providing the case studies, scenarios, and so on to assist with explicitly introducing new knowledge and skills on team roles and collaboration to students for the first time and supporting them to consolidate their learning?

Which are more suited to students applying consolidated learning so as to be able to nuance it in this other learning area context?

How can teachers be supported to know what students have previously learnt about team roles in another class?

Assessment

Assessment in the Capabilities involves teachers identifying evidence of students' learning progress. Assessment could be formative or summative, and it could occur at the beginning of a unit (for example, as pre-assessment) and while students are consolidating and applying their learning. Each student is assessed against the relevant capability achievement standard towards which they are progressing.

Before introducing new learning, pre-assessment could be undertaken to ascertain which achievement standard students are working towards within the Capability curriculum continuum and to gauge their current proficiency and next steps.
Next steps could involve:

- continuing to work towards the achievement standard students are currently working towards
- beginning work towards another part of the achievement standard within the current level
- beginning work towards the achievement standard at a higher level.

A critical aspect of effective assessment of the capabilities is for teachers to set clear expectations. This includes identifying the specific knowledge and skills that students are to develop and then explicitly introducing these

to students. Setting clear expectations is easier when teachers are deeply familiar with the curriculum and are able to distinguish between Capabilities knowledge and skills and Learning Area knowledge and skills.

Setting expectations in this way can also help ensure coherence between teacher judgements and any peer- or self-assessment that is undertaken.

Resources

A range of resources are available to help you explicitly teach and assess the Capabilities. These include:

Capability	Published at VCAA website **Curriculum Area Resources**
Critical and Creative Thinking	• Six videos covering a range of topics including assessment • selected examples of assessment can be accessed through FUSE at these links: **1-2**, **3-4**, **5-6**, **7-8** and **9-10** • Indicative progress examples
Ethical Capability	• Planning tool for teaching ethical issues and associated student reflection tool (sample process for analysing and evaluating an ethical issue) • List of ethical principles for analysis of ethical issues • Levels 7-10, seven units of work • Indicative progress examples • Curriculum map linking Ethical Capability and Learning Areas 7-10 • Unpacking of content descriptions and sample learning activities guide F-6
Intercultural Capability	• Teacher guide/posters on fostering supportive classroom climate • 21 units of work from F-10, including some with student work samples and formative assessment rubrics • Powerpoints on key approaches and concepts • Videos on cultural inclusion • Indicative progress examples • Curriculum map linking Intercultural Capability and Learning Areas
Personal and Social Capability	• Respectful Relationships resources (including resilience) • Indicative progress examples

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