

## **PLEASE CONSIDER ...**

Education in Australia is usually a highly standardised affair. Every student is assigned the same year-level curriculum at the same time and is given the same amount of time to work on it.

## **PLEASE READ ON**

All students are assessed with the same tests and examinations (administered at the same times) and their performances are evaluated against the same expectations or achievement standards. All are then simultaneously given the next year-level curriculum and the process recommences, whatever their readiness.

At first glance, providing everybody with an identical solution may seem 'fair', but fairness depends on meeting individual needs.

In our schools, many students struggle with a year-level curriculum for which they are not yet ready because they lack the prerequisites for effective engagement. Some are a year or two from being ready for the curriculum they've been assigned. As a result, they make limited progress. Each year they're given another curriculum for which they're not yet ready. Many fall increasingly far behind over time.

Ten per cent of students are typically five to six years behind the most advanced 10 per cent of students in their year group. Both groups are disadvantaged by this. By Year 9, some struggling students are still back on the primary school section of the curriculum track.

Students already disadvantaged by their socioeconomic background are more likely to be among those continually assigned a curriculum for which they're not yet ready.

Other students are assigned the standard year-level curriculum, but require something better suited to their more advanced learning needs if they are to make the progress of which they are capable.

The challenge is in creating the conditions to enable this - this challenge is not the responsibility of teachers alone; the curriculum that individuals are assigned also crucially influences the progress they make.

Progress is maximised when each learner is given learning opportunities appropriate to their current learning needs – well-targeted challenges that may not be the same for all students. Research into human learning has made this clear and also invites a more flexible approach to time. What is important is that every student makes excellent progress and eventually achieves high standards, not that they all reach the same point at the same time or even that they all progress at the same rate.

Currently in Australia, every student is assigned the same year-level curriculum by a central curriculum authority. This standardised approach is administratively convenient and may seem superficially 'fair'. The teachers who are aware of the student's family life, interests and personality should be largely responsible for deciding the curriculum each student is assigned, based on that student's current level of attainment and learning needs.

For a learning area such as mathematics, a sequence of syllabuses could be centrally developed to provide the common path along which all students progress. Students would not be required to move in lockstep from syllabus to syllabus, but teachers would decide when a student had mastered the content of a syllabus and was ready to move to the next. In this way, students who required more time would have it, and students ready for a more challenging syllabus would be able to advance to it. The objective would be to maximise every student's learning by ensuring no student was assigned a syllabus that was much too difficult or much too easy.

The decisions about when a student moves to the next syllabus would be based on a teacher's assessment of their readiness, not elapsed time. In other words, the decision would be evidence-based, not evidence-free. The same learning path (sequence of syllabuses) and content would apply to every student, with the only difference the rates at which individuals progress through that content.

The current view that teachers should be 'deliverers' of a centrally prescribed solution (to everybody at the same time for the same amount of time) is inconsistent with the nature of professional work. Professionals of all kinds evaluate what they're dealing with and then provide solutions appropriate to presenting situations.

To maximise learning, teachers need to be able to provide students with learning activities and challenges appropriate to their current levels of attainment and learning needs.

Any new curricula must recognise that fairness and individual progress are maximised through a focus on equity rather than equality.

## **FURTHER READING**

**The Millennial Job Interview is not to be missed!**

OECD (2016). *Low-Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How to Help Them Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264250246-en>.

The Australian Curriculum: a robust and world-class curriculum : August 2014 <https://www.acara.edu.au/news-and-media/acara-facts>

Why Learning Neuroscience Matters

<https://www.td.org/insights/why-learning-neuroscience-matters>

Intergenerational Equity

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intergenerational\\_equity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intergenerational_equity)

Source: 'A Millennial Job Interview': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo0KjdDJr1c>