

CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS: A MEANS TO ACCOMMODATE ALL LEARNERS IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

What comes to your mind when the word "curriculum" is uttered? Do you consider curriculum to be a department of education thing? You may be right to an extent. I thought that way too. What does it entail? Let me attempt giving you my understanding of the word "curriculum".

"Curriculum is everything planned by educators which will help develop the learner. This can be an extra-mural sporting activity, a debate, or even a visit to a library" (Curriculum 2005 Lifelong learning for the 21st century 1997:10).

According to Bertram, Fotheringham and Harley (2000:3), a curriculum could further be understood in the following two ways: "firstly, ... as a plan (which may be written in a document). This plan reflects the knowledge, skills and attitudes that any society chooses to pass on their children." In their view curriculum should secondly be seen as the learning and teaching experiences that happen in any site of education. Therefore, a curriculum is a carefully planned and well written document that explicitly reflects the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of societies that are intended to be passed to or mediated to the future generation, comprising both the old and the young. This document gives educators room to manoeuvre as well as to take their ideas, which are embodied in the curriculum document, and enact them in their respective institutions of learning and classrooms.

In addition, the way in which educators would interpret a curriculum depends on and is highly influenced by the knowledge, skills and beliefs of that particular educator as well as by the context, milieu, and conditions in which the educator finds himself/herself during the learning mediation. Curriculum comprises the following

components: academic programme, practical programme (trait oriented) and skills training programme.

WHAT ARE CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS?

Curriculum adaptations are modifications that relate specifically to instruction or content of a curriculum. Further, these could be adjustments or modifications to: (i) teaching and learning environment, (ii) teaching and learning techniques, (iii) teaching and learning support material that enhances a learner's performance or allows at least partial participation in a learning activity (iv) learning programmes and (v) assessment.

The NCS has several components that are flexible enough to allow for adaptation. Examples of these flexible features include :

- Learning outcomes do not prescribe content or method. Therefore, content and methodology could be appropriate for a learner's needs. (DOE, 2002: Overview of Revised National Curriculum Statement, p.14.)
- Activities can be flexible. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.10)
- The context can be made relevant to the learners' needs. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of learning Programmes, p.10)
- More time can be provided for assessment and execution of a task. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.11)
- Methods of assessment are flexible. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- The learning programme can be structured to meet the needs of the specific learners. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.2)
- Learners can communicate using SA sign language, Braille, assistive devices or any other communication method. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- Expectations can be adapted to the abilities of the learner within the framework of the high expectations. (DOE, 2002: Overview of Revised National Curriculum Statement, p.12.)
- The curriculum emphasizes the principles of social justice, healthy environment, human rights and inclusivity. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.5)

- Teachers are encouraged to consider any particular barriers to learning and/or assessment that exist in different Learning Areas and make provision for these when developing learning programmes. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.7)
- Assessment standards can be broken into finer components. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- A Lesson Plan time allocation can range from a single activity up to a term's teaching or more time if necessary, depending on the needs of the learner. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- Time allocation and weightings regarding learning outcomes and learning programmes should vary according to the learners needs. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.6)
- The number and nature of a learning programme at a school can vary depending on the availability of staff, resources and the needs of learners.
- Flexibility in the selection of appropriate assessment standards according to the individual needs of a learner is possible on the recommendation of the assessment team in the case of a learner not capable of achieving a GETC.
- Work schedules and learning programmes are not limited to a grade/year. Differently gifted learners may require acceleration or slowing down of the process.
- Integration of Learning Areas in a phase and across phases is possible.

WHY ARE CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS NECESSARY?

Certainly, curriculum adaptations are not intended to lower the education standards. Curriculum is adapted to make education first and foremost accessible and secondly, to see to it that blind learners in the broad sense of the word are not unfairly prejudiced and disadvantaged. Learning Programmes, Work Schedules and Lesson Plans can be modified and adapted to cater for the individual needs of learners.

WHEN ARE CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS NECESSARY?

The scale and scope [extent] of curriculum adaptations and modifications will only be determined after a thorough assessment of an individual learner. An individualised learning programme and Work Schedule with its related Lesson Plans should be devised on the basis of the needs of visually impaired learners. Adaptation at Lesson

Plan level will be required for all learners in a class who need specific additional support because of their disability/s. Those involved in this process must include the teachers, parents, school based and district based support teams (where they exist). Other relevant professionals from the community can also be consulted.

Conclusion

The National Curriculum Statement is the curriculum for ALL learners. The Assessment Standards of all Learning Outcomes are the minimum requirements per grade to be demonstrated at the end of the year. For visually impaired learners, the strategy of "designing down", "breaking down" or "scaffolding" the Assessment Standards into manageable steps, allowing enough time for these learners to demonstrate their attainment of the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes practically, is essential and recommended. Some visually impaired learners may not attain a GETC but they will all achieve to their full potential which will be acknowledged through certification.

In order for inclusive education system to accommodate all learners, all stakeholders in the blindness sector should encourage inclusive education teachers to use the principle of 'designing down', 'breaking down' or 'scaffolding' in planning or adapting Learning Programmes, Work Schedules and Lesson Plans.