

# **Building skills for life and work: Challenges for schools in assessing and reporting on employability skills**

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# Outline of session



- Introduction
  - Origins of generic employability skills
  - Attempts to define generic skills
  - Focus on employability
  - Recognising 'life skills'
  - An Australian curriculum?
- Key challenges
  - Defining generic employability skills
  - Assessing and reporting student achievement
- Some current assessment approaches
- What will it take to develop, assess and report 'life skills' achievement?
  - An approach to assessment
  - An example

# Life skills

Employability

**Thesis 1:** 'Life skills' are applicable in four domains of an individual's life

**Thesis 2:** The purposeful and reflective development of these skills in any domain will enhance their application in other domains

Civic

Social

Personal

# Focus questions

## Geoff Masters posed four key questions

1. Should students develop basic levels of competence in certain areas?
2. What should these areas be?
3. What standards of achievement should be set?
4. Should performance be reported on a nationally comparable basis?

We think they should include generic 'life skills', and we argue that such skills need to be defined as assessable constructs before proceeding to answers for Question 3.

Before we can address this question, we need to demonstrate a feasible assessment strategy that will support this level of reporting.

# This is not new



There have long been demands on school systems to produce senior secondary school graduates with attributes of learning that are transportable from one context to another.

What is new is the recognition of their place in student learning.



UK	Core skills, key skills, common skills
New Zealand	Essential skills
Australia	Key competencies, employability skills, generic skills, core skills, transdisciplinary skills, repertoires of practice, cross-curriculum skills
Canada	Essential skills, employability skills
USA	Basic skills, necessary skills, workplace know-how
Singapore	Critical enabling skills
France	<i>Competences transversales</i> (cross-field skills)
Switzerland	Transdisciplinary goals
South Africa	Critical cross-field outcomes



# Facets

Each of the employability skills has a particular purpose

*e.g. Communication skills contribute to harmonious relations between employees and customers*

Definition of an employability skill is operationalised through *facets*

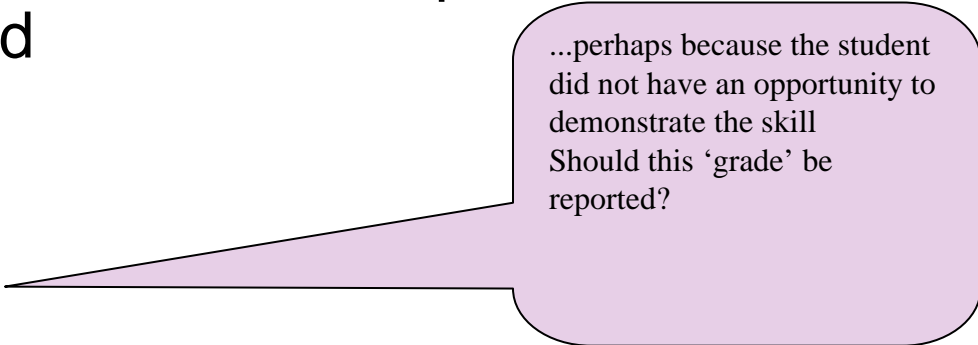
*e.g. Listening and understanding; speaking clearly and directly; writing to the needs of an audience...*

# Levels performance

- Levels of performance

- We suggest that three substantive performance levels be recognised

- Advanced
    - Creditable
    - Basic
    - Not demonstrated



...perhaps because the student did not have an opportunity to demonstrate the skill  
Should this 'grade' be reported?

- Descriptions of standards

- Standards descriptors are developed for facets
  - They are 'public' statements, available to students
  - They are used to judge evidence of achievement (student work)



# Employability skill: Problem solving

1. Activities
2. Facets
3. Visibility



# **Problem solving: Activities**

Problem-solving activities develop students' abilities to recognise problems, apply strategies, and reflect on solutions.



# **Problem solving: Visibility**

Good problem solving is the basis for achieving productive outcomes.



# Problem solving: Facets

1. Accurate identification of the problem
2. Taking a practical approach to solving it
3. Reasoning logically and critically in pursuit of a solution



# Advanced

Student demonstrates an extensive understanding of problem complexity and solution strategies. Consistently selects an appropriate strategy to arrive at the best solution.




# Creditable

Student demonstrates general understanding of the nature of problems and problem identification. Can usually select an appropriate strategy to arrive at a solution.



## Basic

Student demonstrates basic understanding of a simple (given) problem, applies practical or routine strategies, and arrives at a solution.



These facets of problem solving should be apparent in most senior secondary subjects and are vehicles for developing basic problem identification, strategy selection, and the processes of monitoring and reflection.



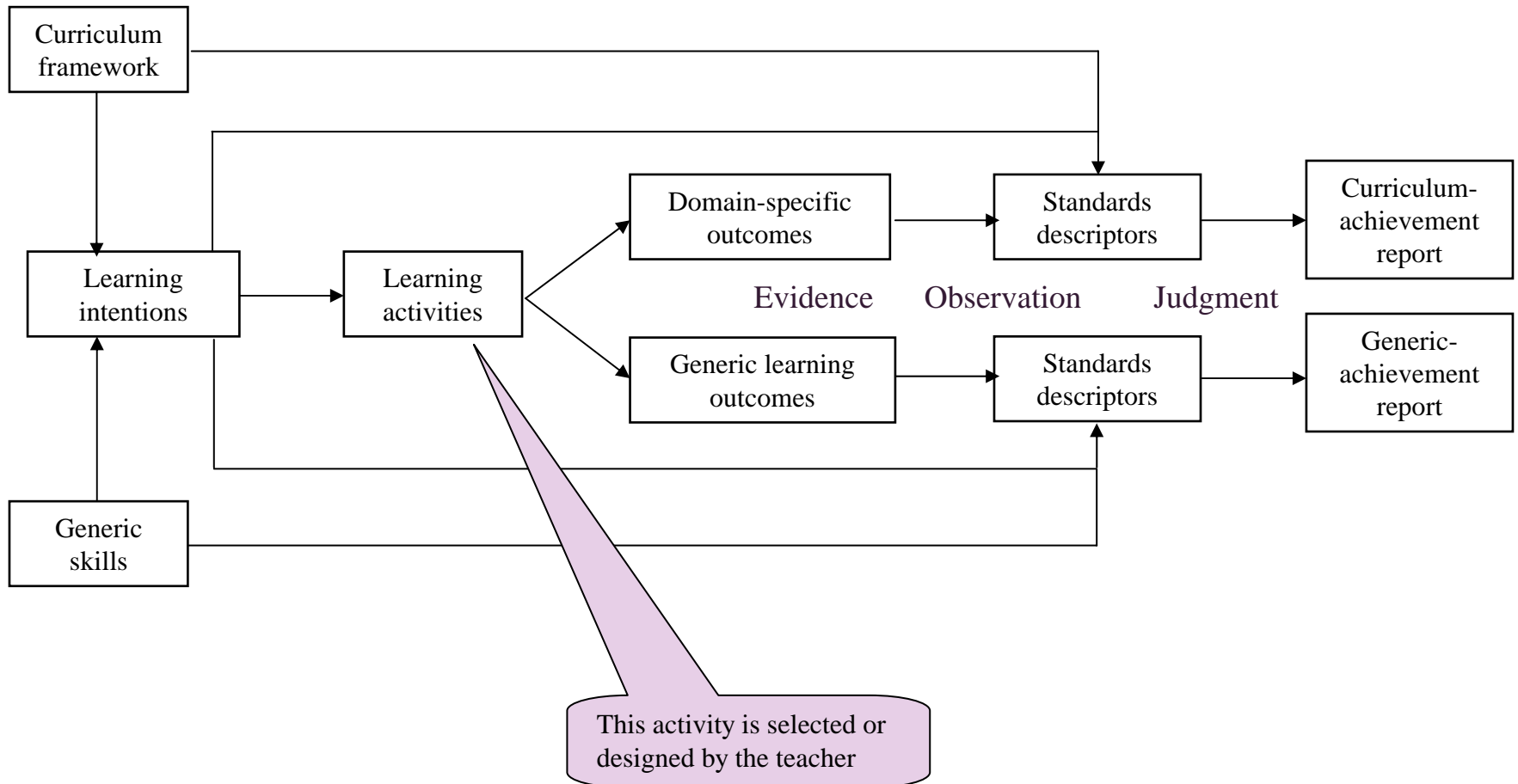
# Another approach...

## Characteristics of the approach

- Teachers' tacit knowledge made explicit
- Experience of students across the curriculum exploited

# Teacher-initiated assessment

## Another generic skills assessment model



# An example

## Society and environment

### – Societies and culture (SACSA Framework)

Year 6

Considers factors which contribute to personal and group **identity** and **social cohesion**, and valuing **cultural diversity** within and outside Australia.

Year 8

Investigates and analyses the causes of **disharmony** or **conflict** in Australia's **multicultural** society, and suggests strategies for **peaceful resolution** of disputes.

Year 10

**Critically** examines through **research**, and **justifies** personal views on, particular **social, political and economic beliefs, concepts, policies and practices**.

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Increasing Complexity

Similar curriculum content, but increasing scope

# Learning and assessment activity

## **Cronulla Beach Riots – 2005**

What events, that became known as the Cronulla Beach Riots, occurred?

Who was involved in these events? Describe the characteristics of those involved.

What factors contributed to these events?

What actions were taken by authorities? Were they appropriate?

Why did the events attract media attention?

What role did the media have in reporting the events?

What do your findings tell you about multiculturalism in Australia?

## **Organisation**

Work in a group of 4–5 people.

Research the events. Keep records of what you find and the sources you use.

Write a 2,000-word group report on your findings.

Deliver a group presentation to the class on your findings.

Opportunities to apply, develop and demonstrate  
**communication, teamwork and planning and organising** skills



# Embedded employability skills

Key skill	Facets
Communication	Write Empathise Persuade Share information
Teamwork	Define role in team Identify (and use) strengths of team members
Planning and organising	Manage time Manage priorities Collect, analyse and organise information

# Apply standards

**Facet:** Writing to the needs of an audience

Facet standard	Descriptor
3	Understands and illustrates the relationship between purpose, form, language and audience in a range of written and multimodal text types
2	Understands and shows the ways written language can be varied for different audiences and purposes
1	Understands and shows the ways written language can be structured for some audiences and purposes

# Summary




- Employability skills are *life skills*
  - They are applicable in employment **and** in personal, social, and civic domains
  - They are important and warrant attention
- Key challenges are
  - Defining life skills as assessable constructs
  - Assessing and reporting achievement
- Effective assessment requires
  - Devising good assessment tasks
  - Envisaging performances likely to be elicited
  - Developing standards descriptors for facets

# Questions



- Are the employability skills facets relevant to current curricula?
  - Can you identify additional facets?
- How many performance bands do you envisage?
  - How many do we need?
  - How many are readily discriminable?
- What scope is there in current learning activities for students to develop and demonstrate life skills?
  - Would you need to modify existing activities?
  - Would you need to develop new ones?
  - Would sharing activities and associated standards descriptors with other teachers be helpful?
  - Would such sharing lead to relatively consistent application of standards?
- How onerous is the suggested assessment approach?



**Do we see the recognition, development, assessment and reporting of these skills as an imposition on students and teachers or as a guarantee to students (and others)?**