Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum:

Connected Learning

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 The Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum: *Connected Learning* will guide the writing of the *Connected Learning* Course to replace the existing *Connected Learning* and *Food for Life* courses.

1.2 This paper has been prepared following analysis of feedback from public consultation on the Shape of the ACT Curriculum Food for Life, and in consultation with Associate Professor Thomas Nielsen, School of Education, University of Canberra and Dr Jennifer Ma, Research Fellow, Department of Psychology, University of Canberra.

1.3 The paper should be read in conjunction with The Shape of the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum located at:
http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/bsss_course_development_consultation

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The *Connected Learning* course will be the basis of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in ACT senior secondary schools. It will be useful for and useable by experienced and less experienced teachers.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies is reviewing the *Connected Learning* and *Food for Life* Curriculum in the five-year course development cycle of improvement and renewal. *Food for Life* will be redeveloped as *Food Studies*.

3.2 All courses under development are required to meet Board design specifications and to align with Board requirements for senior secondary curriculum. These specifications align with ACARA course design specifications and provide teachers with flexibility to plan, teach and assess according to the needs and interests of their students.

3.3 The *Connected Learning* course is to be developed under the *Integrated Learning Framework* as it engages with evidence and methodologies from several learning areas, such as Science, Philosophy and Social Sciences. Drawing on the definitions of Alexander Refsum Jensenius, this course is interdisciplinary in that students learn how to assess and apply evidence from different disciplines to inform their thinking and draw conclusions. It is multidisciplinary in that the epistemological focus of units will shift as students connect their learning to different areas of their life. The course is transdisciplinary in that the course aims to provide the opportunity for students to connect different learnings and understandings drawn from their studies to improving their quality of life and that of others. (Jensenius, A. R, 2012) The course will engage with changes in technology and lifestyles that challenge students' learning and fulfilment, and it will build skills applicable to life, learning, community and workplaces.

3.4 This is in keeping with the *Integrated Learning Framework* that states:

> *"Advances in technology, coupled with political, economic, and social shifts both nationally and globally have transformed the nature of work and learning. Students are required to demonstrate a range of capabilities. They are required to apply concepts, methods, and language of more than one discipline to explore topics, design research questions, develop skills and solve problems*
>
> *Courses written under this framework promote interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. Students will learn how to transfer capabilities such as the research process, information management, critical thinking, creativity, effective teambuilding, leadership, collaborative decision making and communicate with a diverse range of people.*
>
> *Students complete an inquiry that has a purpose, product or outcome. They develop the ability to engage with a process, question sources of information, make effective*

decisions, consider ethical implications, evaluate their own progress, be innovative and solve problems.

Courses written under this framework are suited for students with diverse abilities and learning styles, including students preparing to enter the workforce, as well as for further study."

(BSSS, Integrated Learning Framework, 2017, p. 4.)

3.5 All courses based on this framework should enable students to:

- analyse and evaluate ideas, methodologies, concepts, issues and knowledge

- apply ethical frameworks that underpin relevant disciplines

- plan and develop research projects

- reflect on the learning process

- demonstrate interpersonal and communication skills

- build on and connect, concepts and skills from diverse disciplines

- use inquiry and research methods from diverse disciplines to identify problems and to research solutions

- use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse methodologies and insights from a variety of disciplines

- demonstrate collaboration and build mentoring relationships within the community

- apply creative and innovative solutions to real life contexts.

Courses developed under the *Integrated Learning Framework* provide details of course content through the component units of the course. While this content will differ according to the particular course, all content will be chosen to enable students to work towards the achievement of the common and agreed goals of the Framework.

3.6 Concepts, knowledge and skills from the Integrated Learning Framework

Concepts and knowledge

- multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary approaches

- models for research and inquiry (proposing, designing, initiating, planning, producing and reviewing)

- problem finding

- information and data management

- information and communication technologies

- personal and social capability

- ethical understanding

- collaborative and global understanding

- nature of creativity and innovation

- entrepreneurial enterprise

- consultation with community.

Skills

- creating and producing
- communication
- critical review
- creative thinking
- modelling
- evaluation, analysis, assessing
- selecting primary and secondary sources
- decision making
- teamwork, collaboration
- project management (including time management/organisation)
- metacognition (including reflecting on the process).

3.7   All courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate should enable students to develop essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners proposed by the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019) "to prepare young people to thrive in a time of rapid social and technological change, and complex environmental, social and economic challenges" (2019, p. 3). The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities comprise an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions. Curriculum aims to provide opportunities for students to develop these in their learning across the curriculum. (ACARA, 2016)

Connected Learning provides opportunities to develop capabilities in 'Creative and Critical Thinking', 'Personal and Social Capability', as these have been identified by teachers in the ACT as aiding transitions between levels of schooling and supporting movement into the world. Though students will also develop capability in 'Information and Communication Technology', 'Intercultural Understanding', 'Literacy', and 'Numeracy' in researching and assessing data from a range of learning areas. (ACARA, 2016)

3.7.1   Students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking involves students thinking broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.

3.7.2   Students develop personal and social capability as they learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. Personal and social capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills.

4. THE CONTEXT OF THE ACT

4.1   Courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate:

- provide a variety of pathways, to meet different learning needs and encourage students to complete their secondary education

- enable students to develop the essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners

- empower students as active participants in their own learning

- engage students in contemporary issues relevant to their lives

- foster students' intellectual, social and ethical development

- nurture students' wellbeing, and physical and spiritual development

- enable effective, respectful and contributing participation in a diverse society.

4.2   Each course of study:

- comprises an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum

- is based on a model of learning that integrates intended student outcomes, pedagogy and assessment

- outlines teaching strategies which are grounded in learning principles and encompass quality teaching

- promotes intellectual quality, establish a rich learning environment and generates relevant connections between learning and life experiences

- provides formal assessment and certification of students' achievements.

4.3   In consideration of the ACT context, and in response to contemporary research and literature, a *Connected Learning* course should include:

- a student-centred pedagogical approach

- an interdisciplinary approach

- the educational needs of young people with respect to living a meaningful and fulfilling life

- the Integrated Learning Framework and Achievement Standards

- the needs of different schools and sectors (government and non-government)

- cultural diversity and the multiple practices of living a connected life

- the opportunities and practices of work, careers and professions

- the right to freedom of expression

- the exploration of personal, local, and global issues.

5. AIMS OF THE CONNECTED LEARNING CURRICULUM

5.1   Students in our colleges are faced with living in a complex world in which the economy is restructuring to eliminate low-skilled labour, in which labour requires engagement with the information and service economy, in which migration, increasing inequality and technological change place tensions and demands upon conventional relationships and patterns of living. (Commonwealth Education Council, 2019, p.10) In this world, they are engaged in making meaning and building and planning for productive and meaningful lives (Nielsen, 2007; 2013). Students are looking for information and assistance in building their lives.

They are learning how to be adults in charge of the health and well-being of themselves, as well as contributing to the well-being of their communities. Yet, in a Mission Australia survey 8.3% of school age students in the ACT thought they lacked the information to succeed in their study or work goals. (Bullot A., et al, 2017) Young people will be supported in these challenging tasks through this course by students learning how to research and assess ideas and possibilities in aiming towards their goals for a good life. (Bourdieu, P, 1984; Goldthorpe, J.H. 2007) This course will be particularly valuable to students as it offers the resources to support them in learning how to be, grow and flourish in an increasingly complex world.

Indeed, students in the senior secondary system are engaged in the wider community on a range of levels, and this can prevent them from fully engaging with education. Sometimes, they are independent or bear responsibilities very early in life. For example, 8.4% of students in the ACT had significant family duties which they reported impacted negatively on their schooling. (Carlisle E, et al, 2019, p.62) Such duties can also entail significant decision-making responsibilities and they need information to address those challenges.

Further, significant proportions of students come from many backgrounds and experiences that affect learning and engagement with school. This includes 12% of ACT Students from a low socio-economic background, the 40% of young Australians that have been exposed to traumatic stressors, and the 11-16% of Australians who have experienced abuse before 15. (Bullot et al, 2017; Baily and Brunzell, 2019) Further, 9.4% of ACT students less than happy in their lives, 38.9% very concerned about mental health, 8.6% very concerned about discrimination, according to Mission Australia (Carlisle E, et al, 2019, p.66). Further, disadvantaged backgrounds often render young people unfamiliar with the social, legal, and industrial codes that regulate life in modern Australia. They need that information as they are on the verge of independent living and are making, or will soon make, significant decisions that could have long-term consequences.

Finally, young people consider the challenges facing the natural environment is the most important issue facing Australian today with 53.1% considering it the most important issue, but very few, at 5.5%, felt their voice made a difference on such important issues. (Carlisle E, et al, 2019, p.74). Evidently, young people want to develop dispositions and skills to improve their lives and the lives of others.

5.4   This course will support young people in developing the skills to engage with all aspects of society. This intention follows the aims enunciated in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration*:

> *"The skills and knowledge that young people acquire are critical to their success and happiness. The scale and pace of change in society and the economy mean that now more than ever, the ability to learn and grow beyond the compulsory years of education and training is essential. Skills, knowledge and capabilities will need to be renewed and updated throughout life." (Commonwealth Education Council, 2019, p. 10)*

In addition, the intention of this course also follows the ACT's *Future of Education* plan.

> *"The Strategy is about developing capable adults who have learnt to learn, live productively in society, think, create and work in an increasingly digital future... The Strategy also recognises that learning environments are places that bring people together as a community and enable relationships to form between people and services." (Berry, 2018)*

Both the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration* ACT's *Future of Education* plan find a presence in the purpose of this course.

5.5   Following these policy documents, the course gives students the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge in several areas. It provides opportunities for students to research and read about healthy relationships. This course seeks to provide students with the means of finding and assessing information about life skills that enable a more comfortable and contented life, as measured by the OECD Better Life Index, which uses civic engagement, income and wealth, environmental quality, health status, housing, jobs and earnings, education and skills, subjective well-being, social connections and personal security as metrics. (OECD, 2017). As Andrew Fuller argues "The experience of many young people is that growing up is a bit like going on a wild roller coaster ride....[we should] help as many young people as possible to stay in the trolley car and not fall on the tracks." (Fuller, A 2017 p. ix in Ramesh Manocha (ed.), 2017) As such, in this course students also learn how to gain information about physical, psychological, digital and academic health and well-being, and how to assess the validity and utility of information about health and well-being.

5.7   There is a strong evidence-base around the value of life skills courses for assisting students engage with learning and wider society to 'stay in the trolley car'. As Lene Buchert argues, a life skills course can contribute to a much better life and future for those students involved. He writes:

> *"Life skills or skills for life are perhaps captured in the simplest and deepest way in the four pillars of learning of the Delors report (Delors et al. 1996), with outcomes of education relating to four crucial areas affecting a self-fulfilling life and contribution to societal development. They are (1) learning to know (i.e. to master the instruments of knowledge); (2) learning to do (i.e. to apply knowledge in practice); (3) learning to live together and living with others (i.e. to prevent and resolve conflicts, and promote peace and respect for other people, their cultures and spiritual values); and (4) learning to be (i.e. to ensure all-round development of each individual)" (Buchert, L, 2014, p.166).*

Following Buchert's suggestions from research, in this course, students will consider the ethical, social and legal regimes that regulate their community and apply those principles to their daily life and the lives of others. They will develop the collaboration and communication skills necessary to give effect to their ethical judgments through positive action for the benefit of themselves and others. They examine the means and metrics for developing productive and fulfilling lives and relationships. Students learn how to do basic tasks for independent living and how to teach others similar skills.

5.9   A study of *Connected Learning*, like many life skills courses fosters personal, social, moral and ethical development, and promotes intercultural understanding. In this course, to build a more connected life as suggested by the OECD *Better Life Index,* in keeping with the *Future of Education*, and in reference to research cited in the previous rationale, students are provided with the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and understandings in regard to:

- key life and social skills, such as conscientiousness, emotional stability, determination, control, optimism, interpersonal skills, communication skills, leadership skills, management skills, advocacy skills, co-operation and team building skills

- Ideas and methods for building meaning in their life, including self-knowledge and living and being for self and others

- access to knowledge and skills that improve access to opportunity and equality

- ideas about how to maintain self-care that enable them to give and live meaningfully including research into the value of giving and community service

- reading, researching and problem solving using critical thinking skills

- ideas from ethics and philosophy that provide decision making guidance about living a moral and responsible life that fosters positive social outcomes for people and society

- day to day living skills

- time and project management skills and communication skills for life and work

- emotional and relationships skills, relationships and sex education, and these issues are vital domains for living well and conduct a range of tasks while also living and working with others.

6. STRUCTURE OF THE CONNECTED LEARNING COURSE

The principles underpinning the structure of this course is Big Ideas. The theory of the use of Big Ideas in the curriculum was developed by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins. Big ideas are what we want students to understand by the end of their study. The course writers have been supported in their understanding of this area of learning by Associate Professors Dr Jennifer Ma and Dr Thomas Nielsen.

Rationale
Connected Learning provides students with opportunities to find and assess information about living well, and to develop skills and knowledge that enable a balanced, meaningful, and independent life. Students analyse, assess and apply information and arguments about living well and the skills to achieve the goals they set in response. They will acquire dispositions and understandings, communication and collaboration skills, and project managements techniques that will enable positive relationships personally and professionally.
Students in ACT colleges are engaged in making meaning, building and planning for productive and meaningful lives. They are learning how to be adults in charge of their own health and well-being of themselves and how to influence the well-being of their communities as active citizens. These challenging tasks will be supported by students learning how to research and assess ideas and possibilities in aiming towards a good life. Through research in this course, students develop an understanding of themselves and their world if they are to have the life skills, resilience and self-knowledge necessary to weather the complexity of the changing world.
This course will be particularly valuable to students for future life, study and work. It offers the opportunity to learn about how to be, grow and flourish in an increasingly complex world. The course builds critical reading skills which are vital to future study. It builds practical skills in communication, planning, information literacy, and building and maintaining relationships that will be useful in any workplace.

Units
Finding Balance   Students analyse the principles of good health and a balanced life in several domains. They formulate plans for developing healthy and effective habits for living their life.   Students analyse effective ways of approaching their studies for life-long learning and assess its significance in their lives.
Giving and Meaning   Students analyse and assess different ethical systems that drive the institutions and community life in which they operate. They consider ethical and sustainable practices and ways to improve society. Students examine the connections between giving, meaning and happiness.   Students examine and employ a project management system to plan a project about which they have made ethical judgements. They study and employ effective means of communicating their position and intentions

Relationships and Communication

Students assess arguments and theories about respectful relationships. They examine the legal regulation of personal, social, economic, and ecological relationships. They examine strategies for effective communication within different types of relationships. Students examine examples of relationships and consider communication strategies that would educate people about respectful relationships and thus enhance and improve relationships.

An Independent Life

Students analyse different ideas about an independent life. They consider their own situation and quality of life. Students undertake life and work planning. Students analyse the costs and benefits of different ways of managing personal finances. They research and analyse the costs and benefits of their choices and possibilities, considering and assessing metrics such as consumerism, happiness and sustainability.

They analyse ideas and information about household management and learn how to accomplish basic household skills and communicate their learning to others.

Negotiated Study

Students must have studied at least TWO standard 1.0 units from this course. Students must not duplicate topics, case studies or issues studied in this course.

A Negotiated Study unit is decided upon by a class, group(s) or individual student in consultation with the teacher and with the Principal's approval. The program of learning for a negotiated study unit must meet all the content descriptions as appears in the unit.

7. CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Incorporating a futures orientation

To equip students to engage in their future, they should examine their themselves, the processes and systems at work in their world, how to learn, and how to respond to change. This intention follows the aims enunciated in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration*:

> *"The skills and knowledge that young people acquire are critical to their success and happiness. The scale and pace of change in society and the economy mean that now more than ever, the ability to learn and grow beyond the compulsory years of education and training is essential. Skills, knowledge and capabilities will need to be renewed and updated throughout life." (Commonwealth Education Council, 2019, p. 10)*

In addition, the intention of this course also follows the ACT's *Future of Education* plan.

> *"The Strategy is about developing capable adults who have learnt to learn, live productively in society, think, create and work in an increasingly digital future... The Strategy also recognises that learning environments are places that bring people together as a community and enable relationships to form between people and services." (Berry, 2018)*

Both the future orientations of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration* and the ACT's *Future of Education* plan find a presence in the purpose of this course in that it build the capacity to engage with future changes and adversity, and the skills to build a meaningful life.

7.2 Connected Learning course

Connected Learning retains an important place in ACT senior secondary curriculum. The curriculum fosters higher order thinking, intrapersonal and interpersonal understanding, intercultural understanding, and communication skills that equip students to take an active part in their community as people, citizens and workers.

7.3 Equity and opportunity

The *Connected Learning* course provide flexibility and choice for teachers and students. Teachers will design programs of learning to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills outlined in the course. The factors that influence those programs include school and community contexts, local community learning opportunities, contemporary and local issues and available learning resources.

This course is intended to provide a means to redress inequities in students' access to good information. It attempts to broaden access to information, dispositions and habits that will enable better engagement with society.

7.4 Connections to other learning areas

Connected Learning is an inherently interdisciplinary course. The curriculum for courses will identify where there are links or opportunities to build cross curriculum learning. The connections arise naturally out of the curriculum.

7.5 Role of digital technologies

Students and teachers integrate a growing range of online information, tools and applications into teaching and learning in this course. These include a range of online resources including databases, reference works and indexes to library holdings. Students will develop skills for lifelong learning through digital resources.

Connected Learning students will examine their place in the digital world and how to use it for their own benefit. They will examine questions raised by the digital environment and develop their own solutions for living well and safely.

7.6   Clarity of curriculum

The curriculum is substantial and flexible. It is sufficiently rich and descriptive to guide teachers with limited experience, but avoids excessive prescription that would hamper experienced teachers from exercising their skills. The curriculum document is expressed clearly in terms that are accessible to a new teacher, while allowing all teachers to enhance it with their interests and expertise.

7.7   Breadth and depth of study

Content descriptions specify the knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to learn and that teachers are expected to teach. Teachers are required to develop a program of learning that allows students to demonstrate all the content descriptions.

A program of learning is what a college provides to implement the course for a subject meeting students' needs and interests. It is at the discretion of the teacher to emphasis some content descriptions over others. The teacher may teach additional (not listed) content if it meets the specific unit goals providing that it does not duplicate content in other units.

7.8   The nature of the learner

The courses address the needs of diverse learners and cater for Accredited (A) and Modified (M) levels of study.

7.9   General capabilities

Skills and understanding related to thinking skills and creativity, self-management, teamwork, intercultural understandings, social competence, and literacy are further developed and used in *Connected Learning*. In addition, capabilities such as numeracy, ICT and ethical awareness are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area.

7.10   Cross-curriculum perspectives

Each of these perspectives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Australian's Engagement with Asia, and, sustainability, are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area. Curriculum documents are explicit as to how the perspectives are dealt with in each course and how links can be made between learning areas.

8.   PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

The underpinning beliefs and learning principles for the development of ACT Board of Senior Secondary School curriculum as are follows:

Underpinning beliefs

1. All students are able to learn
2. Learning is a partnership between students and teachers
3. Teachers are responsible for advancing student learning.
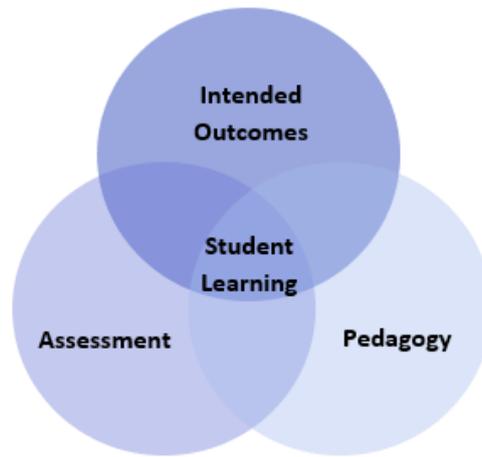
Learning Principles

1. Learning builds on existing knowledge, understandings and skills.

   (Prior knowledge)

2. When learning is organised around major concepts, principles and significant real world issues, within and across disciplines, it helps students make connections and build knowledge structures.

   (Deep knowledge and connectedness)

3. Learning is facilitated when students actively monitor their own learning and consciously develop ways of organising and applying knowledge within and across contexts.

   (Metacognition)

4. Learners' sense of self and motivation to learn affects learning.

   (Self-concept)

5. Learning needs to take place in a context of high expectations.

   (High expectations)

6. Learners learn in different ways and at different rates.

   (Individual differences)

7. Different cultural environments, including the use of language, shape learners' understandings and the way they learn.

   (Socio-cultural effects)

8. Learning is a social and collaborative function as well as an individual one.

   (Collaborative learning)

9. Learning is strengthened when learning outcomes and criteria for judging learning are made explicit and when students receive frequent feedback on their progress.

   (Explicit expectations and feedback).

9. CONCLUSION

The Connected Learning course is to be developed under the *Connected Learning* framework. The course promotes critical and creative thinking and personal and social capabilities, equipping young citizens for the demands and challenges of the 21st Century globalised world. *Connected Learning* equips students to analyse how people have tried to make moral, spiritual and intellectual sense of the world.

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