

Discussion Paper

Board Approved 1st September 2015



Educating in the 21st Century

This paper captures the best work of current practitioners in South Australian secondary schools. These educational leaders understand the changed practices required to better equip our young people to thrive in a rapidly changing, globally competitive and uncertain future.

The aim of this paper is to promote discussion in all of our schools about teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment design and school organisation in the 21st century.

The paper evolved out of research, debates and shared experiences documented during 2014 and 2015. This process of sharing best practices and refining our understandings based on what works in our schools enhances our capacity as the State's secondary leaders to confidently articulate our shared understanding of how to best address the needs of 21st century learners.

In July 2015, secondary leaders were asked to share the draft version of this paper with teaching staff and with Governing Councils: to establish what matched their current thinking and practices; what was being done in their school context that was not captured in the paper; and what changes needed to be initiated in their schools to create the conditions for improved 21st C teaching and learning practices.

The Discussion Paper consists of three sections:

1. **Summary:** a one page outline of the principles that reflect the professional practices of teachers, leaders and schools in relation to our growing understanding of how to deliver 21st century learning, teaching and schooling. [Page 2]
2. **Context:** a brief statement provided by Emeritus Professor Alan Reid. We are very grateful for Professor Reid's advice and contribution. [Pages 2 – 3]
3. **Snapshots of Practice:** each of the principles related to 21st C teaching, learning and leading is explained in an easily referenced paragraph. [Pages 4 – 6]

The SASPA Board believes that is timely for secondary leaders to share their understandings of how schools are preparing the full range of students for a complex and uncertain future so we can learn from each other and get the best outcomes possible for all of our students who are preparing for adult life in a rapidly changing world.

As an association dedicated to supporting leaders in the continuous improvement of teaching and learning in secondary schools, we offer this paper as an impetus for secondary leaders to develop a consensus view about what we need to do differently to fulfil our moral purpose and ensure that our students thrive within school and beyond school in the 21st century.

Summary

What does the SASPA Board mean by the term “21st Century Learning”?

- Learning is designed to be learning for life.
- Learning is designed to be relevant and meaningful.
- Learning is designed to be collaborative.
- Learning is designed to be personalised to student’s learning needs.
- Learning is accessible 24/7.

What does the SASPA Board mean by the term “21st C Teaching”?

- Teachers understand and create blended learning environments.
- Teachers develop their students as expert learners.
- Teachers re-focus the way time is used in classrooms to enable them to ‘see’ deep learning in action.
- Teachers are collaborative learners themselves.

What does SASPA mean by the term “Leadership for 21st C Teaching and Learning”?

- School cultures constantly evolve to reflect the rapidly changing society.
- Students are at the centre of the learning process so the teacher’s role changes from information transmission to orchestrating collaborative learning.
- Professional learning equips teachers to adopt, adapt and apply improved and innovative pedagogies required for effective 21st Century learning.
- Professional learning further develops teachers and support staff to use digital technologies in supportive and challenging ways to create engaging learning opportunities that stretch students intellectually and improve student outcomes.
- Resources are directed into ICT platforms that create flexible and relevant learning spaces that operate 24/7 to meet the personalised learning needs of students and the needs of teachers to create blended learning opportunities for students.
- Schools have well developed systems that enable every teacher to take responsibility for the continuous improvement of every student’s learning opportunities.

Context

At one level the term 21st century schooling tells us little more than that the task of schools is to prepare children and young people for life in the contemporary world. However, as with most educational ideas and concepts, the term hides a multiplicity of contested ideas. These include debates about the purposes of education, about the nature of the contemporary world, about how the world may change in the coming decades, and about how people learn best – the answers to which help to shape the kind of schooling that we offer students. Such debates are the sign of a healthy education system and a healthy society. A professional organisation like SASPA has a key role to play in these debates given the level of educational expertise and the depth of experience which exists in the organisation, and the fact that its members are in the unique position of being the designated leaders in school sites. It means that it is important for SASPA to have its own ongoing discussions about the nature of schooling today, and to document where it stands broadly on the question of what kind of education best suits the needs of students and our society in the 21st century.

The Policy Context

Schooling always occurs within contexts which shape the nature of schools and what happens within them, such as teaching and learning and social interactions. These contexts can be idiosyncratic to specific school communities and clearly any approach to teaching and learning must take account of these contexts in the processes of designing and implementing the curriculum.

But there are also contexts which are common to most schools. These include the education policies of the State government, the federal government, and the increasing presence of the international community through organisations like the OECD. These help to shape the work of schools and the nature of the school curriculum.

The dominant themes of contemporary education policy across these various arenas reflect a neo-liberal philosophy where education is seen as a market in which schools compete for custom, and parents and students exercise choice. Allied with this approach is the provision of public information about schools to inform school choice, and encourage improvement. In Australia this has manifested itself through the *My School* website which facilitates comparison of schools through annual standardised NAPLAN tests and through a dominant focus on literacy and numeracy.

In addition, schools are currently implementing the first Australian Curriculum which sets out national agreements about what all students should know and be able to do during and by the end of their schooling. As with any curriculum development, there are disputes about what constitutes valued knowledge, and about how the curriculum should be represented, implemented and assessed.

If the national context helps to shape what happens in schools, the international context is increasingly influential. Standardised tests such as PISA and TIMSS are regularly conducted and enable comparisons to be made about the quality of education across many countries. Once again, there is a narrow focus in relation to what is tested and the outcomes of the tests have encouraged national governments to imitate what is happening in what are perceived to be the 'successful' countries.

Another aspect of the context is the changing world of work which means that after 13 years of schooling teachers are obligated to ensure that students are equipped to thrive in an uncertain future where they may have 17 different employers across 5 separate careers and work in jobs 65% of which don't even currently exist.¹ Young people also live in an increasing *personalised* world where individuals can access an ever increasing array of information sources and can adapt standard processes to reflect more personal choices.

In short, it is impossible to consider schooling in the 21st century without taking these contextual influences into account. As a consequence, it is important that education bodies like SASPA understand the contexts, attempt to contribute to policy outcomes, and decide what things should be embraced, worked around or, indeed, resisted. This demands some broad agreement about the direction that schooling should take in the 21st century – an agreement which will be partly determined by the nature of the contemporary and future society for which our students are being prepared.

Emeritus Professor Alan Reid, University of South Australia

¹ Learning Frontiers p.4

What does SASPA mean by the term “21st Century Learning”?

Snapshots of Practice: There are 5 fundamental principles that embody 21st C learning.

- **Learning is designed to be learning for life.**

In the Information and Digital Age the idea of the purpose of school being simply to acquire knowledge is an anachronism. The role of the 21st C school is to develop students who have the skills to take increasing responsibility for their own learning in order to continue this process throughout life. This is essential if our students are to be equipped to manage and thrive in the rapidly changing 21st century world. By creating learning opportunities that develop students' 21st century skills and linking learning to real world experiences, student engagement is deepened; critical literacies are developed; and the ability to collaboratively form creative and innovative responses to problems is strengthened.

“There is only one skill students need for the future – that is the ability to learn.”

Dylan Wiliam

- **Learning is designed to be relevant and meaningful.**

Generation Z students need to see a relationship between the learning and their sense of themselves and their place in the world. By involving students in the design of their learning it is more likely to have direct meaning and value to them and in turn engage them more deeply and purposefully. Students and teachers need to work in partnership to co-design tasks and learning opportunities. This co-design involves both students and teachers contributing their expertise; using real life assessment; creating opportunities for transcending traditional subject boundaries; and creating opportunities for young people to provide feedback on their learning needs and to be involved in ethical action of local and/or global significance.

- **Learning is designed to be collaborative.**

Developing students' skills to problem-solve, learn collaboratively and to build relationships of trust requires learning programs that provide opportunities for students to work in teams that are diverse in membership and size, and have a clear focus on developing skills that support effective team work. As students develop the skills for learning for life they become more expert in their own learning; that is, they know how they learn best and what they are most interested in. In this context, teachers understand their role as *orchestrating* the learning; that is, creating the conditions for students to direct their own learning within the required curriculum frameworks, take risks with their learning and connect with others to collectively develop capabilities, build knowledge and find wisdom.

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

- **Learning is designed to be personalised.**

A personalised learning program connects learning required by curriculum frameworks with students' interests and capabilities according to their readiness, interest and/or learning profile. In the Information and Digital Age, schools must take advantage of digital technologies that both challenge and support students by offering access to learning objects, collaborative learning, assessment tasks, and two way feedback reflecting a learning partnership between teachers and students.

- **Learning is available 24/7.**

A personalised learning program *blends* face-to-face teaching and real time collaborative learning with multiple online formats making learning available 24/7, reflecting real world work patterns. Technology enables further personalisation as teachers use online formats to collect student feedback to check for understanding and to fine tune their curriculum delivery accordingly.

What does SASPA mean by the term “21st C Teaching”?

Snapshots of Practice: There are 4 fundamental principles which embody 21st C teaching.

- **Teachers create blended learning environments².**

Work patterns across the world operate 24/7 and this is reflected in the ways our schools are responding to students’ *anywhere, anytime* learning preference. Teachers have a specific role in the personalisation of students’ learning by creating *blended* learning environments where on-line learning *blends* with face to face teaching so that learning is accessible to students 24/7 in multiple formats. This increases student access to learning, it provides students with an opportunity to adjust the pace of their learning and, where learning objects such as podcasts are used, students can *rewind* the explicit teaching as a means of enriching and better understanding face-to-face learning experiences.

- **Teachers develop expert learners.**

Task design is the process by which teachers orchestrate student learning to provide challenging, relevant and meaningful ways for learning to be demonstrated and, when appropriate, measured. The role of the teacher has moved from *sole dispenser of information* to *highly skilled orchestrator of blended learning*; that is, assisting students in the formulation of inquiry questions and supporting them to conduct inquiry-based learning in real and online contexts as a means for them to turn information into knowledge (and knowledge into wisdom). This means that students are learning and re-learning, and developing capabilities that support learning for life. Teachers design learning tasks to develop expert learners who can apply their learning in a range of different and changing contexts.

“*The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.*”

Alvin Toffler

- **Teachers re-focus the way time is used in classrooms.**

The shift in the focus in schools from teaching to learning means that classroom and home time needs to be used differently to enable teachers to see their students working collaboratively problem-solving and learning in their classrooms and to give students the opportunity to review the explicit teaching in their own time. Secondary schools can no longer be *the places where young people go to watch teachers work* (Dylan William, 2014) and this means achieving a better balance between student output and teacher input. Since we want greater emphasis on learning processes and developing skills that are transferable to all learning contexts, there must now be a deliberate shift away from the teacher delivering content to the more highly skilled requirements of the teacher *orchestrating learning*. This means putting learning processes centre-stage so that teachers can see and intervene in real time to re-direct and challenge students’ learning.

- **Teachers are collaborative learners (as well as teachers).**

The collaborative nature of learning that our students undertake should also be evident in the work of teachers. Teachers need to experience, understand and model how collaborative learning works if they are to successfully create these learning opportunities for students. Collaborations between teachers need to be part of their formal work load to support teams to undertake focussed reflections on current practice, to reduce differences between class performances, to moderate work and to engage in professional dialogue about how to improve student engagement and achievement. In these teams, teachers collaborate to share best practices and to trial and appraise improved approaches to teaching and learning.

² Blended learning is an approach where students learn, at least in part, through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

What does SASPA mean by the term “Leadership of 21st C Schooling”?

Snapshots of Practice: There are 4 principles that embody leadership of 21st C schooling.

In order to realise the key characteristics of 21st century teaching and learning, school leaders need to work within their school and across their various networks (including the Birth – 18 Partnership) to systematically plan, implement and continuously refine strategies that bring a 21st Century approach to school cultures, structures and processes.

School cultures need to constantly evolve in order to:

- Place students at the centre of the learning process, and the learning processes at the centre of teachers’ work, using the available school time wisely and effectively to reflect this important priority.
- Emphasise the critical role of teachers in the highly skilled task of orchestrating the learning processes.
- Support and acknowledge the importance of the teacher/student relationship particularly in terms of teachers knowing what their students know and how to challenge their ongoing learning.
- Continuously improve the learning outcomes for all students and, when required, to challenge ill-informed political, social and organisational demands from a base of understanding 21st Century learning.

School professional learning programs need to further develop:

- Pedagogical practices that focus on inquiry based, personalised, blended learning that is relevant and meaningful to all students.
- ICT competencies of teachers and support staff to use digital technologies in supportive and challenging ways to create engaging learning opportunities that improve student learning outcomes.
- Ability of teachers to adopt, adapt and apply pedagogical approaches that enable student ownership of their learning and class time to be used differently so students have increased opportunity for collaborative problem-solving and the application of their learning to different and more complex contexts.

Schools need to direct resources into:

- Professional learning that equips teachers to adopt, adapt and apply improved and innovative pedagogies required for effective 21st Century learning.
- Facilities and infrastructure that complement collaborative ICT based learning opportunities for students and staff.
- ICT platforms that create flexible and relevant learning spaces that can operate 24/7 and meet the personalised learning needs of students and the needs of teachers to create blended learning opportunities for students.

Schools need to analyse relevant contextualised qualitative and quantitative data sets that:

- Enable every teacher to take responsibility for the continuous improvement of every student’s learning opportunities.
- Inform public discourse and present balanced perspectives on the data.
- Provide insights and understandings for future planning.
- Promote the strengths, the inclusivity and the successes of our collective work as educators of the next generations.