

13th Annual

# Thinking & Learning Conference

**GAVIN GRIFT**

Saturday 21 May

**Collaborative Teams that Transform  
Curriculum: The next steps in PLCs**

Session 3

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**MELBOURNE**

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# GAVIN GRIFT

Gavin Grift is executive director of Hawker Brownlow Professional Learning Solutions (HBPLS). With experience as a teacher, assistant principal and educational coach, Gavin's passion, commitment and style have made him an in-demand presenter of keynotes, seminars and in-school support days. As a speaker, Gavin connects with national and international audiences on topics ranging from Cognitive Coaching and quality teacher practice to professional learning communities (PLCs) and learning-centred leadership.



Gavin is the author of numerous articles and books, including *Assessing the Whole Child* (2007), *Teachers as Architects of Learning* (2013) and *Transformative Talk: Cognitive Coaches Share Their Stories* (2014). As a Centre for Professional Learning Communities (CPLC) training associate, he led the establishment of a PLC network within Australian schools. Gavin also serves as a training associate for Thinking Collaborative, which is the home of both Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools.

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Website: [www.hbe.com.au](http://www.hbe.com.au)  
Email: [orders@hbe.com.au](mailto:orders@hbe.com.au)

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## CHAPTER 3

# Transforming Curriculum

As mentioned in the first chapter (page 3), current approaches to curriculum can be transformed by an effectual response to the question, What do we want our students to know? We propose that a well-crafted answer to this question begins with a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

## The Need for a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

The concept of a guaranteed and viable curriculum was first introduced in the book *What Works in Schools* (Marzano, 2003) and was further developed in a number of later publications (for example, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Marzano et al., 2014). By *guaranteed*, we mean that the same content is taught in all classrooms. To achieve this, the curriculum must provide “clear guidance regarding the content to be addressed in specific courses and at specific grade levels” (Marzano et al., 2014, p. 69). A prerequisite to a guaranteed curriculum is a *viable* curriculum – one with content that can be taught in the time available to teachers.

Collaborative teams and a guaranteed and viable curriculum have a symbiotic relationship. If one of the crucial objectives of the PLC process is to increase the quality of students’ learning, then a guaranteed and viable curriculum is a foundational element to that mission. Given that a great deal of the collaborative team’s work centres on monitoring teacher instruction and student achievement, it is imperative that the team’s members have a clear understanding of what they will teach. Without a guaranteed and viable curriculum, assessment tasks and the measurements based on them become inconsistent, invalid and unreliable. A guaranteed and viable curriculum can only be created, implemented and sustained through collaborative effort, making this task ideal work for collaborative teams (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Such activity also creates the opportunity for teachers – those who will eventually deliver the content to students – to be directly involved in curriculum design (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

The creation of a guaranteed and viable curriculum has four steps, as follows.

1. Identify essential content.
2. Include cognitive and conative skills.

## COLLABORATIVE TEAMS THAT TRANSFORM SCHOOLS

3. Identify learning goals and objectives.
4. Construct proficiency scales.

The following sections discuss these steps in more detail.

## Identifying Essential Content

The first step in creating a guaranteed and viable curriculum is to identify the essential content, often called *prioritised standards*. Sets of academic content standards typically articulate far more content than is possible to teach in the time available. Even with the recent adoption of a national Australian Curriculum, the problem of too much content is still rampant. As such, it is crucial that collaborative teams distill broad achievement standards down to a manageable amount of essential content.

A collaborative team might do this by looking at the Australian Curriculum achievement standards for their year level and content area, having each teacher choose the statements within the achievement standard that they think are essential, and then discussing and coming to a consensus as to which statements are essential. More specifically, teams can use a four-step process (Heflebower, Hoegh & Warrick, 2014) that includes: (1) analysing the achievement standard to become familiar with the material; (2) individually rating the priority of each statement in the achievement standard; (3) grouping the high-priority statements into topics; and (4) reviewing the grouped statements and adjusting as necessary. (For a more detailed discussion, see Heflebower et al., 2014.) The power of this four-step process for rating statements is that all teachers involved have the opportunity to weigh in on the decisions. Additionally, as they make decisions about essential content, content knowledge across all team members increases.

As a measure for determining the importance of individual statements in an achievement standard, teams can use Larry Ainsworth's (2003) criteria: endurance, leverage and readiness. *Endurance* refers to whether or not the knowledge and skills will be valuable over time. *Leverage* refers to the usefulness of the knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines. *Readiness* refers to the value of the knowledge and skills in terms of preparation for subsequent courses and year levels. As teachers rate the importance of statements (step 2 of the process), they can consider these criteria to guide their ratings. For a more formal approach, they might list each statement in a table and check off the criteria that apply to each statement. The majority of instructional time is then spent on the essential content, with other supplemental content being woven into the essential content or taught separately but with less emphasis. We typically recommend that collaborative teams identify between eight and 15 prioritised standards for the entire year for a given subject area for a given year level or course. For example, the following vignette depicts how schools might identify the essential content.

*Goeling Primary School has committed to implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum. School leaders have selected humanities and social sciences (HASS) as the first content area to go through the process and invited all the HASS teachers to participate.*

*To aid the process, the technology department has created an electronic template teachers can use to select essential content. The tool lists all of the statements in the Australian Curriculum: HASS achievement standards for Years F–6 along with a rating scale. Each teacher independently reads each statement and selects a rating under each of the three criteria – endurance, leverage and readiness.*

continued →

## Transforming Curriculum

*The electronic form aggregates the responses so the year-level teams can easily see which statements received high ratings. Members can also identify discrepancies among individuals' ratings of specific statements and resolve them through discussion. Each year-level team discusses its statements and ratings in order to determine a collective list, which members document on poster paper and electronically.*

*The next part of the process involves a vertical review of the statements selected by the year levels (or courses) just above and below each team's level. To do this, the teams hang up their poster paper lists around the room in year level and course order. During the review, one member of each team stays at the chart to explain their work to others while other team members visit the chart one year level (or course) above and one year level (or course) below. For example, the Year 3 team reviews Year 2 and Year 4. While reviewing the selected statements from the other year levels or courses, the teachers pose questions and share any concerns about omissions and redundancies. The representative at each team's chart takes those suggestions back to the original year level or course team for revisions. After a round of revisions based on that feedback, the HASS teams complete one more vertical review. Once the teams finalise their essential content lists, they move on to the development of proficiency scales.*

## Including Cognitive and Conative Skills

Creating a guaranteed and viable curriculum is transformational in that it provides teachers with a laser focus regarding the essential content they will teach. Collaborative teams can effect a second transformation in the curriculum by including skills that enable life-long learning. If students are to become university- and career-ready, the PLC process should take into account two categories of such skills: cognitive skills and conative skills (Marzano & Heflebower, 2012). *Cognitive skills* are “those needed to effectively process information and complete tasks” (Marzano et al., 2013, p. 24); *conative skills* involve one's ability to evaluate both information and emotions and then respond or act appropriately (Marzano & Heflebower, 2012). Each category includes specific skills that can be directly taught and used to deepen students' thinking (Marzano et al., 2013). The cognitive and conative skills are reported in tables 3.1 and 3.2, respectively.

**Table 3.1: Cognitive Skills**

Cognitive Skill	Definition
Generating conclusions	Combining information to create new ideas
Identifying common logical errors	Analysing conclusions or arguments for validity or truth
Presenting and supporting claims	Using reasons and evidence to support new ideas
Navigating digital sources	Finding relevant information online or in electronic resources and assessing its credibility
Problem-solving	Navigating obstacles and limiting conditions to achieve a goal

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<b>PROFICIENCY SCALE</b>	
<b>PRIORITISED STANDARD(S):</b>	
<b>AREA:</b>	<b>YEAR LEVEL:</b>
<b>4</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>APPLICATION</b> <b>SCORE 4.0 – More complex</b> <b>Demonstrations of learning that go above and beyond what has been explicitly taught</b></p> <p><i>In addition to exhibiting a level 3 performance, in-depth inferences and applications that go BEYOND what was taught in class.</i></p> <p><b>Students will be able to:</b></p>
<b>3</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LEARNING GOAL</b> <b>(PRIORITISED STANDARD)</b> <b>SCORE 3.0 - The learning goal or expectation</b></p> <p><i>No major errors or omissions regarding any of the information and/or processes (SIMPLE OR COMPLEX) that were explicitly taught.</i></p> <p><b>Students will be able to:</b></p>
<b>2</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRE-REQUISITE SKILLS (INCLUDING VOCABULARY)</b> <b>SCORE 2.0 – The simpler stuff</b> <b>Fundamental knowledge, simpler procedures, isolated details, vocabulary</b></p> <p><i>No major errors or omissions regarding the SIMPLER details and processes BUT major errors or omissions regarding the more complex ideas and processes</i></p> <p><b>Students will be able to recognise and recall recognises or specific terminology, such as:</b></p> <p><b>Students will be able to:</b></p>
<b>1</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE SIMPLER STUFF</b> <b>SCORE 1.0</b></p> <p><i>With HELP, a partial knowledge of some of the simpler and complex details and processes</i></p> <p><b>With help, the student can perform score 2.0 and 3.0 expectations</b></p>
<b>0</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NO UNDERSTANDING</b> <b>SCORE 0.0</b></p> <p><i>Even with HELP, no understanding or skill demonstrated. These students would be working on an Individual Learning Plan (focusing on different learning goals.)</i></p> <p><b>Even with help, the student cannot perform expectations</b></p>

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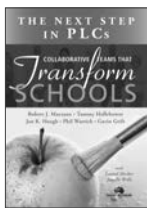
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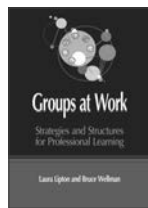
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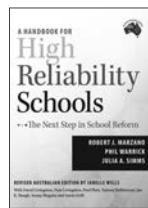
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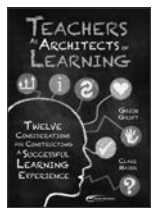
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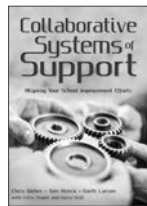
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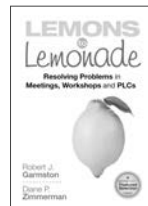
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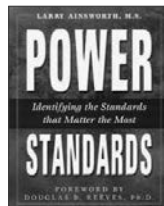
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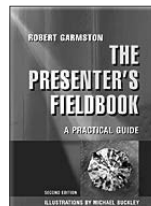
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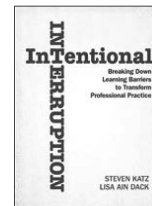
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