Premier’s First State Super Financial Literacy Scholarship

Financial Literacy —On Line and Below the Line

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My original proposal sought to evaluate how financial literacy is taught in the United States and the United Kingdom, and to adapt the best of these to develop a series of modules. The initial focus was centred on Year 9 Commerce students, whereby I would conceptualise a series of modules that would be consistent with the current syllabus; be adaptable to all students in recognition of the fundamental importance of financial literacy; and at the same time deliver such capabilities to all students, not just those who choose the Commerce elective. I envisage that the Elementary modules will be developed and delivered to the entire cohort via such media as assemblies, general citizenship lessons, roll call or any other pastoral care-style medias. Delivery of the concepts would be varied, not restricted to but including bring your own device (BYOD). This would enable the content to explicitly acknowledge the internet and social media as newer, albeit ubiquitous, tools for the delivering financial media. At all times, my overarching focus for all modules has been to shift the focus from ‘This is what I have learned from my teacher’ to ‘This is what I have learnt for myself.’

This report is in three parts:

* 1. preparation phase
  2. discovery phase
  3. recommendations for implementation.

How I prepared

As a teacher of the Stage 5 Commerce syllabus, I felt that I was capable of delivering lessons that enabled students to meet the syllabus outcomes. However, I was concerned that the content I was teaching to these teenagers was too important not to be delivered to all students. The fundamentals of consumer behaviour as well as the more conceptual concepts of saving, budgeting and investing for both the present and the future were too important not to be delivered to all students.

In preparing for my overseas investigation, I sought out generalist courses of financial literacy. This was to see what delivery methods were being used and to evaluate how effective they were. Being familiar with traditional classroom delivery techniques and methods, I was curious to see if and how financial literacy was being delivered outside the schoolroom.

The most appropriate course seemed to be one delivered by Macquarie University, Open2Study.

The course was delivered over four weeks and consisted of a video tutorial and supplementary multiple-choice questions that acted as a gateway to the next unit. Whilst I was familiar with the course content, the delivery method was my focus. I found the content interesting, although I felt teenagers would be not necessarily be more engaged than in traditional classroom

I also undertook extensive desktop research, and felt that I had a good appreciation of how topics within the Stage 5 syllabus were being delivered, as well as what major issues might need to be addressed so that the module concept could be developed and implemented.

In addition, I participated in several webinars sponsored by the Council for Economic Education (USA) and hosted by Jon Lefeber. These were of interest in the sense that Jon is a recognised expert in delivering and developing financial education materials.

What I saw

The benefits of my extensive preparation were readily apparent as soon as I reached the United States. I was able to commence my study tour with two full days shadowing several teachers at a school in San Francisco. This process was repeated at more schools in Seattle and New York City.

My primary finding was that the concept of financial education is being addressed in an ad hoc manner despite a plethora of resources, some excellent and some of questionable value. There is no general financial education syllabus, with each state being encouraged to develop their own curriculum, and no general accreditation, either through examination or requiring mandated syllabus content.

One fundamental difference between Australia and the US is the fact that in the US financial corporations are actively involved in partnership with either school districts or states. Banks in particular are required to have some community involvement as a corporate citizenship venture. Most corporations develop a financial literacy component. Visa has an excellent program called Practical Money Skills overseen by Washington DC and delivered to the states. This program develops a whole range of extensive teaching materials that address all of the areas of financial literacy for high school students. The resources are engaging and comprehensive and provide teachers with a comprehensive kit of materials. Some states assist their teachers and school districts to implement the programs.

The problem lies in the lack of a nationwide implementation program. Having said this, the materials are very good and available at no cost. In Australia, we can access these materials and adapt them to fit our Commerce curriculum and associated citizenship syllabuses.

In the UK, there is a more comprehensive approach with a syllabus that is mandated for all schools. While these are early days, there is wide consensus that a lack of oversight and formal accreditation mean that there are problems with consistency in quality delivery of the financial capability units (as they are called in the UK). The subject of Financial Education is formally part of the curriculum and it is being delivered to all students in all schools. Many resources are being developed that have relevance to the Australian situation, and in many ways the UK, in formally acknowledging the fundamental role of Financial Education, is ahead of the pack insofar as countries seeking to improve the financial literacy of students.

What we could do

When developing Online and Below the Line, I was mindful of the need to develop a stepped program that would be accessible to all students and that could be delivered in a competent manner by all teachers. I imagined that as they become confident with the scope and contemporary nature of the program, as well as becoming familiar with the uncomplicated delivery, teachers of all subjects would become involved in how meaningful the subject matter is, as well as how to engage with the students by fleshing out the examples with anecdotes from their own adult experiences.

The modules I propose would make it easy for teachers to select a lesson ideally by curriculum dot point or even a more explicit allied social skill set, particularly for the Elementary units. I envisage considerable overlap between Commerce and other, more pastoral, civics-based topics, such as identity protection, social media profiling and cyber safety. Another central tenet of the development of a less academic, more pastoral suite of lessons is underpinned by the need for equity and wellbeing as long-term social goals. All units will be capable of delivery through either traditional methods or BYOD.

I have ensured that the delivery of the content of the modules is consistent with the Quality Teaching Framework by developing the grid that follows.

Further, I have at all times been mindful that the syllabus core topics match with the module system, and that there is a clear stepped process whereby the content between Elementary,

The Grid

|  | **Elementary** | **Effective** | **Expert** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Introductory and general in nature. Two to three key concepts introduced and opportunity for students to make the content their own through role plays, discussion and perhaps poster-making. General vocabulary introduced and reinforced through quizzes. | More rigorous and with more time devoted to the achieving specific outcomes. These students would be Commerce elective students. More achievement oriented with clear mastery of some concepts clearly specified at the outset and at the completion of the unit. Assessment would be an essential of learning and would be incorporated throughout the unit, not always formalized, but designed to demonstrate to the teacher and the student that some level of competency had been achieved. | Further accretion would be clear to all students at this level. In acknowledging the commitment of the student to be at this stage, there should be no sacrifice of having engaging content and creative delivery. I envisage students tackling this level would not only be the brightest, but also the most engaged. Excursions and guest speakers would be features here. Students would also need to have a more challenging assessment regime to ensure that the whole process retained its legitimacy. |
| Shopping |  |  |  |
| Budgeting |  |  |  |
| Saving and Investing |  |  |  |
| Future -focus |  |  |  |

Effective and Expert is internally consistent, without in any way making the content in any level too simplistic. The real world *is* out there and these students are engaging already, so the content must be realistic, and students must not feel talked down to, nor should the content seek to dumb down the issues just to make a quick point.

In reference to the grid, theElementarymodules would be developed in short, self-contained   
20 to 30 minute sections. Each unit would consist of background notes for the teacher delivering the lesson and a short video outlining the major points of the topic. The next section would consist of several role-play scenarios. The rationale for this is that from research and observation, both as a teacher and as an observer, I know that learning by doing has the most impact and has the best possibility of engaging the students. The most important of the many reasons for this is that the students are, by and large, respectful of messages their peers deliver and the ability to assume another persona can be an enjoyable way to embed learning for teens. This part need not be undertaken by all students, and teachers may need to be judicious and sensitive when assigning roles.

Considerable skills are involved when students take on the role of another. Firstly, they can become immersed in a topic without needing to have ownership of it. This would be particularly relevant in the case, say, of a poor purchasing decision, or a problematic budgeting situation. The anonymity of such role plays may help students investigate situations with which they may be only too familiar, but not at all aware of how it got that far. This is not too far removed from the anonymity of many technologies in the financial and social media arena. A critical component of this unit is an explicit acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of the internet as an educational delivery technology, an entertainment medium, and the means by which teenagers connect in their learning and their social worlds. The development of this explicit framework does not mean that each module is delivered online, but rather, each module has the uses of technologies embedded within the resources, with appropriate protective behaviours made explicit.

TheEffective module would essentially contain activities built on the Elementary module, but would be designed to meet the curriculum requirements of Commerce. The stepped approach would assist students of all levels to engage in the subject matter; however, a more rigorous gateway at the end would ensure that students met the course outcomes in a more academic manner with appropriate assessment of learning activities. This could involve a multiple-choice test, ideally administered online, that would ensure the key points were addressed, and some activities that could be adapted as assessment tasks. This unit would also contain talking points that students could use to begin a conversation at home. It is here that the experience of their parents/carers would hopefully add a real life dimension to the subject matter. Further, this would help bring a little of the classroom into the home, hopefully to foster discussion on topics of importance and relevance to this age group.

The Expert module would contain additional extension activities that could be completed either alone or under the guidance of a specialist teacher or other similar person within the student’s sphere. More complex material and exercises would engage those students who have a particular interest in the topics. An example would be when the issue of saving/investing was delivered and the students wanted some more information on, say, the operation of shares, beyond say the obvious ownership paradigm (Elementary) or the complexity of the buy/sell mechanics (Effective) to a general exposure, perhaps to charting or some other more complex strike price activity.

When developing these modules, it would be necessary to work with consultants from other, related areas, such as Mathematics, to ensure overlap was consistent and to maximize the opportunity for cross-curricular delivery.

When developing the conceptual framework for On Line and Below the Line,I was intrigued by the use of the Essential Question. This is a relatively new concept in teaching, but one that helps focus the mind and direct the teaching points on the ultimate teaching and learning goal, not just on a discrete unit of work, a curriculum dot point, or even a single lesson. I propose that at the completion of each module, the student will be able to not just enunciate an answer to the Essential Question, but also build relevance to their worldview.

For this reason, I have used the modules around the key learning concepts of Shopping, Budgeting, Saving and Investing, and Future Focus. Within the Stage 5 Commerce syllabus, all of the learning areas are core to the course, and are intended to give a theme of building confidence and relevance as the student moves through the course. While Shopping, Budgeting, Saving and Investing are clear and descriptive, Future Focus will contain issues including Buying a Car, Renting a Home, Buying a Home and Preparing for Retirement.

An overwhelmingly positive aspect of my study tour and the financial literacy course I completed prior to departure was the fact that resources for teachers are not the issue per se. Rather the real problem lies in the fact that resources are all over the place, and it can be just a happy coincidence that a teacher stumbles upon a well constructed and relevant lesson plan or series of lessons that can form the foundation of a good unit of work. This ad hocery is simply not good enough. Financial literacy makes a difference to the very real life outcomes for students. All those good resources available out there for teachers with the time and/or the inclination to look are there because of the fundamental nature of financial literacy. The universality of the issue and its recognition by governments all over the world when preparing citizens of the future makes is obvious that a financial capability is critically important when preparing students’ readiness skill sets as they enter adulthood.

My module proposal seeks to unpack the diverse components of the whole Commerce curriculum, and to assemble resources in such a way that they are not just timely, but of the time. This is the only way that we can group resources that are relevant, contextual and effective for the students.

Within each core area, I propose breaking down each area of the grid into four components, Products, Concepts, Issues and Choices.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The what | The how |
| Products | This area would be the hook. Students would be familiar to a greater or lesser extent with the products, either by name or operation. For example, the shopping products would include EBay, online purchasing with home delivery, product rating services such as Choice, iSelect etc. |
| Concepts | The concepts will be the core Learn to and Learn about points from the syllabus. That is where there is the most scope to engage and update existing resources to ensure that relevance to the students is key. That will include explicitly acknowledging the role of social media. |
| Issues | The Issues component is where the students will be apprised of the of the core area. This more philosophical area would be where philosophical discussion would take place. |
| Choices | In this area, consequences will be addressed, but not in the usual binary form of good and bad. Students will be able to follow the decision making process and hopefully have the facility to adjust as they go*,* in other words, just like in real life, there are thresholds that enable people to review and change. |

I believe that an advocacy role between education providers, government and business would create an atmosphere of collegiality that would immediately focus attention on what and how students are learning, not just for now, but for their future. If there is a gulf between these stakeholders, my proposal seeks to narrow it with the support of businesses operating in the space. The corporate world has a vested interest in having a capable customer base, and they lose when a customer misuses their product, or fails to complete their contractual obligations. It is fair to assume that businesses thrive when customers choose their products/services wisely and that problems cost businesses enormous amounts of not just money but also the more elusive and potentially more costly goodwill. All businesses would say that poor decision making on behalf of the customer, and an inability to know what and how to get help lies at the heart of many of the problems surrounding individuals who get into financial difficulties. For this reason, it is essential that partnerships between education institutions, governments and business get together to assess and keep the resources current, so that what is delivered in the classroom is contemporary and relevant in the real world.

In summary, I am excited by the opportunities that the module delivery system could have in enhancing all students’ financial literacy in an approachable, user-friendly manner. By building on the extensive existing resource base, development time can be compressed, and the roll out could be quite soon, but not dependent on implementation of the new national curriculum in this learning area. The success of the module system has been proven to be effective in all KLAs, and other related areas such as pastoral care units. They are readily accepted by teachers who are relieved of the need to assemble whole lessons; depending on the audience and lesson time, resources can be cherry-picked to ensure the best outcome within the time available and the nature of the audience.