



Curriculum catalyst for change – challenges for the future

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The launch of *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13* (2007) provides the opportunity for us to reflect on the way in which we design and deliver learning for the future. The new document actively supports the development of a school curriculum and provides the opportunity to think about personalising learning to meet individual and community needs.

There are two ways of approaching this challenge for the future – we can tinker with the curriculum, or we can tailor it to meet our specific needs. Tinkering could imply simply pasting the new curriculum objectives into your current curriculum documents...and nothing else will change. If you simply turn to the achievement objectives at the back of the document you have missed an opportunity to push forward, to innovate and to develop a curriculum to meet the particular needs of your students. As Barth states, "...unless teachers and administrators act to change the culture of a school, "innovations" will have to fit in and around existing elements of the culture. That is, they will be superficial window dressing, incapable of making much difference" (Barth, 2001: 8).

Instead, I am advocating a 'tailoring' approach to the new curriculum. A great tailor is able to craft a garment to meet individual needs, can visualise the possibilities, and design and produce a high quality garment. It is custom made to fit. Yes this takes commitment, but is your school not unique? Do your students not deserve that time?

Tailoring takes time and requires some people to champion its development. Innovation is often initiated by key drivers (Doig, 2005), people who have a 'big picture outlook' and can see the possibilities. Identify these people in your school and give them the time and space to focus on developing a curriculum that is driven by student needs and interests and moves away from a one size fits all. Individual, organisational and external factors will contribute to the speed and direction of change in your school.

Key Competency focus

In using the new curriculum a good place to start is to become familiar with the document. I believe the key competencies, in particular, have real power to add value to education. Spend time exploring these and what they may mean in your community. Read through the Learning Area statements for each curriculum area (pages 16-33) as these succinct statements provide the lens through which each curriculum area can be viewed.

The starting point for moving forward will be different for each school, depending on the journeys already taken. One school may have a clear set of values already established, and use these to build on. Another school may have envisioned what students will be like when they graduate and use this as a starting point. You do not need to reinvent – where you have good programmes in place already, use these as the foundations on which to build. But take care! Don't think, "Oh yeah we do that already..." Push the envelope and seek to move beyond your current practices.

Robust reflection and consultation will help to tailor the curriculum to meet student needs, but we must know where we are going and why we are going there. Some focus questions to consider could be:

- What sort of learners do we want to develop? (culminating outcomes)
- What are the beliefs underpinning the outcomes?
- How will learners exhibit these outcomes?
- What are the implications for teaching practices?
- How will we know our learners are excellent self managers (or demonstrate other competencies)? (Evidence/methods)

Evidence does not necessarily mean assessment. Instead of assessing the key competencies, weave them into the learning pathways of the school. Have a clear idea of the impact you wish to have on student learning and deliberately seek to develop key competencies over the time students are in your school. Evidence of success could be the development of a shared vision and language throughout the school; the increased role of students within the school (eg level of student voice and how this demonstrates competencies); ongoing consultation with staff, students and parents indicating the competencies are being achieved within the school; feedback from students indicating enjoyment of school and providing ideas for improvement; and students' actions in the school and community demonstrate the competencies in practice (for example in student-led conferences).

Teaching rubrics such as the one on the following page, can be used to build on competencies over time. In this particular example the school has decided, after consultation, that goal setting is an important part of its school curriculum. It has the expectation that goal setting will happen regularly and will be modelled by the teacher. Hence the rubric shows development over time so that learners extend their skills. The implication is that, whether you are a student **or** teacher, when you have been at this school for six years you should be able to goal set at quite high levels.

Goal Setting Rubric

Thanks to Fendalton School for this example.

YEAR 1/2	YEAR 3/4	YEAR 5/6
Able to articulate what a goal means, and what it means to set a goal.	Able to identify next learning step with assistance	Identify specific learning goals based on evaluation and next steps setting
With assistance can use a rubric to set goals and evaluate achievement	Set, monitor and evaluate a goal with assistance	Able to self monitor and evaluate next steps independently.
Able to set a specific goal about a concrete task, eg full stops, capital letters etc.	Select a goal from a pre-organised or brainstormed list of learning intentions	Regular honest and purposeful reflection
	Identify actions required in order to achieve goals	Independently checking with others for feedback and seeking assistance from others in order to achieve goals
	Show self awareness of weaknesses and areas to develop and begin to set goals accordingly.	Able to set time frames, decide how to achieve the goal, who would be able to help and to adjust the goal as necessary.
		Prioritise workload and goals and meet milestones along the way.
		Demonstrate ability to goal set, particularly in key competencies, in the way they lead their FOS friends group.
		Recording of goals could be in written format, oral (eg garage band), visual (eg video) etc.
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The rubric is an intentional teaching tool not a tool for assessment. Think about the student's last day at your school - what competencies you want them to exhibit and how you will know if they have achieved them? Work towards these throughout the school - on purpose.

Initial research on the key competencies (Boyd & Watson, 2006) has already been undertaken, and some schools are already early adopters in this area. The NZCER researchers asked teachers to rate their own competency in some areas and then asked students to also rate their teachers on this scale. For example, in *Managing Self* the following items showed the greatest variance between what students said and what teachers said:

Managing self... Do you:
Teach the children learning to learn skills Believe and show that all students can do well Help children set their own learning goals Help students feel confident in themselves as learners

In each case the teachers rated themselves considerably higher than the student ratings.

There is a need to gain ongoing feedback from students as well as parents regarding the way we teach and whether student needs are being met. This may make some feel uncomfortable, but unless we get honest, open feedback we have no clear direction for improvement.

Here is an example. Let's say that as a result of the feedback from students a teacher decides to work on the following aspect of Managing Self - "Believe and show that all students can do well". A class discussion leads to the creation of a Y chart, showing what this statement sounds like, feels like and looks like. The students work with the teacher to improve this aspect of Managing Self over the next month, providing commendations and recommendations to the teacher weekly. In this class the students feel safe enough to have this discussion and provide feedback. It is the job of the teacher to develop the culture that actively supports feedback (and hence model the key competencies to others).

Conclusion

The website <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/> has a huge array of useful information and resources to help schools implement the new curriculum. NZCER has also produced valuable material and research. Reflect on what will be useful to keep driving your school forward, in order to meet the diverse and unique needs of your students. What are the challenges for the future?

Kurt Fisher, a leading Harvard neurologist explains it like this: "Children learn to do the important things in whatever capacities they possess – not in only one way. People learn in different ways – if a teacher or parent sticks to only one method of teaching only some students' needs will be met." That is why we need YOU to be a tailor, not a tinker.

References

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