

**“More Magic of Teaching.  
The Future Challenge”**

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**The Challenge of Key Competencies**

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## Background: A Condensed History



Prior to 1997 we had a NAG1 which carried a focus on delivering the national curriculum. There was an emphasis on ‘coverage’, Achievement Objectives and ‘balanced Curriculum’.

In 1999 we had the NAG 1 revision which aimed to provide schools some freedom to move away from the coverage issue.

*“The revised Nags make it clear that priority is to be given to student achievement in literacy and numeracy, .... the Ministry considers that the balance of essential learning areas and essential skills is a matter for each school to determine within the framework provided by the national curriculum statements.”... “The achievement objectives are intended to be: .... sufficiently broad and flexible to allow for local interpretation and elaboration ... to empower schools and teachers to design programmes which are relevant to the learning needs of their students and communities”.*

[http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/document/document\\_page.cfm?id=5133](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/document/document_page.cfm?id=5133)

The Curriculum Stocktake, was released, towards late 2002, a number of observations were made at that time:

### New Zealand Stocktake: An International Critique by Joanna Le Metais

“New Zealand has chosen not to implement systematic student assessment at key transition points. Nevertheless, the Statements and the expectations of the Education Review Office, have caused some teachers to interpret the Achievement objectives in terms of areas to be ‘covered’ rather than as a framework for managing and discussing learning.” (P8)

P25 Clear measurable objectives

“The Achievement Objectives are the most contentious and, arguably, the weakest, element of the school curriculum documents. They are perceived, and act, as a constraint on teaching and learning, but they do not lend themselves to reliable assessment and meaningful reporting of performance contrary to the stated intention, the achievement objectives are not, for the most part, expressed in terms that can be measured.”

P29 life long learning

‘The new Zealand curriculum encourages students to become independent and life long learners’ expressed in some Statements.

“However, the formulation of the curriculum in terms of Achievement Outcomes may cause some teachers to narrow the learning experiences they offer students, lest they have insufficient time to ‘cover’ the curriculum”

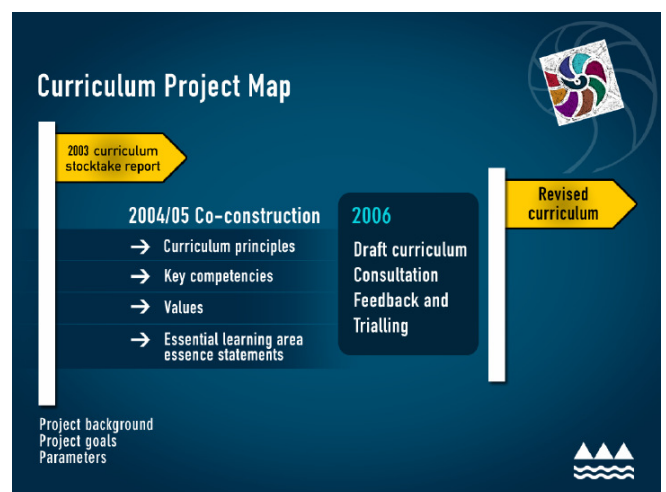
This could almost be called ‘Death by AOs’

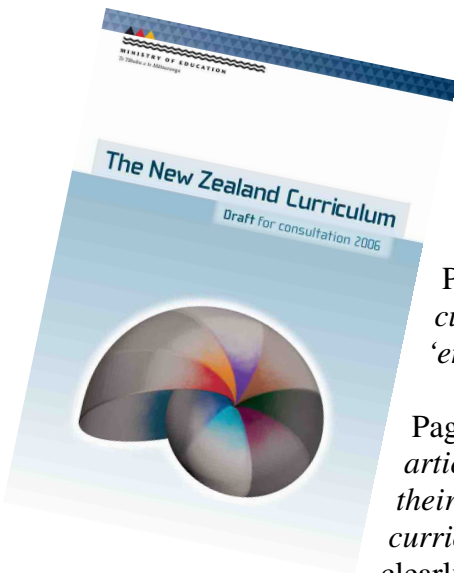
Brandt (1993) made this comment about the impact of coverage on education generally.

*“The greatest enemy of understanding is coverage. As long as you are determined to cover everything, you actually ensure that most kids are not going to understand. You have to spend enough time to get kids involved in something so that they can think about it in lots of different ways and apply it – not just at school but at home and on the street and so on”.*



After the Stocktake Report the curriculum project was started to involve teachers and others in a consultative process to develop a new national curriculum. The draft was released in 2006, with finalization expected in September of 2007.





The Vision on page 8 outlines that the aim is primarily about the development of life long learners.

P26 outlines that each school *'is expected to develop their own curriculum' (within the construct of the national curriculum) that will 'engage and motivate their pupils'*.

Page 28 states the expectation that *'Principals and teachers can articulate what it is that they want their students to achieve and how their curriculum is designed to achieve this. Schools can explain their curriculum priorities.'* This places a huge value on schools having a clearly articulated learning vision.

On Page 28 it outlines the role of the eight learning areas, *'The challenge for teachers is to design learning experiences that will take students on from where they are...The learning areas provide unlimited contexts for such experiences'... 'The challenge for teachers is to design learning experiences that will take students on from where they are...The learning areas provide unlimited contexts for such experiences'*.

It also gives a very clear statement about the importance of the achievement objectives. *'The long view is taken: each student's ultimate learning success is more important than the covering of particular achievement objectives'*.

Though the document stresses that schools must decide what is important for their curriculum, hence what is important for assessing, there is one statement in the current version that points strongly towards an expectation that schools will assess against the Key Competencies. Page 29 *'The competencies should be assessed in the context of tasks that require students to use their knowledge and skills in new ways.'*

Which raises the question:

**What are the challenges we face with implementing, teaching, assessing and reporting key competencies?**

I see a number of challenges facing schools in terms of implementing and assessing the Key Competencies. There are 8 that I will specifically address.

### Challenge 1: Vision

Schools will need to clarify their learning vision, that is....

What they see as being important for their pupils. They need to be able to clearly articulate those learning needs and goals. This is the foundation to being able to develop a sound school based curriculum, because the only way to justify and explain your curriculum is in terms of your vision.

### Challenge 2: Understanding

The central core and purpose of the National curriculum is to develop the competencies. To implement the competencies Teachers, Boards, Parents and pupils need to gain a clear understanding of them. The competencies are very different from the essential skills. The Essential skills were just that.. a list of specific skills, with no real expectation that we would assess them, they were also never gazetted. Competencies by contrast are complex mixtures of attitudes, values, understandings and skills. For instance **Managing Self...**

Managing self involves **self-motivation**, a **“can-do” attitude**, and the **ability to establish personal goals, make plans, and set high standards for oneself**. It is about students **knowing who they are, where they come from, and where they fit in**.  
Students who can manage themselves are **enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient**. They **act appropriately** and are **aware of the effects that their words and actions may have on others**. They have **strategies for meeting challenges** and **know when and how to follow someone’s lead or to make their own, well-informed choices**.

**Attitude**

**Understanding**

**Skills**

**This is a complex mixture, students will not exhibit this competency in any consistent manner, their attitudes, understandings and skills will change from day to day, context to context, and situation to situation.**

### Challenge 3: Going Deeper

We have already seen that each competency is a complex mixture of skills, understandings and attitudes. The skills explicitly listed in each competency only scratch the surface. In most cases there are a whole range of skills that have not been detailed. A school will need to decide if they just focus on the listed skills, or if they will go deeper. For instance.. What other skills are associated with Managing self?

Some suggestions are:

Time management	Resource management
Goal setting	Planning
Task focus	Setting standards
Self evaluation	Decision making
Enterprising	Strategies for meeting challenges

One could even argue that being enterprising is just a title for a whole group of specific skills and that ‘strategies for meeting challenges’ also involves a number of skills.

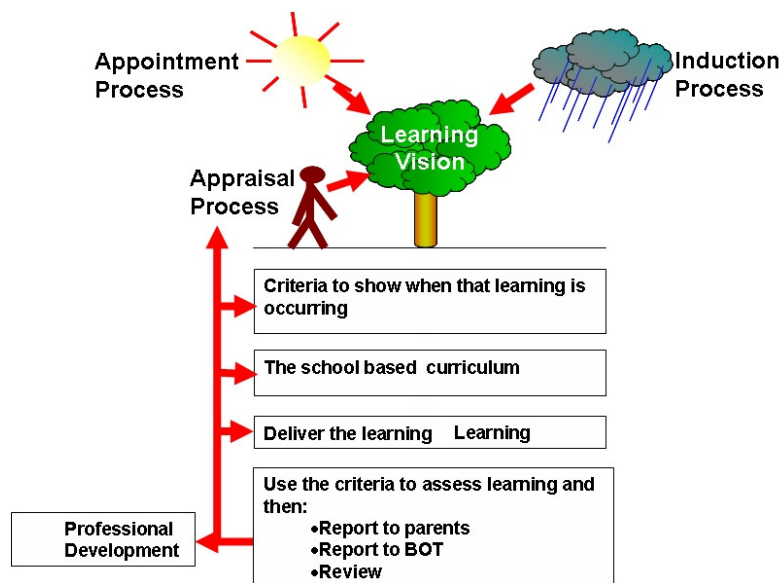
#### Challenge 4: Implementing

Once each competency is understood, (and further understanding will come through the process of implementation) schools have to implement the competencies.

Successful implementation requires a number of steps.

- Setting your success criteria
- Developing appropriate curriculum
- Addressing the how of delivery
- Designing and implementing assessment
- Ongoing review

These are all part of a larger holistic structure that can help schools with this whole process.



Setting success criteria is vital because it helps us to ensure that our visions aren't just carefully crafted educational waffle. The following example comes from Wakefield Primary School (Yr 0 to 6)

#### A Capable Communicator is one who can:

**Productive:** Transmit complex messages clearly and creatively using a range of techniques appropriate to the audience and media. They can explain the main and supporting points from the intended message/s, justifying the range of techniques used to convey the message and evaluate the effectiveness of their communication using their own rubric or criteria

**Receptive:** Receive a complex message, identifying and share main and supporting points, give and justify a reasoned and relevant personal response

There is one important message that needs to be communicated here. We have learnt from experience that too much curriculum is not conducive to good learning. When developing your school based curriculum start with a basic central core of what you see as being absolutely essential for you pupils. There is, and will always be, huge pressure on schools to keep adding to their curriculum. This is your chance as schools to deal to the issue of curriculum and process overcrowding, don't do to yourselves what the new curriculum gives you the freedom to escape from.



### **Challenge 5: Assessment**

Once we understand the complex mixture of attitudes, understandings and skills that make up each competency it doesn't take much to realise that assessment of these competencies is going to be an issue. Students attitudes and understandings will vary from situation to situation, and that our traditional paper based methods are inadequate for the challenge.

A solution being developed to this at Brightwater School takes a 2 pronged approach, with students and teachers using digital portfolios for gathering evidence, reflections, and outcomes.

- 1.. Facilitate students to reflect on their understanding and attitudes across a range of contexts and situations.
- 2.. Identify a core set of skills (there are too many to assess them all), develop a set of progressions towards skill achievement, then gather evidence across a range of situations over time.

For Instance...

#### **Thinking**

Thinking is about using creative, critical, metacognitive, and reflective processes to make sense of and question information, experiences, and ideas. These processes can be applied to research, organisation, and evaluation for all kinds of purposes – developing understanding, making decisions, shaping actions, or constructing knowledge. Intellectual curiosity is at the heart of this competency.

Students who have well-developed thinking and problem-solving skills are active seekers, users, and creators of knowledge. They reflect on their own learning, draw on personal knowledge and intuitions, ask questions, and challenge the basis of assumptions and perceptions.

Working on this with a number of schools we have identified about 35 specific thinking skills. Each school has identified a core set of between 5 to 6 thinking skills that they see as important for their students. These are the skills that will be assessed over time. This doesn't mean that the other skills won't be addressed, just they won't be formally assessed and reported.

<b>Arguments.</b> Arguments are developed to promote, defend or critique a point of view.	Unaware that a position is being defended, promoted or challenged.
	Can follow, but is unable to create, a logical argument that defends, promotes or challenges a point of view.
	Creates a logical argument, possibly containing flaws, based on 1 or 2 crucial points that defends, promotes or challenges a point of view
	Reflectively creates and critiques multi-faceted arguments to support or challenge a point of view.

<b>Decision Making.</b> Appropriate decisions and actions should follow sound reasoning and should consider relevant Implications and Consequences.	Decisions or actions are made with no awareness of relevant evidence, assumptions, arguments and consequences.
	Decisions or actions are made in accordance with the obvious consequences or outcomes, there is little weight given to long term outcomes.
	Decisions or actions are made in relation to a wide range of possible consequences or outcomes. Weight is given to positive and negatives as well as short and long term predictions. Utilises this material to support or attack a piece of reasoning
	Reflectively examines short and long term implications and consequences, creating a wide range of choices which are then evaluated in terms of possible outcomes. Reflects on actual outcomes in the light of decisions and utilises this reflection to assist in further situations

Questioning is another crucial skill that many schools are now looking at because..

Questioning is central to thinking

Questioning is central to learning

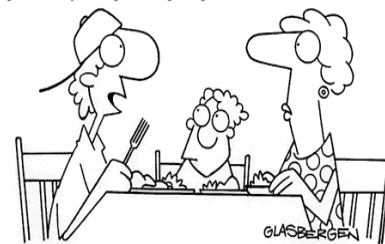
Questioning is at the core of the Social Science and Science curriculums

Got to <http://ictnz.com>, follow the link to the Questioning Wiki to see some exciting new material developed to help us facilitate and assess questioning skills.

### Challenge 6: Pupil driven learning

Implementing core competencies well is likely to require further shifts towards student-centered practices. This may include students involved in the co-construction of curriculum. Moving away from a teacher-directed approach towards increasing student decision making can be daunting for teachers.

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“Everyone in my biology class voted against dissecting a frog. But we almost had enough votes to dissect the teacher!”

### Challenge 7: Teacher Attitude

Working across a number of schools some of the comments I hear from teachers are along the lines of ...

*“Oh no... not more change!”*

*“Just new names for old stuff!”*

*“But we did vision 3 years ago!”*

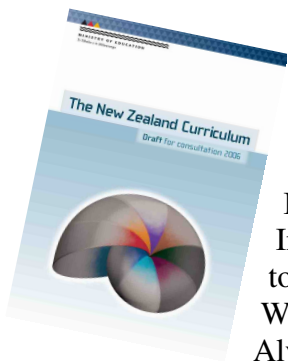
*“So all schools have to do their own curriculum... that’s crazy.. What a waste of time and energy, why don’t they just give us one curriculum and let us get on with it?”*

### Challenge 8: parents and caregivers

“There is always, especially among parents, a kind of nostalgia for the schooling which seemed to serve them so well when they were young, but which belongs now to an outdated paradigm” Beare 2000

Many parents have an understanding of schooling but do not have an up to date understanding of learning and this often places them at a point of confusion and mis-understanding. Running parent sessions that educate and inform is important, especially as part of any meaningful consultation process. It is important to inform and educate before you consult.





### **8 challenges: So What?**

In 5 years time some schools will look little different from how they look today.  
In 5 years time some schools will be very different places from what they are today.

We have been serious about literacy and numeracy for a number of years.

Alvin Tofler says

*“The literate of the 21st Century will not be the person who can read or write, rather the new literate is one who can learn, unlearn and re-learn.”*



What we need to remember through all this is that ultimately it is not about us or our professional comfort zones, but it is about the absolute best that we can to empower our students and their futures.

## Recommendations

- **Review and revitalise your school vision... this is more than compliance, it is an essential foundation.**
- **Focus on one competency at a time**
- **Take time to get to grips with it and gain a clear corporate understanding of the associated skills, attitudes and understandings.**
- **Take time to go deeper, and discover what lies underneath**
- **Don't skimp on this crucial school wide professional development**
- **Establish a clear picture of the entire process and how the separate parts relate to each other**
- **Establish a strategic plan that is realistic and manageable**
- **Work through each step thoroughly**
- **Seek advice, support and help from those that are ahead of you**
- **Consider having an outside voice involved**
- **Decide how you will handle attitudes and understandings**
- **Establish the range of skills involved**
- **Determine which are the core skills for assessment**
- **Make the key competencies a whole-school focus (with not too much other PD).**
- **Don't just add extra work... reduce meetings**
- **Remind them that teachers have wanted professional recognition and autonomy for a long time. Now you have it.**
- **Too much curriculum, no-one to blame but yourselves after this.**
- **Running parent sessions that educate and inform is important, especially as part of any meaningful consultation process. It is important to inform and educate before you consult.**