

Assessing the Focus

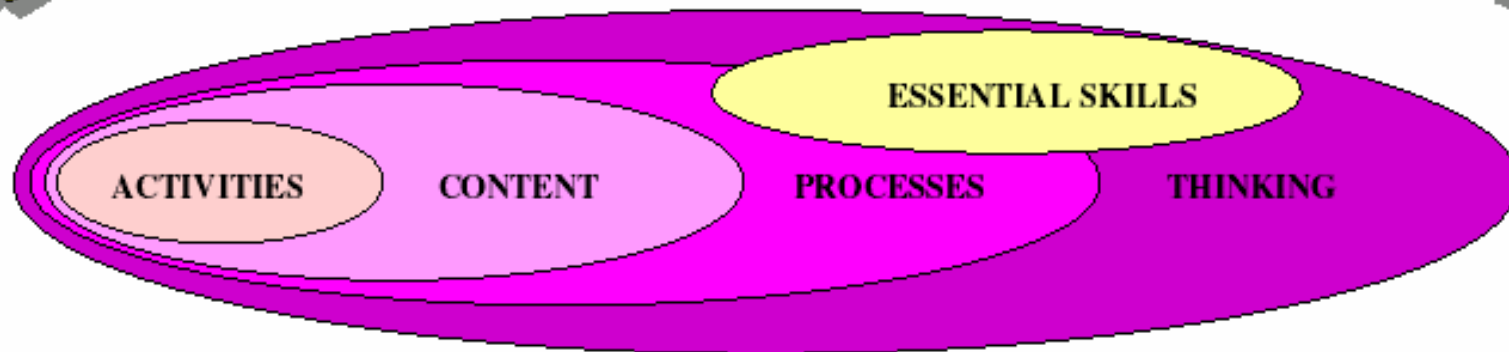


Diagram adapted from Art Costa: Habits Of Mind



A shift in Focus

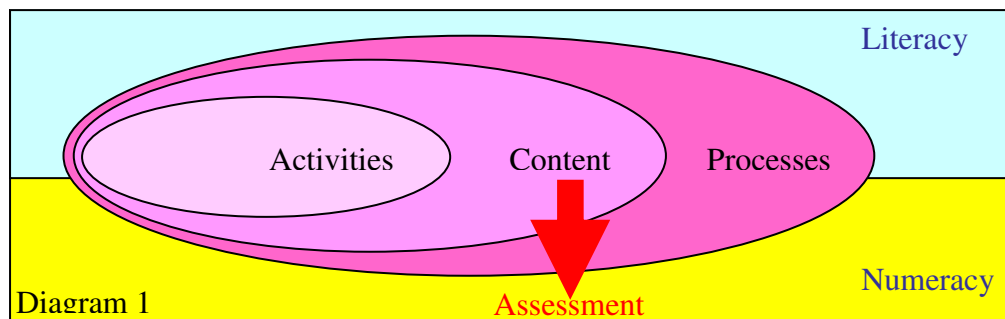
Many of our schools have been through the 'Death By AOs' syndrome that was driven by curriculum documents and pre 1999 NAG1 requirements. Well meaning principals and school leaders initiated systems and processes to track coverage of the vast collection of Achievement Objectives laid out through the seven curriculum documents.

There was the drive of accountability and the need for better more detailed achievement tracking.

This scenario was played out in school after school. One outcome is teachers who are increasingly frustrated by the demands of curriculum coverage and the lack of time to do in-depth teaching.

The following diagrams are adapted from an illustration created by Art Costa.

(Note the addition of Numeracy and Literacy as foundational or central aspects because of the requirements of our National system)

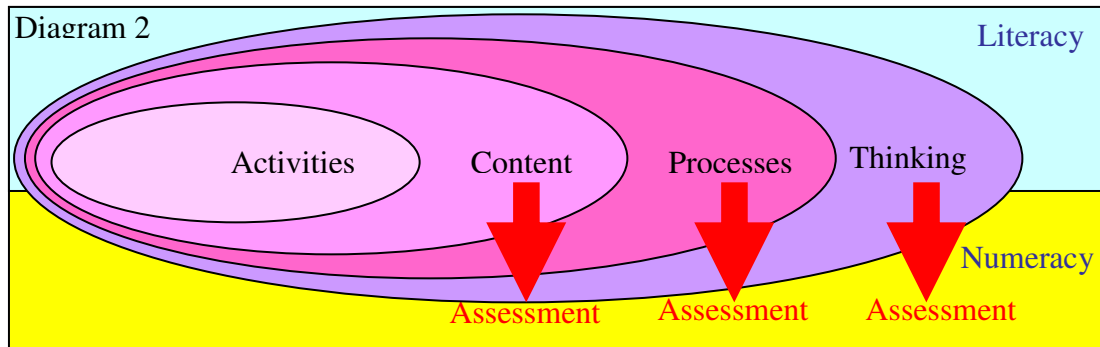


Schools were in a position where there was huge pressure to provide coverage of a large amount of curriculum material as well as pressure to assess and track pupils' progress. The pressure of assessment and tracking created a climate that detracted from the in-depth teaching and learning that many felt should be occurring in our classrooms.

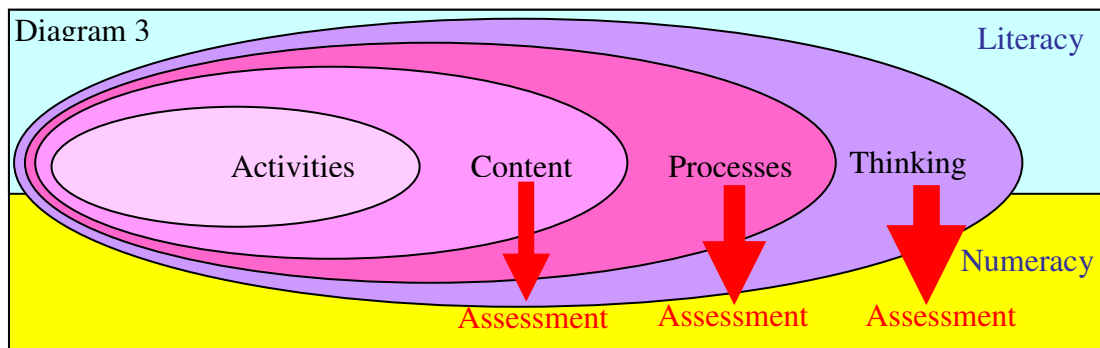
In education there is a current shift of emphasis from the delivery of content towards the teaching of processes, strategies and the facilitation of thinking. There are three main hindrances that can be observed to this shift of focus in our schools.

1. There seems to be a reluctance to move away from the perceived safety of the "content coverage" approach. There is a zone of comfort and safety for teachers when they can point to a curriculum document and then illustrate from their planning that each aspect has been covered, especially if these statements can be further supported by detailed assessment and tracking that further support coverage and illustrate some form of progress or development for individual class members.
2. While this coverage approach is governing teaching practice it robs teachers of the time and energy that in-depth work on processes and thinking
3. The AOs provide a ready resource of material that can be utilised to assess retention, and perhaps use of knowledge, in a measurable manner. Any school that wants to focus on processes and thinking now has to re-examine and re-develop their assessment strategies and resources. They have to work through questions like:
What is important learning?
What is important to assess?

If process or thinking is our learning focus then shouldn't they also be our assessment focus?
 How do we assess processes?
 How do we assess thinking?
 Do we just assess content?
 Do we just assess process development and acquisition?
 Do we just focus on thinking?
 Do we assess a mixture of all three, if so what balance, and how do we decide?

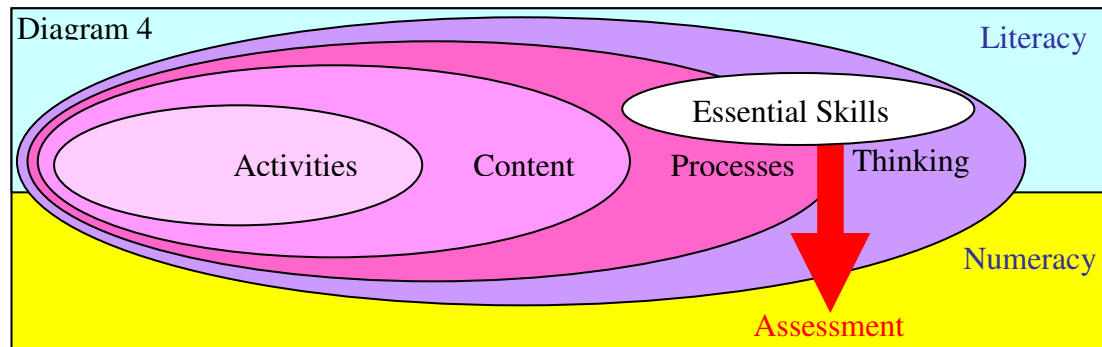
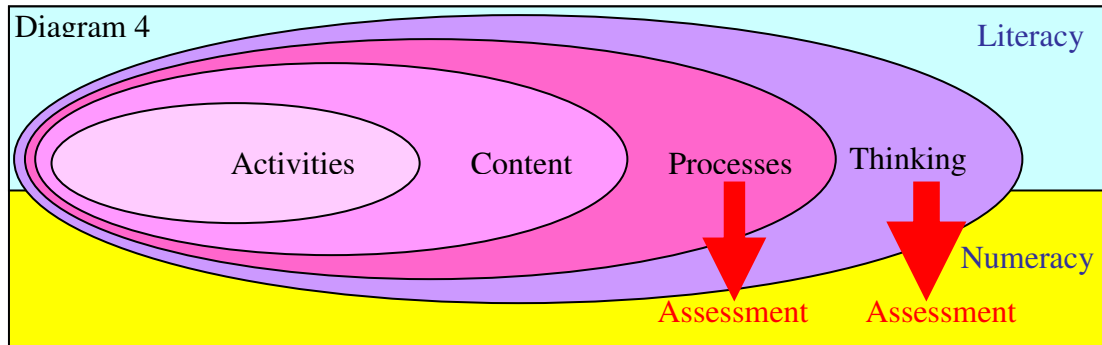


There is no right or correct answer. Each school has to decide for themselves what their focus will be and how they will deliver and assess it. The challenge will be not to just add more and more delivery and assessment demands into the classroom environment as illustrated by Diagram 2.



Diagrams 3, 4 and 5 show some other possible options schools are looking at.

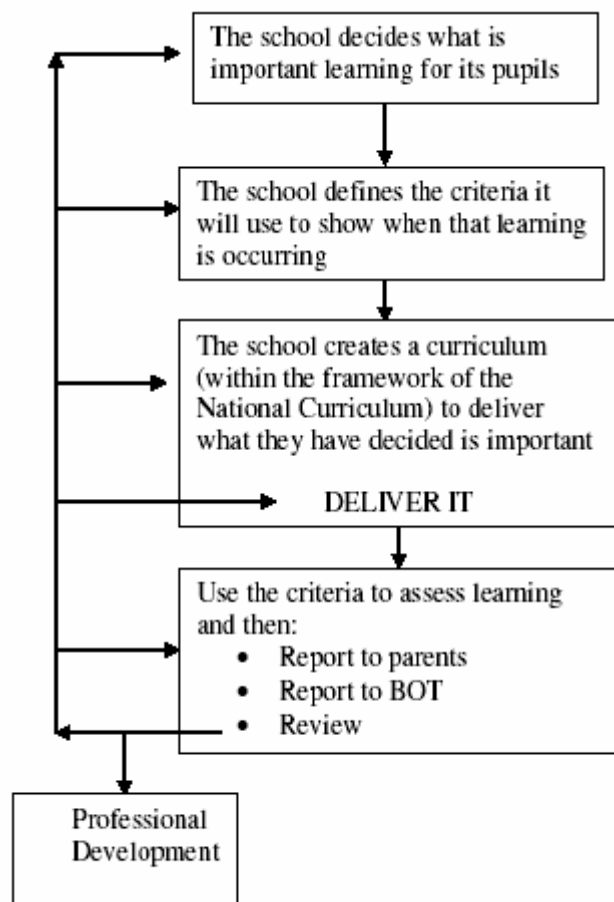
Diagram 3: Illustrates schools that believe that there is some content which is important, as well as certain processes, and aspects of thinking. Note that the quantity of assessment varies with the focus.



The Diagram below outlines the structure and format of NAG1.

In the first stage the school decides and outlines what it believes is important learning for its pupils.

Many schools are now looking beyond the delivery of curriculum content and want to focus on the delivery of processes and thinking skills.



This sounds fairly straight forward and easy at first, but as schools start to work through the steps outlined in the diagram it becomes apparent that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed.

The first and most obvious is the lack of knowledge and understanding most of us have about some processes, aspects of thinking and the assessment of them.

It will soon become apparent that to be able to create learning criteria, and a suitable curriculum we need to have a sound understanding of the processes and skills involved.

Other articles available on <http://ictnz.com> cover in deeper detail “the what is it?” of:

- Information Literacy process and Enquiry Learning process
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking

The rest of this paper will provide some samples of rubrics that could be used, or adapted, to:

A... specify the criteria that will be used to identify the desired learning

B... provide a framework for assessment, recording and reporting for

Information Literacy and Enquiry Learning (general)

The **SAUCE model** (specific)

Essential Skills

Thinking and Reasoning

Information Literacy/Inquiry Process

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Recognising Information need			
Doesn't recognise the need to obtain information to complete the task or solve the problem	Recognises the need for information but starts searching without clarifying the need	Recognises the need for information and phrases questions to help locate it. Some questions are irrelevant to the task or problem.	Recognises the need for information, identifies key words and phrases, utilises those key words and phrases to write specific and relevant search questions.
Acquiring Information (search, locate, comprehend, and validate from a range of sources)			
Doesn't attempt to search for information	Attempts to search for information in one or more sources, but searching lacks pattern, structure and guiding questions.	Searches in one or more sources for answers to relevant and irrelevant search questions using key words and phrases.	Searches effectively in multiple sources for answers to relevant search questions using key words and phrases.
Doesn't locate or comprehend information to assist with the task or problem.	Locates inadequate information much of it irrelevant but demonstrates comprehension of information appropriate to age level.	Locates and comprehends relevant and irrelevant information from a range of sources	Locates and comprehends relevant information from reputable sources
Fails to locate and validate information	Fails to validate information	Attempts to validate information by crosschecking sources	Validates relevant information by crosschecking sources and checking the reputability of authors.
Using Information			
Struggles to apply information to solve the problem or task	Applies information to make simple decisions that may not be relevant to the task or problem Demonstrates an awareness of fact & opinion	Applies information to make appropriate decisions Demonstrates discernment with fact, opinion & bias	Applies information to reach valid and insightful decisions where multiple factors, conflicting needs and opinions need to be considered and catered for. Discerns values, assumptions, logic errors, irrelevant and relevant arguments
Communication			
Unable to communicate how information was acquired to assist in solving the task or problem	Attempts to communicate the solution, outcome. Can express some part of the decision making process with a single supporting reason clearly and appropriately	Communicates outcome, decisions, solutions and viewpoints with multiple validations clearly and appropriately	Communicates outcome, decisions, solutions and viewpoints with multiple validations clearly, creatively, concisely and appropriately
Evaluation			
Unable to explain the process of acquiring and using information	Able to identify one aspect of strength or weakness from their work within each stage of the process and discuss openly ideas for improvement	Able to identify and validate a number of strengths and weaknesses and suggest a possible step for improvement at each stage of the process	Able to identify and validate a number of strengths and weaknesses, independently suggesting and implementing steps for improvement and able to apply the process in a variety of other situations

SAUCE (further, more detailed rubrics, for teacher and pupil self assessment are supplied in ‘SAUCE: A Teacher’s Handbook’ available from Teacher Resource Centres)

	Ineffective	Developing	Effective
Setting the Scene	Relies upon adults to identify issues and set tasks	Can formulate questions and tasks with adult help	Can independently identify a need or problem and can structuring higher level tasks
Acquiring	Is not using the process effectively to gain information	Can use the process to gain some useful information	Can use prior knowledge and the process to build a foundation containing the required and relevant information
Using	Product fails to meet task or need	Product shows some relevance to the original task or need and has some original aspects	Creates an original decision or solution which fulfils the task or meets the need
Communicating	Reluctant communicator, needs to be drawn out by questioning	Attempts to communicate solution, process and understandings	Can communicate the task or need, the solution as well as the understandings gained fluently and appropriately
Evaluating	Fails to evaluate product and process	Attempts to evaluate product and process realistically	Can use assessment rubrics independently to realistically evaluate product and process

Essential Skills

	Ineffective	Developing	Effective
Communication Skills	Demonstrated low confidence and required assistance to communicate some major points or relied on others to communicate in group situations	Attempted to communicate in a suitable manner and medium covering the major points adequately	Communicated confidently, competently and creatively in an appropriate manner and medium
Numeracy Skills	Relied on the numerical understandings, interpretations and applications of others	Attempted to utilise and understand numerical data in a manner relevant to the task showing some independent understanding	Understood, interpreted, communicated and applied numerical based data relevantly to the task
Information Skills	Relied on the skills and expertise of others to locate, acquire and apply relevant and valid information	Utilised a range of technologies and resources to acquire information that was then used to complete the task	Initiated the use of appropriate resources and technologies competently to acquire valid and relevant information that was then utilised to successfully complete the task
Problem-solving Skills	Relied on the understanding and efforts of others	Participated in the process of problem solving supplying some relevant insight and understanding to the process	Demonstrated an understanding of the problem/s, explored options, utilised appropriate resources to create and test possible solution, finally evaluated product and process
Self-management and Competitive Skills	Lacked initiative and commitment with behavior which was disruptive or unhelpful	Participated actively but demonstrated some problems in handling the stress and challenges	Showed initiative, commitment and constructive positive attitudes in response to the challenges of problem solving with a group
Social and Co-operative Skills	Displayed behavior that was non co-operative, disruptive, irresponsible or inconsiderate	Participated actively and demonstrated tolerance and co-operation with other group members	Actively facilitated a co-operative and considerate group that was inclusive and effective
Physical Skills	Displayed careless and/or dangerous behavior with the technologies and poor physical skills	Acceptable usage of technologies and some room for improvement with relevant physical skills	Demonstrated careful, efficient and safe use of technologies and competency in relevant physical skills
Work and Study Skills	Showed little self management with minimal focus on self appraisal and improvement	Showed a willingness to learn and work effectively and increasing responsibility	Took responsibility for his/her own learning, working effectively within the group and demonstrated realistic self appraisal

Thinking and Reasoning Rubric

	Tacit	Ineffective	Developing	Effective
Purpose. There is always a purpose for reasoning	Unaware of any purpose or reason for the activity	Is aware of the need for purpose but has difficulty identifying valid objectives	Is aware of the need for purpose and can identify and state an associated purpose	Is aware of the need for purpose and can clearly identify significant, realistic objectives
Evidence. Observations Data, and Information are the foundation for our Assumptions.	Unaware of the data, observations, facts and evidence on which they base their decisions	Is aware of the role of data, information and evidence in reasoning but has difficulty in identifying the supporting evidence for claims made.	Is aware of, and can identify a range of supporting data, information and evidence. Fails to recognise the absence of supporting evidence for claims.	Is aware of, and can identify a range of supporting data, information and evidence. Recognises when claims are not supported by adequate evidence.
Concepts & Ideas Key concepts, ideas, and definitions are utilised to form opinions and consequent arguments	Unaware of the main concepts and ideas	Is aware of the need to identify main concepts and ideas but has difficulty in establishing what they are	Is aware of the need to identify main concepts and ideas is able to establish a major key concept clearly.	Searches for, and utilises, evidence that opposes the claim/s. Establish and clearly explains the key concepts and ideas Identify conflicting concepts and irrelevant material. Considers alternative concepts or definitions.
Assumptions/Inferences We form assumptions based on the presence or lack of appropriate evidence	Unaware of the assumptions drawn from facts and evidence	Aware of, but has difficulty in recognizing the assumptions and inferences behind statements	Is aware of and can identify main assumptions and inferences. Fails to identify inconsistencies between inferences and underlying observations.	Clearly identifies assumptions and inferences; evaluates their validity in terms of the lack or presence of relevant, appropriate, supporting evidence
Opinions Concepts and ideas are combined with assumptions and inferences to form opinions	Unaware of any differentiation between fact and opinion	Can differentiate between fact and opinion and demonstrates awareness of varying view points	Can evaluate a range of opinions, ascertaining the validity of the underlying assumptions, inferences and supporting evidence.	Can evaluate a range of opinions, ascertaining the validity of the underlying assumptions, inferences and supporting evidence Strives to be fair-minded in evaluating all points of view.
Arguments Arguments are formed to promote or defend 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	Can create and critique a multi-faceted argument to support or challenge a point of view. Develops sound criteria to check the validity of underlying assumptions and evidence. Applies the same criteria to their own arguments
Implications Consequences For every argument or piece of reasoning there are implications and consequences in terms of outcomes and actions	Unaware of the implications or outcomes of any piece of reasoning	Has trouble identifying and explaining the most obvious immediate outcome	Can identify and clearly explain the obvious implications and consequences of an argument or piece of reasoning	Can identify and clearly explain a range of positive and negative implications and consequences of an argument or piece of reasoning Utilises this material to support or attack an argument or a piece of reasoning
Decision Action Appropriate decisions and actions should follow sound reasoning	Decisions or actions are made with no awareness of relevant evidence, assumptions, arguments and consequences	Decisions or actions are made with little reference to the obvious consequences or outcomes	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 the full range of possible consequences or outcomes Weight is given to positive and negatives as well as short and long term predictions