

Single Competency Focus: A Flawed Approach to Delivering the Competencies

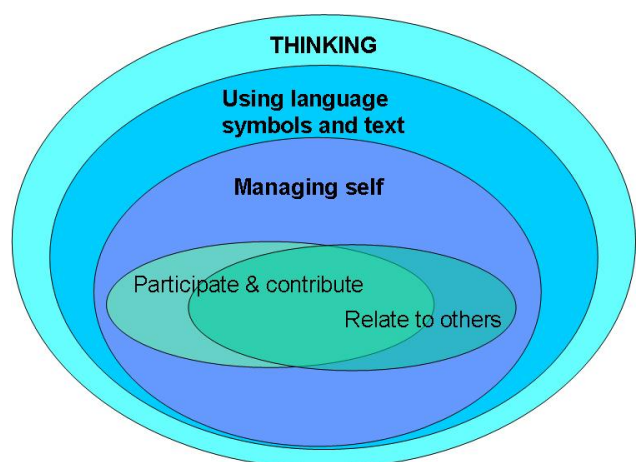
The New Zealand National Curriculum (NZC) is very clear that a central plank of the process to build “*confident, connected, actively involved, life long learners*” (NZC, P8.) is to “*develop the key competencies*” (NZC, P44). The curriculum document goes as far as saying that the competencies are “*the end and the means*” (NZC, P12 & P38).

Schools are responding to this by re-structuring their curriculum documentation and their classroom approaches to encompass this outcomes based curriculum. The approach being utilised in most schools though can be labelled as a ‘Single Competency Focus’ where students and teachers focus on one competency at a time. This approach follows the traditional habit we have in our education systems to isolate and box aspects of learning. We have long isolated our learning areas from each other to enable timetabling and focussed teaching and in general this has become an entrenched educational habit. This approach has so invaded our educational practice that we even do it within single learning areas and compartmentalise aspects from each other. We separate spelling and handwriting from literacy, we separate numeracy and number knowledge away from other mathematical fields, and we separate Physical education away from Health. It is therefore unsurprising, that when faced with a new focus area like the Key Competencies, we follow the same strategy and approach each competency as if it is its own little compartmentalised set of skills and attitudes to be developed in our students.

The New Zealand Curriculum document however includes a crucial statement about the competencies that states, “*In practice, the competencies are most often used in combination*” (NZC, P38). This is a statement many schools seem to have overlooked or ignored as they establish how the competencies are to be addressed. I would contend that the curriculum document actually understates the linkages between the competencies. The competencies are, in practice, inseparable. Take the competency of ‘Thinking’ as an example. There is no way I can ‘Manage Self’ well without thinking, nor can I participate and contribute well without thinking, in fact... effective thinking is at the core of and pervades being successful in every competency. Any form of critical, analytical, creative and caring thinking includes the cognitive use of language symbols and text as a core tool of thinking. This suggests that the use of language symbols and text is also central to thinking. If we go deeper then it becomes clear that ‘self management’ is a major aspect of ‘participating and contributing’ as well ‘relating to others’. It also becomes impossible to separate ‘participating and contributing’ from ‘relating to others’ because I can’t participate without involving others and relationships, nor can I ‘relate to others’ effectively without ‘participating and contributing’ in some way. Thus there is a huge illogicity in an approach that tries to address and improve competencies by treating them as isolated sets.

Diagrams are always poor at capturing complex relationships however this diagram is an attempt at capturing the interwoven nature of the competencies.

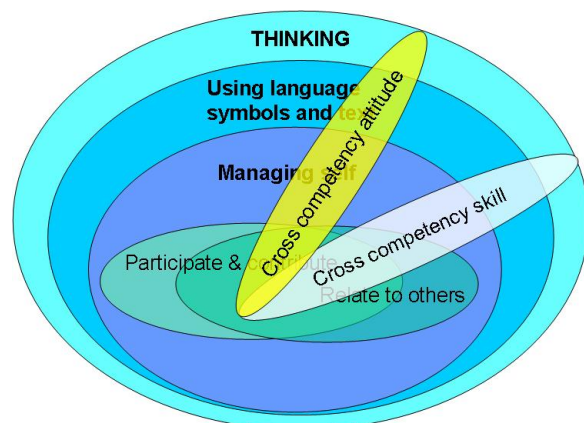
Having come to the theoretical conclusion that the competencies are inseparable, and that the single competency focus is a flawed approach to implementing the competencies in our schools the next challenge is to offer an alternative that is logical and effective.



A Cross Competency Approach

If we have a complex set of interwoven competencies then it seems logical that we should be able to identify some skills and attitudes that are foundational to being able to be successful across the competencies. This approach suggests that we identify a set of **cross competency attitudes** and **cross competency skills** then focus our work with students on that core set of skills and attitudes. This has special significance for students who will then be developing a core set of skills and attitudes in every learning experience and every learning context.

In the cross competency approach the bulk of teacher/student discussion and interaction will then be on the development of the chosen skills and attitudes within a wide range of learning experiences.



A wide number of schools in New Zealand are now in the process of implementing this approach and there is a growing set of resources and professional development available to support this concept.

Cross Competency Attitudes

Attitudes

At Sample School we aim to model and foster the development of these CORE attitudes.

Courage: Willing to make a stand, take risks, challenge, query and act with integrity.

Open-minded: Willing to reflect on and review their own understanding, beliefs, thoughts, opinions, attitudes and behaviour based on further input and experiences.

Resilient: Perseveres, bouncing back from criticisms, challenges and adversity

Empathy: Having understanding respect and tolerance for the dignity and mana of other people (considering their culture, experiences, values, needs and situations).

Cross competency Skills

Step	The ability to identify need or problem
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify that a need or problem exists
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify a specific and relevant need or problem
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can analyse a situation, recognise a need or problem and its key features
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can analyse a situation, recognising the range of needs and problems, as well as their key features

Step	The ability to Identify, understand and use relevant contextual vocabulary
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I attempt to use contextual vocabulary correctly for the context but sometimes I do not have the correct words
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can ask questions to clarify definitions I can, with support, seek to understand the meaning of words in context
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can independently use a range of strategies to seek understanding of the meaning of words in context. I use contextual vocabulary appropriately to the context in oral situations
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I use contextual vocabulary appropriately to the context orally & in writing I attempt to ensure a common understanding of contextual vocabulary I can demonstrate an understanding that vocabulary can change its meaning according to context

Step	The ability to create and use relevant questions to guide thinking, and gain information. (Refers to QuESTioning Matrix)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I attempt to ask questions but still create some statements or irrelevant questions (Typically Types 1 & 2)
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify an information need I can identify and use relevant key words I can use identified needs and key words to create relevant questions (Typically Types 3 & 4)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify and use relevant key words and phrases I can use identified needs and key contextual vocabulary to create a range of relevant questions (Typically Types 3 - 5)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify an information need and relevant vocabulary I can edit questions where necessary I can pose a range of relevant questions including probing questions for interviews. (Stage 3 - 7) I can take my questions to a variety of appropriate sources I persist with my questions until I acquire the required information

Step	The ability to extract and validate relevant information
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can extract information from a chosen source
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can extract information from a chosen source relevant to my need
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can extract and validate relevant information using at least two sources
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can find relevant information, validate it by using other sources and by analyse the credibility of the sources

The ability to create & critique information, argument, belief or theory		
Step	A. The ability to present information/argument with supporting evidence and logic	B. The ability to identify and critique information/argument
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can make an assertion but do not support it with logic or evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify an assertion but not challenge it
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify the difference between fact and opinion in my own assertions I can make a clear statement of fact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify the difference between fact and opinion in other people's assertions
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can create an argument including fact/s or an example to logically support my main assertion. (Uses words like because, therefore, so) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can logically use information to identify motive or contradictions to critique an argument
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can consider and utilise evidence, points of view, information, theories and logic to create a strong argument with justified assertions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can critique arguments, using information and evidence to challenge the assertions and logic, checking for validity, motive, bias contradictions or distortion.

Step	The ability to make informed decisions with due consideration of possible options and their consequences
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I make decisions with no displayed awareness of consequences.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I make decisions based on obvious immediate consequences or outcomes.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I consider positives and negatives I consider short and long term consequences I make decisions after considering the above.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify a range of choices and their possible outcomes. I consider short and long term consequences for other people involved and decide accordingly. I can evaluate and justify the decisions that I have made.

Key Skill Assessment

Each of these skills has been chosen because they are a crucial skill to each of the Key Competencies.

Key Skill	Assessment Process
Identify, understand and use contextual vocabulary appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bi-annually (February and October) STAR testing will be utilised to draw data on Vocabulary development across the school. During classroom interactions teachers and students will use the Contextual Vocabulary rubric for formative, of the moment, assessment to ascertain next step learning.
Ability to create and use relevant questions to guide thinking, and gain information. (Refers to the QuESTioning Matrix)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School wide assessment will be carried out annually to assess the impact our programme has on students questioning skills. During classroom interactions teachers and students will use the Questioning rubric for formative, of the moment, assessment to ascertain next step learning.
Ability to make informed decisions with due consideration of possible options and their consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During classroom interactions teachers and students will use the Decision making rubric for formative, of the moment, assessment to ascertain next step learning.
Creating and critiquing information, argument, belief or theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During classroom interactions teachers and students will use the Argument rubric for formative, of the moment, assessment to ascertain next step learning.
Identify need or problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data for this will be drawn from school-wide questioning assessment, based on the recognition of need which enables the creation of relevant questions. During classroom interactions teachers and students will use the identify need rubric for formative, of the moment, assessment to ascertain next step learning.
Ability to acquire and validate needed information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During classroom interactions teachers and students will use the Argument rubric for formative, of the moment, assessment to ascertain next step learning.

Graphic options for QuESTioning Matrix

