The Shape of Curriculum Change

# Designing a local curriculum from a national framework

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Presentation at CORE breakfast, Dunedin, March 29 2011

The Curriculum Exploratory Studies project

- **What: A joint NZCER / University of Waikato project – three years and two stages**

- **Aim: to provide information/insights that would be useful for other schools/ the Ministry**

- **Focus: How have teachers and "early adopter" schools worked to implement NZC?**

- **How: Interviews with key individuals in early adopter schools 2008/2009/2010**

- **Four "mediated conversations" with school leaders and teachers an added component in 2010**

- **NZC = outcomes-based framework for learning (year 1 to year 13)**

- **Sets the direction for learning but each school must build a local curriculum**

- **Schools modify NZC to meet the learning needs of their students and community**

- **A response to learning challenges in the 21st century**
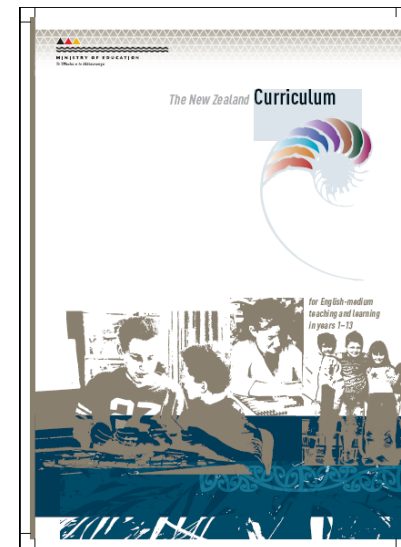
The New Zealand Curriculum

Directions for Learning

Vision
Young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners.

Values
Excellence;
Innovation, inquiry, and curiosity;
Diversity;
Equity;
Community and participation;
Ecological sustainability;
Integrity;
Respect.

Key Competencies
Thinking;
Using language, symbols, and texts;
Managing self;
Relating to others;
Participating and contributing.

Learning Areas
English;
The arts;
Health and physical education;
Learning languages;
Mathematics and statistics;
Science;
Social sciences;
Technology.

Official languages

Achievement Objectives

Principles
High expectations, Treaty of Waitangi, Cultural diversity, Inclusion, Learning to learn, Community engagement, Coherence, Future focus

Guidance

Purpose and Scope
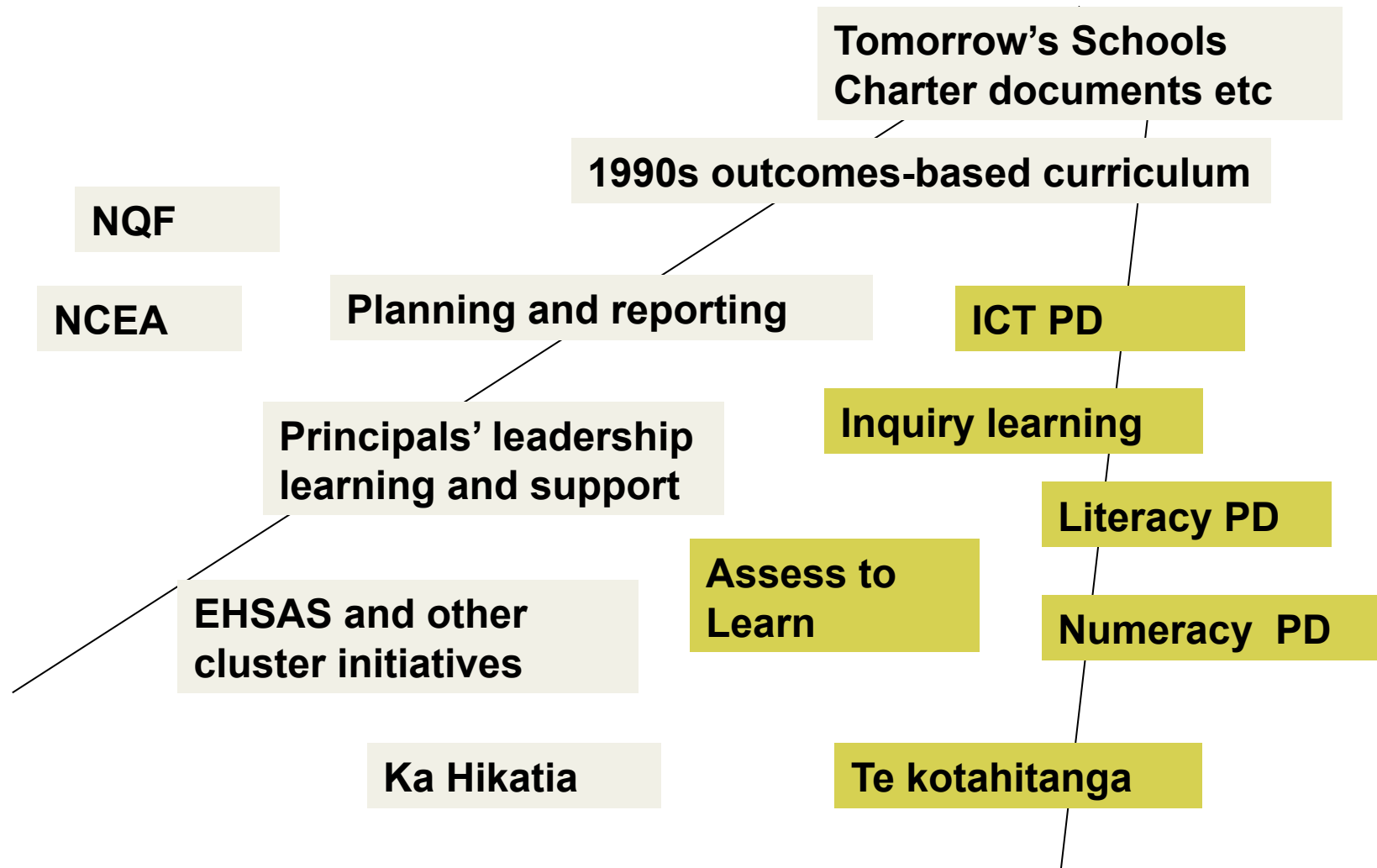Page 6

Effective Pedagogy
Pages 34–36
(For Assessment, see pages 39–40.)

The School Curriculum: Design and Review
Pages 37–42

The School Curriculum

Creating a coherent whole from the parts is a design challenge not to be underestimated!

Tomorrow's Schools
Charter documents etc

1990s outcomes-based curriculum

NQF

NCEA

Planning and reporting

ICT PD

Principals' leadership
learning and support

Inquiry learning

Literacy PD

Assess to
Learn

Numeracy PD

EHSAS and other
cluster initiatives

Ka Hikatia

Te kotahitanga

NZC did not arrive into an ideas and learning vacuum!

Coherence of policy has been an important enabler

Implementing NZC is not a one-off change….
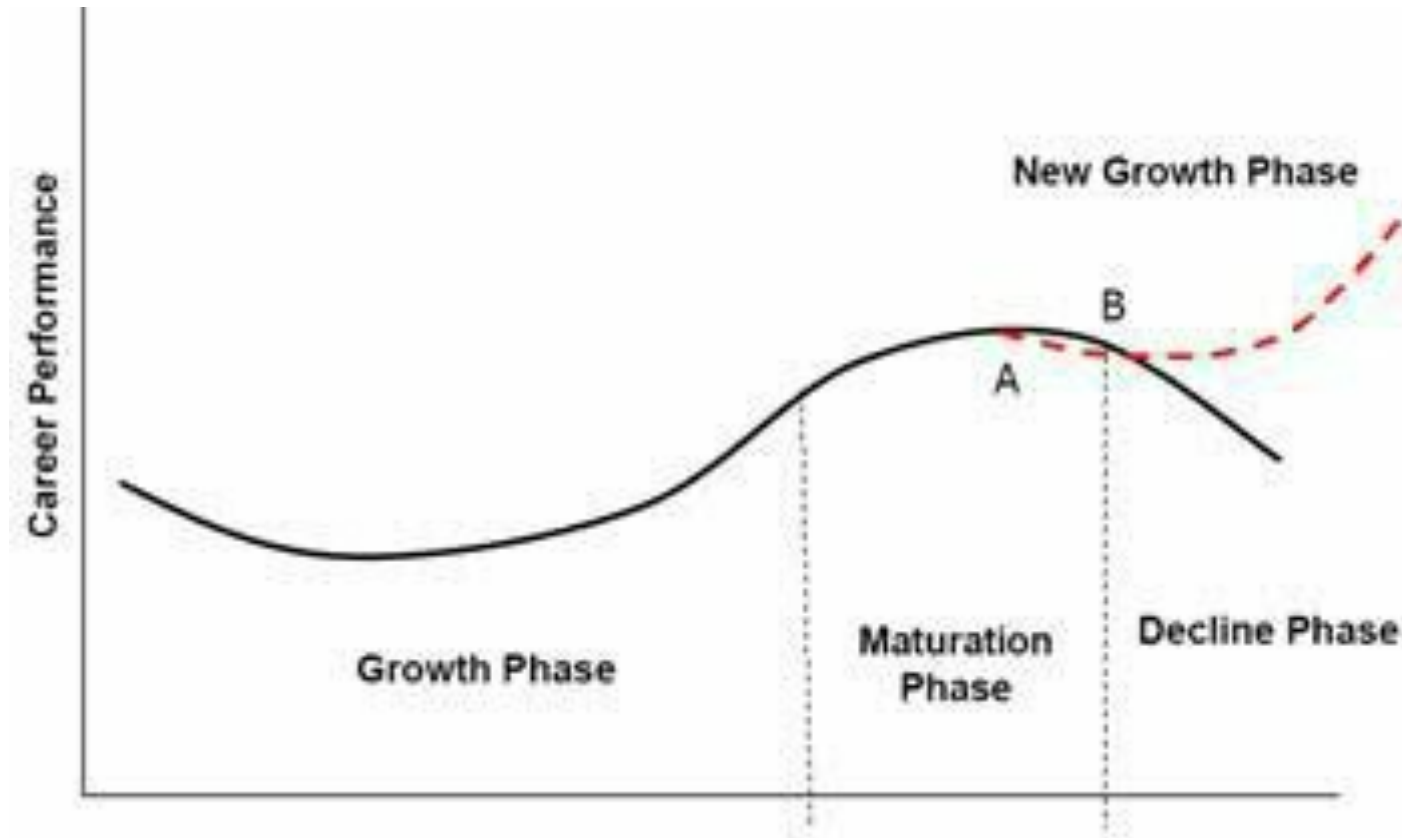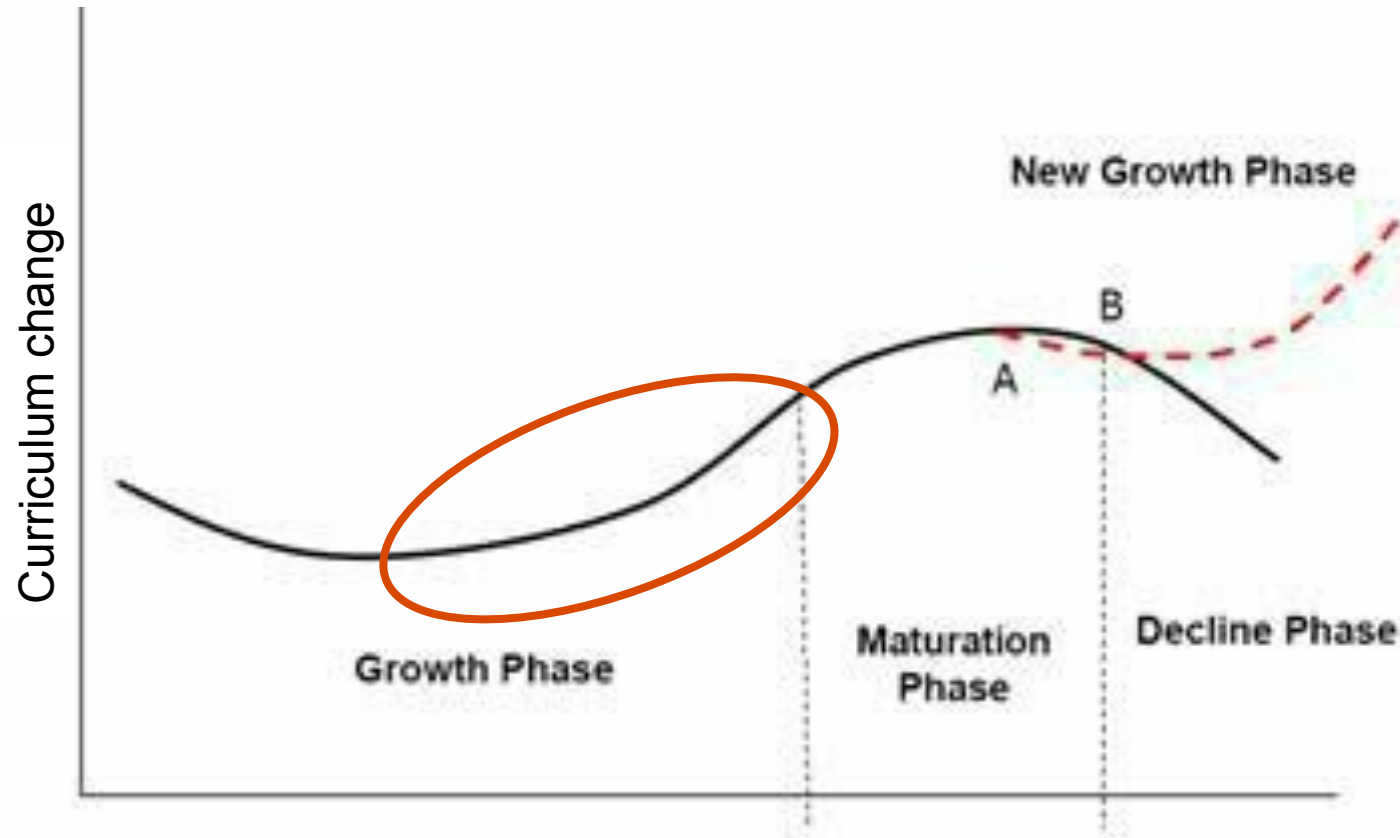
The sigmoid curve – a biological metaphor for social change

Implementing NZC is not a one-off change….

The early adopter schools were ready for NZC: early change was very rapid

The impact of NZC in the early adopter schools

- catalysed high level curriculum change (vision, values, a focus on learning to learn etc)

- energised school professionals in ways that affirmed and sustained their commitment to learners and learning

- strengthened continual improvement processes supported by ongoing inquiries into shared practice

- gave additional impetus to growing awareness of the importance of culture and of the diversity of New Zealand's students

- consolidated strengths-based approaches to learning, in contrast to deficit-based thinking about behaviour and achievement

FIG. I — Centralized, Decentralized and Distributed Networks
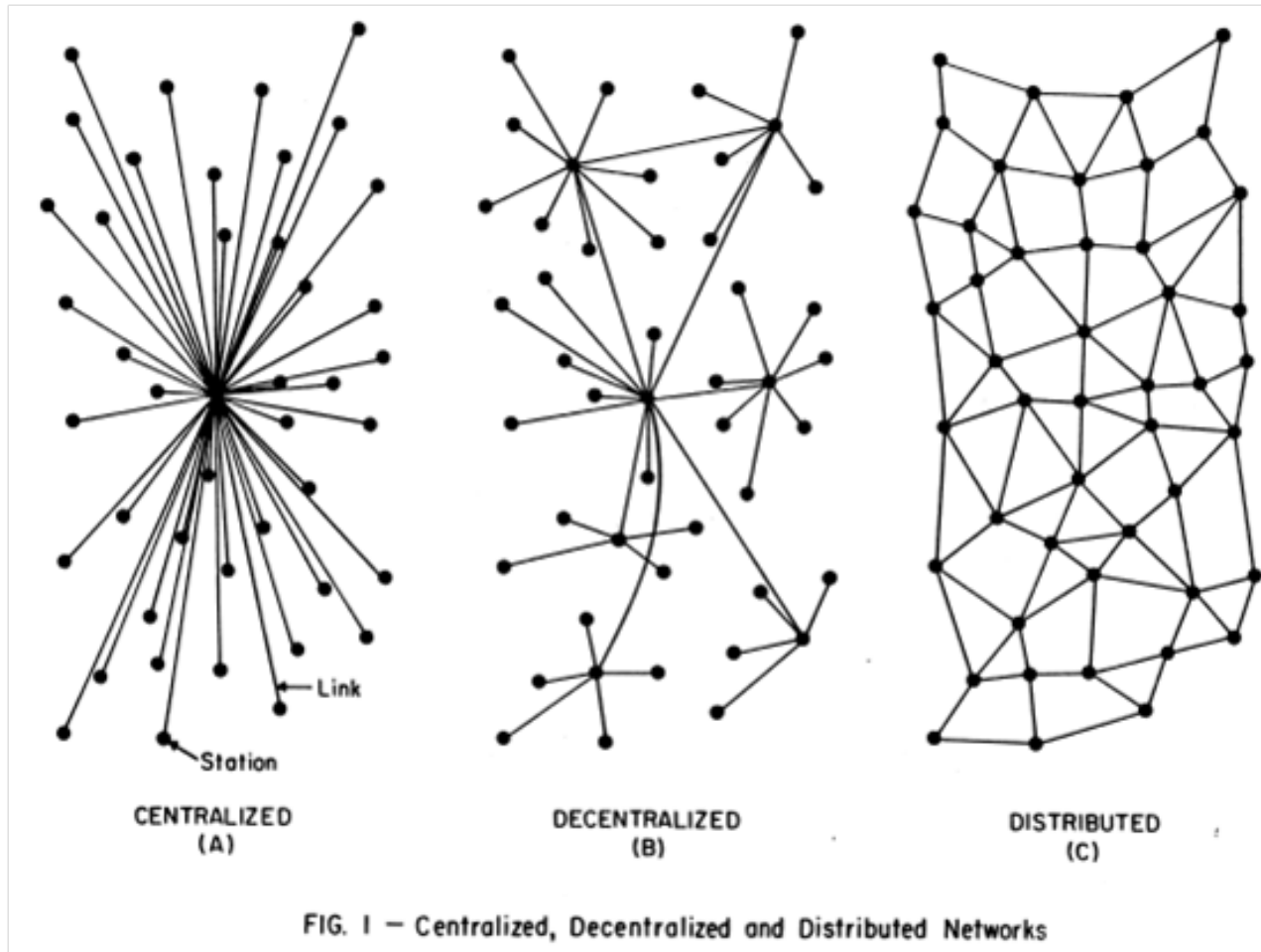
Decentralised learning networks have provided an effective support structure for complex layers of professional learning and change

Enjoying the fruits of change: NZC has ..

- Stimulated conversations about valued curriculum content and ways to achieve greater coherence (within taught curriculum and across various professional learning initiatives)

- Prompted development of a shared language and vision for learners and learning

- Increased student engagement and involvement in their own learning

- Re-energised teachers' shared sense of moral purpose: strengthened collective responsibility for student achievement

- Supported modest increases in parental and community involvement in learning and curriculum

Even for schools that were ready and waiting for NZC, the initial growth stage took at least two years.
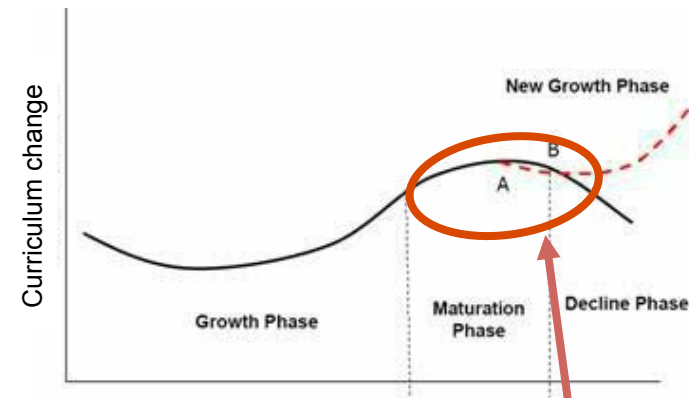
Sustainability … is not linear. It is cyclical, for two fundamental reasons. One has to do with energy, and the other periodic plateaus, where additional time and ingenuity are required for the next adaptive breakthrough.
(Fullan, 2004, p. 14)

Vertical learning experiences are cases where a learner makes lots of incremental progress on a scale from low to high skills, as if moving up a ladder.

'Horizontal' learning experiences are those where one does not make a lot of progress up the ladder of skills, but stays on the initial rungs awhile, exploring them and getting to know what some of the rungs are and what the ladder looks like. Horizontal experiences look like mucking around, but really they are ways of getting your feet wet, getting used to the water, and getting ready, eventually, to jump in and go swimming.
(Gee, 2004, p. 60)

Not so much a "plateau" as a place of recursive (horizontal) learning…

The "front end"

- **Vision**

- **Values**

- **Principles**

- **Key competencies**

The "back end"

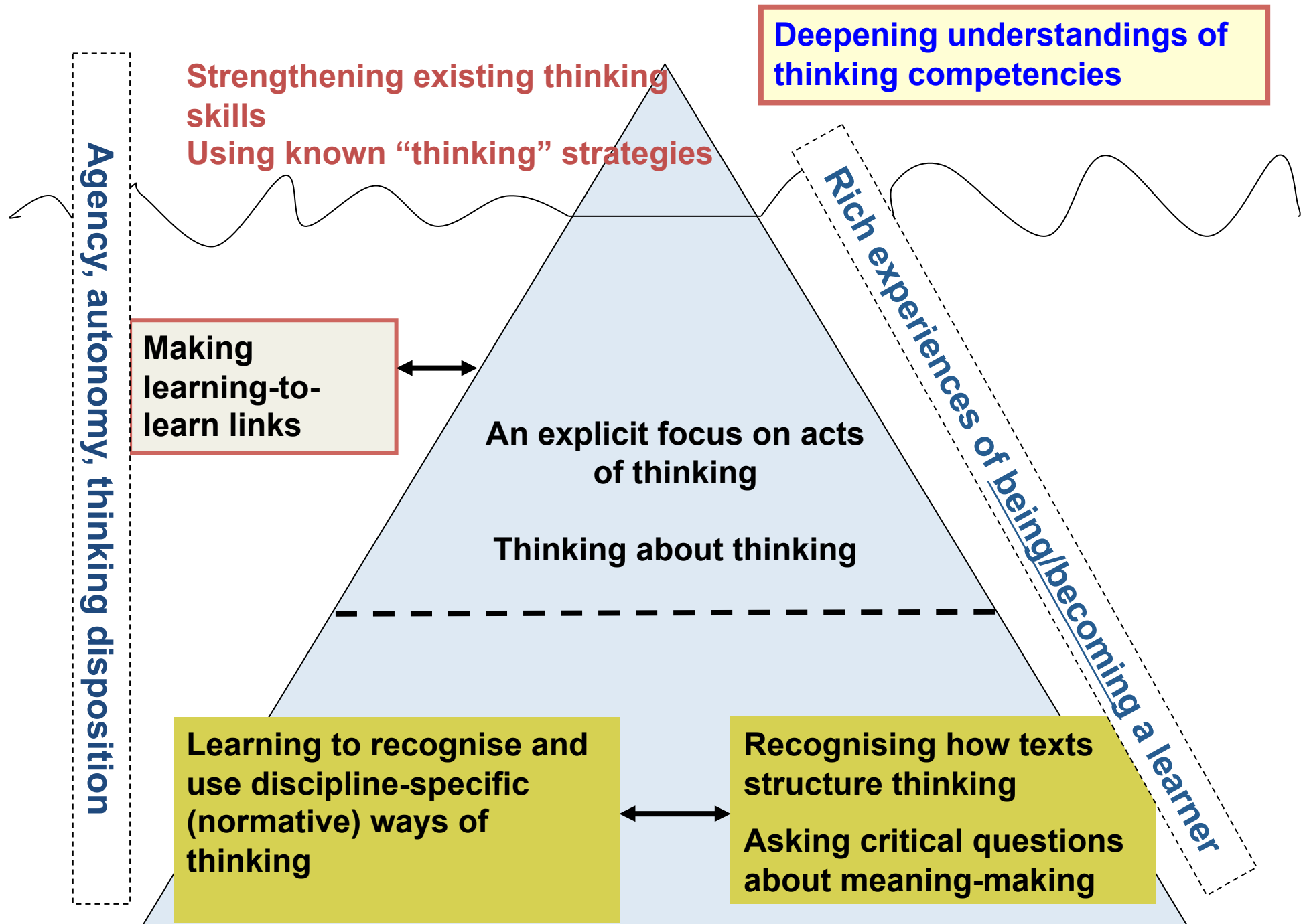**8 levels**

8 learning areas

8 sets of achievement objectives per level

Effective pedagogy, key competencies, learning to learn
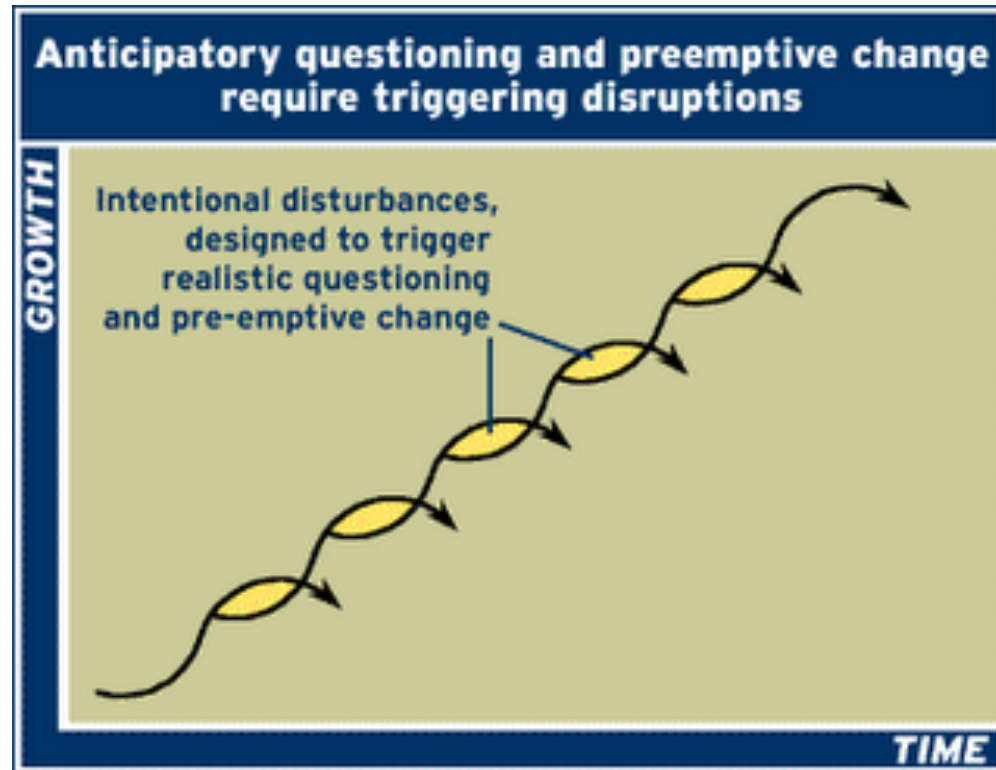
These parts of NZC can help bring the two ends of NZC together – but only if they are NOT positioned as "add-on" features.

This is a significant design challenge and subject-specific input is a necessary component

Strengthening existing thinking skills
Using known "thinking" strategies

Deepening understandings of thinking competencies

Agency, autonomy, thinking disposition

Rich experiences of being/becoming a learner

Making learning-to-learn links

An explicit focus on acts of thinking

Thinking about thinking

Learning to recognise and use discipline-specific (normative) ways of thinking

Recognising how texts structure thinking

Asking critical questions about meaning-making

To move beyond plateaus requires what Heifetz and Linksy call tackling 'adaptive challenges' rather than 'technical solutions'. The difference between the two is that knowledge required for addressing technical problems is currently available (it may still be difficult to implement, but much is known in relation to the problem) while adaptive challenges go beyond our current capacity or current way of operating.

(Fullan, 2004, p. 4)

Anticipatory questioning and preemptive change require triggering disruptions

GROWTH

Intentional disturbances, designed to trigger realistic questioning and pre-emptive change

TIME

*The basic idea of using a pair of "Sigmoid curves" as a metaphor for company performance was offered by Charles Handy in "The Empty Raincoat", 1994

Dancing on a SHIFTING CARPET

An emergent challenge is knowing when you have reached the limits of your internal resources and need new input to stimulate the next change cycle
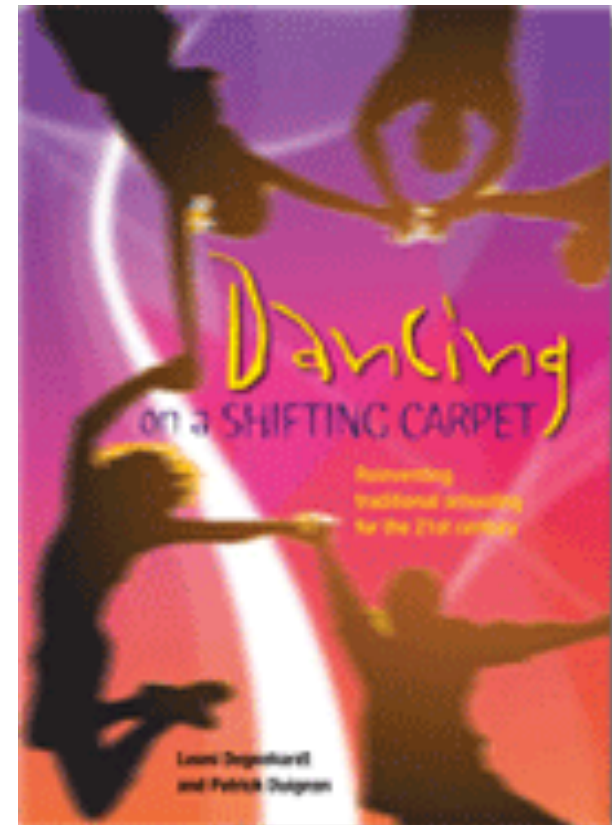
Next challenges: both/and thinking

- Achieving "connected knowing" that is both deep and broad

- Making cross-curriculum links in ways that also maintain the integrity of disciplinary knowing

- Student-centered and a strong role for the teacher

- Connecting "complex resources" within webs of relationships and deep ideas (Fullan, 2010)

Next challenges: Rethinking evidence of learning

- Aligning high stakes assessment and deep curriculum thinking about purposes for learning in the 21st century

- Clarifying the difference key competencies could make within learning areas: knowledge, skills <u>and being…</u> How you come to know matters

- Rethinking what can constitute evidence of learning (new assessment processes, new ways of use knowledge and skills)

- Ensuring parents and others in the community also understand these new learning conversations
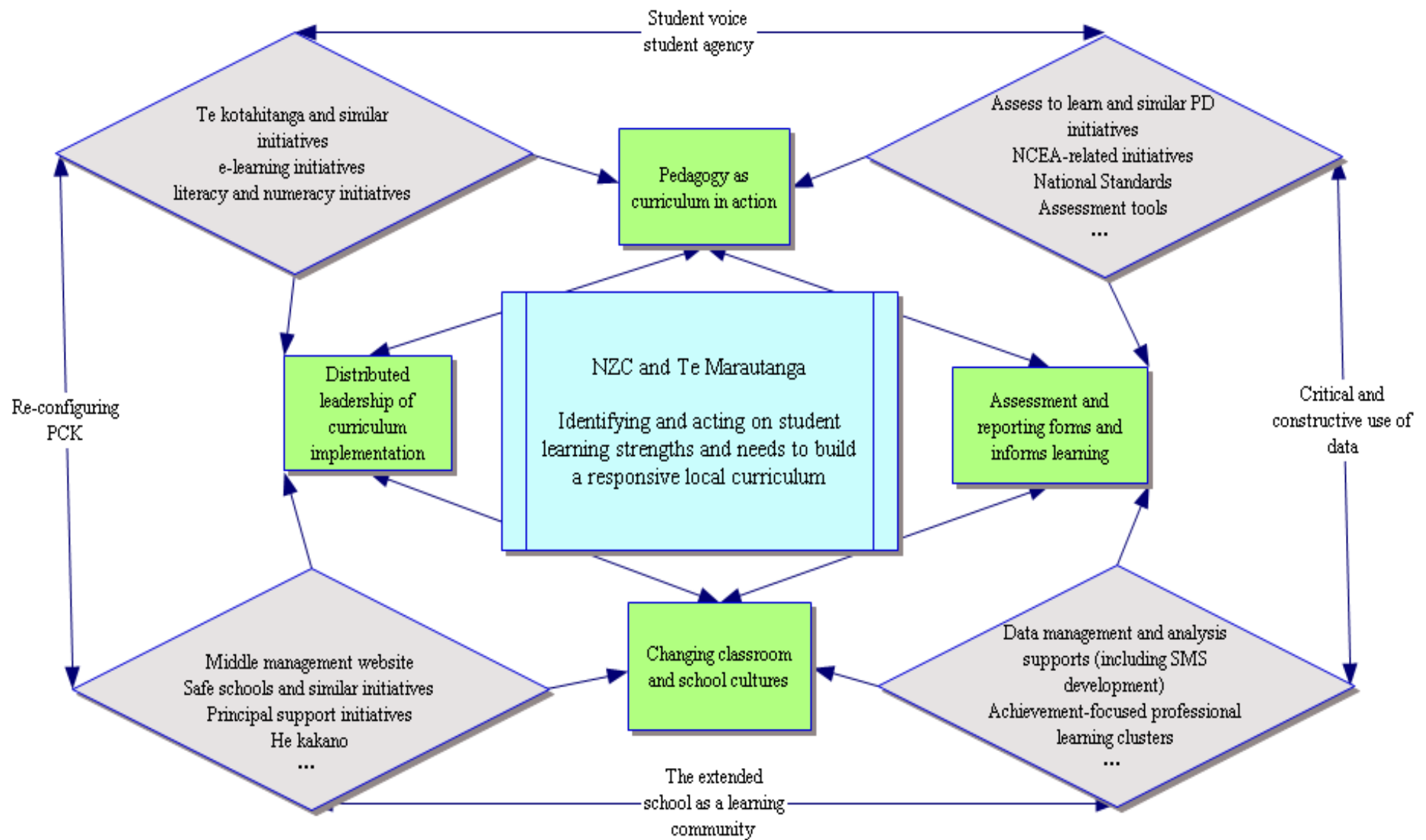
A "complex resources" view of support for NZC (see Fullan, 2010)

And the last word goes to…

The findings of the three rounds of data collection indicate that the implementation process is usefully viewed as a *complex* process of growth and change. This journey can start with school engagement of any aspect of *NZC*. What is important is that schools persist with their development programme engaging with, responding to and calling on the strengths of all those within their wider community.

(Final paragraph of full CIES report, in press).

References

- Fullan, M. (2004). *Systems thinkers in action: Moving beyond the standards plateau*. Nottingham: DIES Publications.

- Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole system reform*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Corwin/Sage Publications.

- Gee, J. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Look for the Curriculum Implementation Exploratory Studies (CIES) short report: "The shape of curriculum change", coming soon on TKI.