

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update



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Welcome to *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*

Curriculum Updates support school leaders and teachers as they work to design and review their school curriculum, in line with the New Zealand Curriculum and with current knowledge and understandings about effective classroom teaching.

Curriculum Updates are published in the *Education Gazette* and are available online at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

This Update focuses on an evaluation of progress in the implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum, using data collected in 2008 and 2009. When considering these findings, it is important to keep in mind that curriculum implementation is ongoing. Research shows that substantial change takes several years.



Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum

In evaluating the implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC), a team led by Dr Claire Sinnema from The University of Auckland wanted to find out what progress had been made during the two years before the required implementation date (February 2010) and what factors explained the degree of progress. During 2008 and 2009, the team asked teachers and school leaders:

- how *receptive* they felt about implementing the curriculum (how they valued it, how confident they felt about implementing it, and how feasible they thought implementation was);

- what kinds of *support* they had received and how valuable this was;
- what their *understandings* were of the key elements, such as teaching as inquiry, partnerships with family/whānau, the values, and the key competencies;
- to what extent their *practices* had changed to reflect the new curriculum.

Information was gathered from approximately 5000 teachers and school leaders in a range of schools throughout New Zealand, using paper and web-based surveys and focus groups.

The big ideas from the evaluation

1. Receptivity and regard

Overall, teachers and school leaders valued the NZC highly but found it challenging. Most viewed it positively, saw it as an improvement on the previous curriculum, and thought that it was relevant to 21st century learners. They had particularly high regard for its flexibility and school-based curriculum design aspects.

We are at an exciting time in our history with education. I am so motivated and enlightened with the pathway put forward with the NZC and feel confident and passionate about the change that is happening.

Teacher (Sinnema, 2011, page 28)

Confidence about the feasibility of implementing some new aspects of the NZC had increased between 2008 and 2009, but in late 2009, many schools still felt unsure about how to change their practice. In particular, there was some confusion about implementing ideas such as teaching as inquiry, student agency, family/whānau partnerships, the values, and the key competencies.

The report recommends that implementation should involve sustained inquiry over time, both within schools and in the wider education sector, as part of the ongoing process of curriculum design and review.

International research findings show that curriculum implementation is typically difficult, especially when the degree of change is substantial (Fullan, 2008; Levin, 2008; van den Akker and Verloop, 1994). Confidence in implementing curriculum change requires deep understandings of the distinctions between new and old elements. The challenge for teachers is to recognise that elements of the new curriculum are in fact substantially different from those of the old curriculum.



2. Support

By the end of 2009, teachers had become better at using supports readily available within their school, such as the curriculum document, their colleagues, Ministry of Education publications, and NZC Online. Many believed that such supports provided valuable help with the task of implementation.

So we've had two teacher-only days about the curriculum; one last year and one this year, and they've really focused on unpacking the new curriculum and looking at it from the point of view of our school. So we [the curriculum team and the associate principal] set up what we're going to do and what direction we're going to take it in, and we've done it over a variety of sessions. For instance at staff meetings, we've done one learning area a staff meeting. At the beginning of the staff meeting, we set out which learning area we're talking about, how we see that learning area in our classrooms, how we all know that we're teaching it effectively. The values and vision and things we've really left for the teacher-only days because they're a bit longer to do ... So I tend to read articles on the NZC website.

Primary school team leader (Sinnema, 2011, page 56)

Some teachers, however, felt they needed more time, more support from professional learning communities, and more face-to-face access to specialised expertise to help them implement the curriculum.

We share ideas across schools but still require training/support/strategies from the "experts".

Teacher (Sinnema, 2011, page 58)

Network Learning Communities (NLCs)

Introduced in 2008, Network Learning Communities were set up to develop teachers' and school leaders' understanding of the NZC and to support its implementation. An evaluation of the NLC initiative (Ward and Henderson, 2011) found that most of those involved were very positive about the support it had given them for implementation of the curriculum in their schools. Further information about NLCs, including stories from the schools involved, can be found in *Curriculum Update 8*.

Access to expertise

All the successful core studies involved someone with expertise from outside the school who was prepared to challenge the ways in which teachers thought about their students ... In one of the supplementary studies, this expertise came from the principal ... But the best of expertise – whether internal or external – can be negated when school leaders conspire with their teachers to maintain the status quo or when teachers support one another to resist change.

Teacher Professional Learning and Development BES, page 166

The report recommends strengthening the provision of high quality support for teachers and school leaders from both within and beyond schools.

3. Understanding and practice

During 2008 and 2009, there was widespread engagement with the curriculum. Most principals had reviewed all key elements of their curriculum in line with the NZC, although 10–20 percent had not reviewed one or more key elements. Many teachers and school leaders had grappled with the new ideas of the NZC and how to reflect them in practice, and some schools had shown significant progress in implementing these changes. However, the report shows a general pattern of surface-level understanding and slight shifts in learning and teaching practice. Primary teachers had generally made more changes in practice than their secondary counterparts.



Progress towards implementing the new ideas of the NZC

- Key competencies had become more evident in schools, although some teachers still saw these as similar to the essential skills of the previous curriculum. Key competencies require a much more complex, nuanced interpretation of the ways in which knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values are integrated.

- The teaching as inquiry model had also become more evident in some schools, although some teachers confused it with “inquiry learning”.

- Nearly a third of schools encouraged students to hold the values listed in the NZC, but there was less evidence that teachers understood values as a three-way process: integrating values into learning experiences across the curriculum; learning about the nature of values; and developing skills for exploring values.

- In implementing the idea of student agency, teachers were more likely to involve students in decisions about what they learn than in decisions about how they were assessed. Enhancing student agency was seen as a big step or a risk by many teachers, especially secondary teachers.

- In many schools, the development of partnerships with parents and whānau had not yet fully met the requirements of the curriculum. Schools were more likely to inform parents than to collaborate with them about teaching and learning matters.

Comments from teachers (Sinnema, 2011)

- *The teaching of the key competencies involves equipping the learner with the knowledge to identify, apply, and reflect on each of the competencies in a range of contexts. Although there needs to be much rich and challenging dialogue with learners about what the competencies are and how they are essential tools for life, they do not “stand alone” but should ideally be embedded seamlessly across all learning contexts.* page 35

- *... use formative assessment, both formal and informal, to inform them about student achievement, then use this data to make decisions about student needs, and finally consult colleagues, research, and other sources to find innovative approaches to meet student needs.* page 40

- *The kids know them [the values] and you can go back to them any time of the day at any stage and in any subject. It's not just a set time for values or whatever: in the playground, before school, after school, whenever you can.* page 38

- *We've got a huge change in our thinking to come forward to ... because for so long we've told them what to do and what to think and suddenly we are having to change the way we approach things, and for some of us, we're further down the track than others.* Secondary AP, page 42

- *A lot of the work that we've been talking about with trying to implement ideas from the new curriculum has been about how do you engage with your community, how you have learning opportunities that are about the community in which kids live, and how do you form relationships with local businesses or pathways for kids in, between school, and outside of school?* Secondary teacher, page 44

The report recommends that educators be supported to develop a deeper understanding of curriculum elements and their relationships to each other.

Guiding questions *He pātai*

- What are my beliefs about the NZC?
- Do I believe it will help me become a more effective teacher?
- How confident do I feel that I understand the “new ideas” listed on this page?
- What would I like to find out more about? How would I go about this?
- What are the greatest risks in trying out something new in my teaching practice?



Conclusions

The research found that the two factors that most strongly influenced the degree of change in practice were the respondent's confidence (the single strongest factor) and her or his perception of the quality of internal support. This included collegial support from other staff, the teaching resources available, and the effectiveness of professional development organised and led by the school.

This finding was based on statistical measures of how changes in practice (the key outcome sought from the NZC implementation process) were related to various contributing factors, including:

- the quantity and quality of support received, both internal and external;
- the teacher's understanding of key elements of the NZC;
- the teacher's degree of receptivity to and regard for the NZC;
- the teacher's confidence about the feasibility of implementation.

Guiding questions He pātai

- How is our school progressing with curriculum implementation in relation to these findings?
- How am I utilising the curriculum expertise of my teachers to benefit all staff?
- Am I using a distributed leadership model in curriculum implementation?
- Do we use a teaching as inquiry process in our own professional learning about curriculum change?

The research concluded that there is only an indirect relationship between either the quality or quantity of support for the implementation process and the shifts in practice that the NZC is seeking. High-quality support (especially internal support) helped to improve the regard that educators had for the curriculum in ways that increased their confidence in the feasibility of NZC implementation. This confidence, in turn, contributed to their ability to give effect to the curriculum in their practice.

Future focus

The report recommends that priority be given to creating conditions that enable and promote effective curriculum implementation.

Local and contextual conditions may distract staff from focusing on curriculum implementation. Schools need to remain focused because curriculum implementation is an ongoing process, not a one-off event. School leaders have a vital role to play in leading professional learning in which support (both internal and external) is aligned with curriculum goals. As instructional leaders, they must be able to motivate and inform staff, encouraging them to think, question, and challenge ideas. They must also encourage them to make changes in their practice and to evaluate the results of those changes.

Helpful resources

> Curriculum implementation reports

www.nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/Curriculum-research-reports
Sinnema, Claire (2011). *Monitoring and Evaluating Curriculum Implementation: Final Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum 2008–2009*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/curriculum/curriculum-implementation-exploratory-studies-2

Hipkins, R., Cowie, B., Boyd, S., Keown, P., and McGee, C. (2011). *Curriculum Implementation Exploratory Studies 2*. NZCER and the University of Waikato. This study involved schools that were "early adopters" of the New Zealand Curriculum.

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/89350/963_Implementation-Synthesis-28022011.pdf

Schagen, Sandie (2011). *Implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum: Synthesis of Research and Evaluation*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

> ERO reports on curriculum implementation

www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports
ERO (2009). *Readiness to Implement the New Zealand Curriculum*
ERO (2010). *Preparing to Give Effect to the New Zealand Curriculum*
ERO (2011). *Directions for Learning: The New Zealand Curriculum Principles, and Teaching as Inquiry*

> 2011 School Support advisors

www.nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources
Information on professional learning and development to support implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum and a list of advisors responsible for support in regions.

> The New Zealand Curriculum Online

www.nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum

> Designing a local curriculum

www.nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-stories/Keynotes-and-presentations/The-shape-of-curriculum-change

A video of Rose Hipkins talking about designing a local curriculum from a national framework

For a full list of references, see the online version of this Curriculum Update, available at:

http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates



References and additional bibliographic resources

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Levin, B., ed. (2008). *Curriculum Policy and the Politics of What Should Be Learned in Schools*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., and Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Wellington: Ministry of Education

van den Akker, J. and Verloop, N. (1994). "Evaluation Approaches and Results in Curriculum Research and Development in the Netherlands". *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, vol. 20 no. 4, pp.421– 436.

Ward, L. and Henderson, A. (2011). *An Evaluation of Network Learning Communities – Technical Report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education

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