

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update



Teaching and Learning

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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 the New Zealand Curriculum principle of students learning to learn.



The learning to learn principle

The principle of learning to learn is central to the New Zealand Curriculum vision of lifelong learning.

The curriculum encourages all students to reflect on their own learning processes and to learn how to learn.

The New Zealand Curriculum, page 9

This Update draws on evidence of why learning to learn is important. It describes how to foster learning to learn so that students take ownership of their own learning and play a greater role in classroom decision-making.

In a world where young people exercise personal choice over matters as trivial as the ring tones of their cellphone, or as far reaching as the learning pathways they pursue, denying them opportunities for active involvement in important learning and assessment decisions is likely to promote disengagement.

Absolum et al., 2009, page 8

What is learning to learn?

Young people are always learning, for example, from their families, their whānau, their peers, church, television, the Internet, and school. However, *learning to learn* is an active, intentional process that needs to be specifically taught.

Learning to learn, sometimes called learning autonomy or self-regulation of learning, is an aspect of managing self. It is itself a competency, that is, a bundle of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that, together with metacognition, enables people to take control of and improve their own learning and develop "learner identities" (see page 3).

Pupils' learning is more productive if it is reflective, intentional, and collaborative, practices which may not come naturally but can be taught and can lead to pupils taking responsibility for their own learning.

Black et al., 2006, page 126

Why is learning to learn so important?

Hattie (2009) observes that “significantly high effects on students’ learning are found where they (a) can set challenging and specific goals that allow them to direct, evaluate and redirect their learning, and (b) receive feedback (from peers, teachers, parents, and own experience) that relates specifically to how the gap can be addressed between current and future performance” (as cited in Gibbs and Poskitt, 2010, page 19).

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) has found that learners’ belief in their own efficacy is the strongest single predictor of whether they will adopt strategies that make learning effective (Artelt et al., 2003, pages 33–34).

When students can direct their learning and know how they learn best, they can also better navigate the wide range of available choices in school and beyond.

Learning to learn is particularly important when teachers are no longer a main source of information and knowledge. For example, young people regularly use information technologies to connect with other people and information. An individual’s ability to locate and critically appraise information from such sources is vital for learning throughout life.

Whānau and teacher support

Ako (teaching and learning partnerships between teachers and students) promotes shared ownership of and responsibility for learning, with well-known benefits for engagement and achievement.

For example, parent–teacher–student conferences, when the student is well prepared to share their learning portfolio and talk about goals achieved or next steps, can provide important opportunities to enhance the student’s agency in their learning.

Empowering students to become more self-directed learners and helping teachers and parents further develop these skills in their children can significantly increase students’ motivation and achievement in school.

Cleary and Zimmerman, 2004, cited in Gibbs and Poskitt, 2010, page 21

Informal learning conversations between teacher and whānau are another opportunity to build a young person’s agency as he or she shares ideas on setting goals and evaluates his or her progress.

Learning to learn for all

A student’s language, culture, abilities or disabilities, and prior experiences affect how they approach learning to learn. Ensuring that each learner has the language and concepts to set and assess their goals requires the teacher to know that learner and what they bring to classroom learning.

Teacher knowledge of the learner is crucial in supporting Māori and Pasifika learners, and those with special education needs, in learning to learn. Inclusive, supportive classroom environments and learning conversations between teachers, students, and whānau help to support all students in learning to learn.

> CASE STUDY

Albany Senior High School: Learning to learn for life

Albany Senior High School leaders, including principal Barbara Cavanagh and deputy principal Mark Osborne, considered how assessment practices could give effect to the school vision *We nurture each other, we inspire each other, we empower each other to achieve highly and become good citizens.*

They realised that the school needed more emphasis on student agency within assessment. The school introduced ePortfolios as a way for its students to document and evaluate their learning processes and outcomes.

The ePortfolios are “not simply a shop window”, says Mark Osborne. He observes that “thinking is involved in the process of constructing the ePortfolio, reflecting on it, and cultivating the story and the ideas around [it]”.

Students explore through learner blogs how they learn best, what is going well, what they are finding difficult, and what they can do to support their learning. “When you talk to students, they can really tell you in depth and detail about some of the problems they have come across and what they have had to overcome, and in discussion you can draw out more information,” says Mark.

Social networking through the ePortfolio site allows the school’s students to say “This is my challenge, this is my success; give me feedback on them.”

The ePortfolio system is constantly under review and reflection. As Mark notes, “We are not saying this is the way it should be done. We are learning, we’re on a journey, and this is where we are at so far.”

Source: [http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Browse-Tags/\(tag\)/eportfolios](http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Browse-Tags/(tag)/eportfolios)

Guiding questions He pātai

- Are all our learners able to take part in establishing their learning goals and evaluating their progress?
- Are there specific and regular opportunities for parents to be active partners in their children’s learning?



Teaching learning to learn

Fostering skills

Teachers need to teach and scaffold so that their learners can:

- set challenging yet appropriate goals
- identify useful, important, and relevant success criteria
- plan appropriate learning steps
- give and receive feedback
- interpret and use assessment information and feedback
- evaluate their progress.

Teachers need to provide regular opportunities for their students to use these strategies. Learning to learn should be taught in the context of real learning.

Providing a supportive environment

Classroom communities need to nurture trusting relationships so that learners feel safe sharing their learning outcomes and needs with others.

Classroom layout can also facilitate reciprocal interaction and enable learners to access required resources, including their assessment records.

Fostering learner identities

Children begin developing their identities as learners from a very young age. Their early experiences help to form learning dispositions.

The fundamental purpose of education for the 21st Century ... is ... facilitating the development of the capacity and the confidence to engage in lifelong learning. Central to this enterprise is the development of positive learning dispositions, such as resilience, playfulness and reciprocity.

Claxton and Carr, 2002, www.educate.ece.govt.nz

Teachers can help students to identify their personal learning preferences and challenges so that they can take greater control of their own learning and achieve their goals.

Students' self-confidence grows as they become aware of the conditions for learning and find they can control some of these conditions.

Absolum et al., 2009, page 21

Key tasks for the teacher include:

- ensuring joint construction of and clarity about goals and learning outcomes
- planning learning opportunities that support learners' goals
- checking frequently on learners' understanding of learning intentions, on progress in relationship to success criteria, and on next steps
- enabling learners to develop the language and metacognitive skills to discuss and reflect on their own learning.



> CASE STUDY

Starting young

At Mangere Bridge School, all students from year 1 work towards becoming self-regulated learners.

"The expectation and experience is that all students have the capacity to take ownership of their learning, given the training and opportunities within the classroom. A key point is that these skills have to be taught and supported to continue," says Rosina Prasad, a year 1–2 teacher.

Sharing of assessment information enables students, teachers, and parents to work in partnership to improve teaching and learning.

As teacher Elizabeth Crisp says, "Sharing that data with [students] empowers them to do something about it. And it also becomes important in sharing with their parents, because that leads into a learning partnership between home and school ... It means we are all on the same page, and we can all work to help the children achieve those learning goals."

Mangere Bridge supports its students to articulate what they have learnt and work out their next steps in partnership with the teacher, a process giving them ownership of and responsibility for their learning. In the words of one younger student, "Well, I know how to write a sentence now ... What do I need to do? I think I need to be able to write two of them."

Teacher Don Biltcliff says, "Once they see the need for their next piece of learning, I can incorporate that into my planning. And I make it explicit to the children that this is my job. My job is to make sure that you understand what your next step in your learning is going to be."

Guiding questions He pātai

- How well do our learners understand and use language and concepts for effective setting and assessment of personal goals?
- Do our classroom systems support learners to regularly and routinely monitor their personal progress?

Assessment for learning

Active participation in assessment is an essential aspect of students learning to learn. If they see assessment as something done to them or a judgment of them, learners are less likely to look objectively at their progress, to be open to feedback, and to take responsibility for their next steps.

Student–teacher collaboration is vital if assessment feedback is to help students understand how they are going and where they might go next.

Active reflection is fundamental to teachers and learners who are serious about producing and sustaining the conditions for effective learning. A learning-focused relationship based on principles of openness, honesty and mutual respect requires that both teacher and student spend time, individually and together, considering how they genuinely have experienced the learning process, assessing the effectiveness of the learning, and reflecting on the quality of the learning.

Absolum, 2006, page 142

Effective feedback

Feedback contributes most constructively to learning when it is:

- provided in the context of a genuine learning conversation
- given at the time of the learning so that learners can make improvements as they go
- initiated by the learner and in conjunction with self- and/or peer assessment.

Teachers need to:

- gauge when (and what kind of) feedback is needed
- provide strategies to help the learner to improve
- allow time for the learner to act on the feedback
- check the adequacy of the feedback with the learner.

Documenting learning

- Learning logs or journals provide a way for learners to identify learning goals, record evidence of success, and reflect on learning needs.
- Learning stories accumulated over time provide a picture of the learner's developing competencies. Stories are typically developed collaboratively and may include photographs and other evidence.
- Portfolios hold evidence of learning compiled over time. Learners select items to include and write descriptive reflections of what each item shows about their learning.

Adapted from Hipkins, 2008

> CASE STUDY

Peer assessment

In her new entrant classroom, Julie encourages the children to evaluate their own and others' work using clear criteria that reflect their learning goals.

Julie begins by modelling for them how to set learning goals, evaluate how well they have done, and identify what they want to improve. This helps them to develop the necessary language and concepts for assessing their own and others' work and develop confidence in what they are doing.

To support self- and peer assessment of writing, Julie provides simple symbols for success criteria on laminated cards.

When the students complete their writing task, they refer to the cards to self-assess and then seek their partner to peer assess, using the same process.

After completing his story, Jordan reads it to his partner, Reuben, who listens carefully. Jordan then asks Reuben if he has met each of the criteria on his card. For each criterion, Reuben carefully scans the text to see if indeed Jordan has put in a full stop or used spaces and confirms that Jordan has met each criterion.

"Do I feel happy?" asks Jordan. "Yes, because I put in an 'and'", and he ticks the smiley face on his assessment card.

Quotation and case study (adapted) from Absolum, 2006, pages 105–107

Self- and peer assessment

Self-assessment enables learners to assess how well their work meets success criteria and to revise it accordingly. As they get older, learners should be given more practice in judging their own learning. This supports them to become less reliant on others' input and more confident of their own successes.

Well-managed peer feedback provides opportunities for collaborative learning and gives students a wider range of ideas about their work. It requires:

- collaboration in discussing and co-constructing the process to clarify the purpose, expectations, and success criteria for the learning
- practice (led by the teacher through coaching, modelling, and feedback)
- appropriate partners or groups (generally of the same ability).

Guiding questions He pātai

- Do we always share the purposes, results of, and processes for assessment with our learners?
- How well do students and parents understand our assessment tools and information?

References and links are listed with the online version of Update 21 at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update

> References and other useful resources

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- Ministry of Education (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Helpful resources

Assessment for learning

- <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom>
- <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom/Assessment-for-learning-in-practice/Effective-feedback>
- <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom/Assessment-for-learning-in-practice/Clarity-about-the-learning>
- <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom/Assessment-for-learning-in-practice/Self-and-peer-assessment>

Key competencies – managing self

- <http://keycompetencies.tki.org.nz/>
- <http://keycompetencies.tki.org.nz/In-teaching/Discussion-tools/PRIDE-challenges>

ePortfolios

- <http://myportfolio.school.nz/>
- <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/Initiatives/ManagedLearningEnvironments/MLEPublications/ePortfolios.aspx>
- [http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Browse-Tags/\(tag\)/eportfolios](http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Browse-Tags/(tag)/eportfolios)
- http://www.inclusive.org.nz/throughdifferenteyes/a_guide_for_teachers

Learning to learn for all

- <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspx>
- <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PasifikaEducationPlan.aspx>
- <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/SpecialEducation/OurWorkProgramme/SuccessForAll.aspx>