



## Briefing Note: Strengthening critical thinking and digital safety in a refreshed New Zealand Curriculum

<b>To:</b>	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	07/04/2022	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1285177
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<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to respond to a request for an overview of current approaches to critical literacy in the context of mis- dis- and mal-information, as well as note opportunities to strengthen these responses through the ongoing refresh of the *New Zealand Curriculum* and any other pilots and educational awareness campaigns.

We recommend this paper is forwarded to the Prime Minister for her meeting with Minister Tinetti scheduled on 12 April 2022.

### Summary

- As part of current curriculum provision, New Zealand schools teach critical thinking as part of the 'thinking' key competency. The performance of New Zealand ākonga in critical thinking is comparable to other developed countries and we do well in some measures.
- The refresh of the *New Zealand Curriculum* offers opportunities to strengthen our support for critical thinking and digital citizenship as part of a future-focused curriculum suited to an environment in which mis- dis- and mal information continues to proliferate.
- Curriculum alone cannot address this complex need and other initiatives will make important contributions to ensuring ākonga are equipped to counter dis- mis- and mal-information

## Proactive Release

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- a **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree



Hon Jan Tinetti  
**Associate Minister of Education**

7/04/2022



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7/04/2022

## Background

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1. Developing critical thinking skills has been a long-standing goal of education systems globally, including in Aotearoa New Zealand, and has received additional interest in recent years alongside the rapidly increasing use of social media, and rising concerns about the proliferation of mis- dis- and mal-information.
2. Additional emphasis on digital literacy and critical thinking has also come from the reliance on remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional screen time which this has engendered.
3. Critical thinking is a complex and contested concept. There are ongoing and significant debates over the term's meaning and the most effective methods for developing the skill in learners.
4. This briefing note will focus on critical thinking and digital citizenship as they relate to mis- dis- and mal-information and particularly in relation to digital media, often called critical literacy. In this context the concept is primarily focused on the ability to find and evaluate information and to critique the reliability of sources as well as to consider contextual features around the production and reception of texts.
5. Alongside developing critical thinking, more immediate responses to potential online harm (particularly in the context of the use of social media) are provided through cyber safety and digital citizenship education.
6. Critical thinking and digital citizenship are also complemented by a wider suite of social-emotional competencies, which underpin ākonga interactions and attitudes across a range of contexts, including online environments.

## Current practices

7. The *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) describes five key competencies: thinking; using language, symbols, and text; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing. These key competencies sit across all learning areas.
8. In keeping with the emphasis on local decision-making in the 2007 NZC, it has been left to schools and teachers to interpret how to incorporate these key competencies into learning experiences.
9. The current NZC describes critical thinking as part of the key competency 'thinking':

Thinking is about using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas. These processes can be applied to purposes such as developing understanding, making decisions, shaping actions, or constructing knowledge. Intellectual curiosity is at the heart of this competency.

Students who are competent thinkers and problem solvers actively seek, use, and create knowledge. They reflect on their own learning, draw on personal knowledge and intuitions, ask questions, and challenge the basis of assumptions and perceptions.
10. The 'managing self' and 'relating to others' key competencies both also contribute to the ability of ākonga to navigate online spaces and respond to mis- dis- and mal-information through their emphases on self-regulation and sociability/empathy.

11. Each NZC learning area overview makes some reference to the key competencies that are valued in the associated disciplines but there is no consistency of expression across the learning areas nor is there any consistent elaboration in terms of the skills that comprise critical literacy and digital citizenship.
12. A number of learning areas do have elements of critical literacy and critical thinking skills woven through. English, in particular, directs teachers towards deconstruction of texts and interrogation of author purpose. Science and Social Sciences also point towards ideas around evidence and reliability. Similarly social-emotional skills are described in the Health and Physical Education learning area.
13. Technology includes a focus on ākonga developing their understanding of 'the technologies people need to locate, analyse, evaluate, and present digital information efficiently, effectively and ethically.'
14. The Ministry of Education has produced resources and support for kaiako and ākonga to develop key competencies including critical thinking skills. The Connected series, for example, has a focus on the science capability of critiquing evidence.
15. The Ministry of Education provides professional learning resources and guidance related to eLearning through Te Kete Ipurangi. This includes guidance around digital fluency and digital citizenship.
16. Resources are also available from NetSafe for keeping schools and ākonga safe online. NetSafe also responds to negative online incidents to reduce harm and advises the Ministry on policy and guidance related to digital safety issues.

### **Evidence of impact of current practices**

17. Up to 80% of Aotearoa New Zealand's 15-year-old students report learning about aspects such as the consequences of making information public online and judging whether to trust information from the internet. In addition, the recent analysis of the PISA reading results, which examined critical literacy, found that 61% of these students were correct when asked to distinguish fact from fiction. This was higher than the international average (47%) and similar to Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> (though it should be noted these results are unevenly spread across settings and demographics).
18. However, this overall strength contrasts with observations of a low focus in critical literacy teaching in primary schools.<sup>2</sup> This is apparent in the Education Review Office's (ERO) report *The Key Competencies: Realising the Potential of the New Zealand Curriculum* (2019)<sup>3</sup> which found that while most schools (years 1 – 8) had some idea about the key competencies very few were weaving them explicitly in teaching and

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<sup>1</sup> PISA 2018 New Zealand Summary report

[https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/196629/PISA-2018-NZ-Summary-Report.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/196629/PISA-2018-NZ-Summary-Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Jesson, R., McNaughton, S., Rosedale, N., Zhu, T. & Cockle, V. (2018). A mixed-methods study to identify effective practices in the teaching of writing in a digital learning environment in low income schools. *Computers and Education*, 119 (April), 14-30;

McNaughton, S, Zhu, T, Rosedale, N., Oldehaver, J, Jesson, R., & Greenleaf, C. (2019). Critical perspective taking: Promoting and assessing online written argumentation for dialogic focus. *Studia Paedagogica* (special issue: Better Learning through Argumentation). 24(4). 119-141.

<sup>3</sup> <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/the-key-competencies-realising-the-potential-of-the-new-zealand-curriculum>

learning practice. More concerning, there was very little deliberate teaching of 'thinking' and 'using language, texts and symbols.' ERO advised that schools needed to:

- a. Deliberately teach and support students to use Key Competencies across all learning areas; and
  - b. Provide opportunities for students to use Key Competencies in open-ended explorations about problems that have no obvious right answer but nevertheless require our attention.
19. A 2017 survey into Digital Technologies in Schools from the 20/20 Trust<sup>4</sup> found that 82% of primary schools and 81% of secondary schools surveyed had strategies in place for educating students to develop positive, ethical online behaviours in the context of meaningful learning. 73% of schools overall had digital citizenship policies in place. There is no data available as to the effectiveness of these strategies.

### **Addressing citizenship skills, critical thinking and literacy in the refreshed *New Zealand Curriculum***

20. The NZC is being refreshed using the criteria of honouring Te Tiriti, being inclusive (so all young people can see themselves and succeed in their learning), clear about the learning that matters and easy to use for teachers.
21. The refreshed NZC will improve ākonga critical thinking and citizenship by supporting teachers to:
- a. Know that citizenship is a key outcome of learning – through a curriculum vision that actively steers learning;
  - b. Identify the learning that matters – through the use of a consistent curriculum model;
  - c. Deliberately teach the practices and connect these to meaningful contexts – through refreshed curriculum content; and
  - d. Draw on resources that weave these aspects together – through a coherent suite of purpose-built resources
22. Citizenship and community participation will be given a stronger emphasis through the refreshed NZC. For example, the new Vision for Young People is used to ensure that each learning area is designed to encourage ākonga to participate in communities engaging in the social issues. It will also ensure that throughout their learning ākonga will be encouraged to think about how their learning contributes to social wellbeing and to their active participation in society.
23. All learning areas will be consistently organised using the Understand Know Do model. This model makes explicit the enduring and memorable big ideas (UNDERSTAND), the meaningful areas of study (KNOW) and the practices that bring rigour to that study (DO). Instead of leaving it to the teacher to determine how key competencies and literacy and numeracy are to be integrated into learning, they are now being deliberately woven into the Do element. For each phase of learning the refreshed NZC

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<sup>4</sup> <https://2020.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Digital-Technologies-in-Schools-2016-17-04-05-2017-FINAL.pdf>

will describe the increased depth of understanding and knowledge, and the refinement and sophistication of the competencies and practices.

24. This model supports teachers to focus on the concept of enduring competencies and involves the mix of what students know, understand, and are able to do. It is this competence that ākonga use and do again and again in more complex learning and contexts that are meaningful to ākonga and community.
25. All learning areas contribute to this notion of enduring competencies. The Understand Know Do model will be applied consistently to each learning area and make clear how the key competencies and literacy and numeracy can be applied (DO) to the knowledge and understanding of the particular learning area.
26. This will contribute to a more consistently robust approach to teaching critical thinking, literacy and numeracy, and better highlight the specific contribution each learning area makes to these skills.
27. The draft Social Sciences learning area (which is currently out for sector feedback) exemplifies some of the ways in which the refreshed curriculum better serves learning about critical thinking and digital literacy.
28. The learning area 'big ideas' are designed to recognise enduring themes and values such as power, participation, perspectives and the relationships and connections between people across time and space. These are ideas that are not unique to Aotearoa New Zealand alone, and will encourage ākonga to think on local, national, and global levels.
29. The learning area contexts (KNOW) will help ākonga explore meaningful contexts and build their own knowledge to combat misinformation; for example, learning facts about New Zealand's settlement and colonisation which contradict racist or discriminatory narratives.
30. The DO statements are organised around thinking conceptually, researching in social sciences, exploring values and perspectives, and taking social action. Analysis commissioned from NZCER shows that learning area-specific use of the key competencies ensures that DO statements explicitly draw on and would expand the practices associated with the key competencies.
31. For example, the 'thinking' practices, which include thinking critically, progresses through increased depth of thinking and sophistication of use as ākonga can:
  - a. Understand and use at least two different types of information from a variety of sources (years 1 – 3);
  - b. Use sources to gather reliable information about a big idea (years 4 – 6);
  - c. Gather information from primary and secondary sources, considering their reliability and identifying gaps in them (years 7 – 8);
  - d. Consider whether my sources are valid and reliable, identify gaps in them and reflect on the weaknesses and bias in them (years 9 – 10); and
  - e. Engage with diverse theoretical perspectives that seek to explain the paradigms and ideologies behind people's actions and ideas (years 11 – 13).

32. Further support for teachers to build critical thinking and digital literacy into their teaching will be provided through the ongoing provision of curriculum-aligned resources which demonstrate how this learning can be integrated into teaching and learning.
33. Resources which have been developed to support the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum provide examples of this. The first tranche of resources and supports for kaiako and ākonga are strongly focused on 'thinking critically.' Ākonga will draw on a broad base of sources while considering authorship, purpose and the voices that are missing, for example, in the newly available classroom resources such as *Connecting current events to the past*.<sup>5</sup>

### Other relevant pilots and campaigns

34. 9(2) (f) (iv)
35. There are a number of sector-led cyber safety and digital citizenship initiatives currently underway such as the Maniakkalani 'Being Cybersmart' programme.
36. A number of Ministry of Education initiatives also address citizenship and social-emotional skills in ways which can contribute towards digital citizenship, for example, 'Ata and Oho' social-emotional learning supports and the School Leavers Toolkit.
37. Other Ministry of Education initiatives can contribute to digital citizenship more generally. These include the forthcoming 'No to cyber nasties' focused on securing digital infrastructure.

### Key Risks and Benefits

38. The impacts of this learning will be ongoing and long-lasting but will not be immediate – they will equip ākonga for life with tools to combat mis- dis- and mal- information but will be developed over time.
39. Some aspects of countering mis- mal- and dis- information, such as providing counter-narratives, can be controversial and lead to push-back from some parties, especially where teaching may contradict the beliefs of parents and whānau.
40. Addressing these issues consistently and effectively will demand ongoing collaborative work across the education sector and place demands on teacher capability. These can be supported through the development of clear curriculum documents and effective supporting resources.

<sup>5</sup> [Connecting current events to the past: The Dawn Raids | Aotearoa NZ's Histories \(education.govt.nz\)](https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/research/the-edge-of-the-infodemic/)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/research/the-edge-of-the-infodemic/>.