

Inquiry Learning & The New Curriculum

Key competencies are the capabilities people need in order to live, learn, and contribute as active members of their communities.

Opportunities to develop competencies occur in social contexts. People adopt practices that they see used and valued by those closest to them, and they make these practices part of their own identity and expertise.

Competencies continue to develop over time, shaped by interactions with people, places and things. Students need to be challenged to develop their competencies in contexts that are increasingly wide-ranging and complex.

Inquiry learning provides an excellent vehicle for developing these key competencies because it integrates knowledge, skills, experiences and strategies in rich contexts.

The key competencies are the common threads that integrate the important disciplines or curriculum areas such as literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, technology and the arts. (If these subjects are the fence posts, the key competencies are the wires that pass through them and link them together.)

The New Zealand Curriculum identifies the following five key competencies:

1. **managing self**
2. **relating to others**
3. **participating and contributing**
4. **thinking**
5. **using language, symbols, and texts.**

Our students will develop these competencies through inquiry learning.



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Established 1922**

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**Kowhai
Intermediate
School**

We Learn. No Exceptions.

***What is Kowhai's
Inquiry Learning
Approach?***



Kowhai Inquiry Learning

We want students to understand that real-life learning is not contained in separate buckets.

When solving problems, unravelling dilemmas and rising to challenges, we tend to mix together ideas from different areas of knowledge and experience; in schools we call it integration out there we call it "life". Life is messy, complex and usually quite fun. We want to develop learning experiences that are useful for life.

There are three BIG AIMS for our Inquiry Learning:

1. To bring together a number of disciplines in an extended learning experience.
2. To teach and practise in-depth research and thinking skills.
3. To help students learn how to learn.



THE FOUR STAGES OF THE KOWHAI INQUIRY LEARNING MODEL

Stage 1. UNPACKING IDEAS

At this stage of the inquiry, students are immersed in the contexts for study. Students brainstorm, discuss and share their existing experiences and knowledge about the topic. If there are important background understandings (e.g. a science topic such as weather or forces) these are 'front-loaded' through specific teaching and experimentation. The known landscapes of student understanding are explored and connections made. This often involves viewing video, exploring on-line resources or field trips. Students are reading and writing about the contexts for study. Thinking skills such as brainstorming techniques are taught and used. Class displays are built up and many tentative discoveries and student generated questions emerge.

Stage 4. PROMOTING NEW UNDERSTANDINGS

Students present the findings from their inquiry and promote these to their peers using various methods (seminar, webpage, roleplay etc). Each inquiry finding is related to the big 'fertile' question that was overarching the school-wide inquiry. Students receive feedback from peers and teacher and the work is assessed.

The final act is to generalise the understandings they gained from their inquiry and write a brief action plan showing how these new understandings could be applied in a different context.



Some Examples of Inquiry Learning 'Fertile Questions':



Authentic questions stir up motivation.

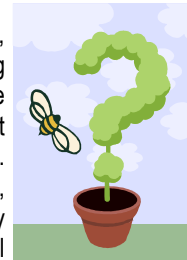
They tug learners out of their 'comfort zone'. When our settled way of thinking is disturbed by a good question our 'equilibrium' is disturbed and the learner is motivated to find an acceptable answer to restore peace of mind.

It is more helpful for a learner to know how to ask good questions than to answer them.

The answerer of a question is usually looking for the safe ground of a "right" answer. The skilled questioner is ready to take risks and to probe what is not yet known to him/her.

Stage 2. GROWING QUESTIONS

The fertile question is introduced. A big, open, challenging question capable of being answered in a number of ways. This is the question that all the students' subsequent investigations are seeking to 'flesh out'. During this stage training in questioning, research and critical skills are purposely taught. Students pose the question that will guide their particular area of inquiry.



Stage 3. SEARCHING FOR NEW IDEAS

Students now make a plan for their inquiry. They begin locating information, including facts and different viewpoints. Critical and evaluative skills are taught and practiced as they weigh up the value of the material they have gathered to shed light on their inquiry question. Students initiate interviews, make contacts within and outside the school and use web-based resources. They synthesise their findings and suggest some tentative conclusions which are presented to teacher or peers for their feedback before finalising them.

How do people find a sense of belonging?

A Health and Social Studies focus in which students inquired into the part that organizations and groups play in helping people to connect with their community.



How does weather challenge the adventurer?

A Science and Social Studies focus in which students investigated weather events and evaluated the dilemmas faced by adventurers and explorers in extreme environments.

The Kowhai Inquiry Learning Model is strongly influenced by Yoram Harpaz and Adam Lefstein's "Community of thinking"