

## IN NEED OF RESEARCH? SUPPORTING SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMPETENCIES IN INCIDENTAL AND UNPLANNED MOMENTS

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Judith is the first recipient of a Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research Doctoral Scholarship. In this commentary she sets out her aspirations for her research.

In 2011, along with Alison Burke, I was asked by Colin Hughes if I was interested in being part of a TLRI research project (with Dr Kathie Crocket and Dr Elmarie Kotze from the University of Waikato) looking at how the work of school guidance counsellors contributes to student learning (Kotze, Crocket, Hughes, Burke, & Graham, 2013). I admit I knew little about the new curriculum document and even less about Key Competencies, so it was with a mix of trepidation and excitement that I said yes. In the process of that research, the team has looked closely at counselling conversations and identified Key Competencies as they have emerged, both in use by students and in their purposeful development. Early this year we brought the results of the project so far to senior teachers and leaders in each of the three participating schools. In each school staff indicated a desire to understand more of the “how you do it”—that is engaging with Key Competencies in here and now practical and teachable moments. It is out of these comments that the impetus for this doctoral research project grew.

In the TLRI research we discovered that our initial understanding of Key Competencies was thinly described, and this may be a familiar experience for many secondary school teachers. Two pages in the New Zealand Curriculum document are not enough to draw out the richness of the Key Competencies when they are considered in the light of everyday school experience. So my hope is that by investigating them further, talking about them and playing with possibilities, teachers can be supported to grow their understanding of what the Key Competencies may look like in practice. And the practice I am talking about here is not in lesson planning or direct formal curriculum delivery, but rather in those day-to-day incidental moments that are the canvas on which the “hidden” learning that happens in schools occurs. While Key Competencies may be considered to be practised and learned informally in everyday situations in schools, from meeting the challenge of getting to school on time, to joining a soccer team, this study will investigate ways to assist teachers to **intentionally** strengthen competency development where previously they may have let these opportunities pass.

One of the things I have noticed working in a secondary school is the level of frustration many teachers experience when faced with the vagaries and intensities of adolescent development and behaviour. By placing the lens of Key Competency development over an interaction with a student, an alternative position may be offered to both teachers and learners, as problems and responses are framed in terms of ongoing development and learning rather than solely “behaviour management” issues. Where students are identified as negotiating moments of secondary school life successfully, noticing these moments and the capabilities the students are expressing will further grow and develop them. These ideas form the basis of my doctoral scholarship study through the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, The University of Waikato.

The school in which my doctoral research will take place is strongly bicultural, with most students identifying as either Māori (55% with many coming to Year 9 from kura) or Pākehā. An important part of the study will be to include Māori understandings of Key Competencies alongside those set out in the New Zealand Curriculum, so that strategies that are developed may be culturally responsive and inclusive. The action research methodology will generate data through individual interviews and focus groups in a series of iterative cycles. Notions about Key Competencies, understandings of how these are produced, and examples of practice will be explored with teachers. Drawing on counselling methodologies that are based on social constructionist understandings, the group will be taught the practice and theory of externalising language, and consider its practical application in their day-to-day teaching life. They will then be asked to note examples of when they have intentionally used Key Competency language, or when it has been at the foreground of their

mind as a vehicle guiding their thinking and behaviour in their interactions with students, and the effect this has had. This will provide a rich source of material to tease out skilful ways of speaking and noticing students that may be further refined to provide a framework or guide for other teachers to use.

My hope is that in placing the focus of research on the often hidden and/or overlooked learning that occurs through daily interactions between students and teachers, the wider field of research on the construct of Key Competencies will be broadened to include all that happens in schools as sites of learning. In doing so, teachers will be further resourced to educate, to draw out from learners those capacities that enable them to live, learn and interact in the world in full and rich ways.

### References

- Kotze, E., Crocket, K., Hughes, C., Burke, A., & Graham, J. (2013). Key competencies and school guidance counselling: Learning alongside communities of support. *Teachers and Curriculum, 13*, 26–32.