Waikato Journal of Education 15, Issue 1:2010

CONNECTING KEY COMPETENCIES AND SOCIAL INQUIRY IN PRIMARY SOCIAL STUDIES PEDAGOGY: INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' PLANNING DECISIONS AND REFLECTIONS

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ABSTRACT *Over 2007–2009 we have worked with the national curriculum's key competencies to establish their place and purpose in the social sciences learning area. As a result, our initial teacher education (ITE) primary social studies programmes involve pedagogy that conceives key competencies as analogous to social inquiry thinking and skills processes. Our team was keen to research ways ITE students identify and embed key competencies in their social inquiry planning decisions. The research also sought student reflection of how engagement with key competencies might influence their future social studies teaching and learning. The article offers a storying of ways the curriculum element of key competencies has been developed, implemented, researched and reflected upon within ITE primary social studies curriculum.*

KEYWORDS

Key competencies, social studies curriculum, teaching and learning,

INTRODUCTION

The term *key competency* (KC) is a relatively new term in education policy and curriculum literature. The word *competency*, however, has a longer history. It emerged in United States education in the 1960s and 70s alongside the behavioural objectives movement. Behavioural objectives were designed to be measured in terms of the competencies a student needed to demonstrate. In this context competencies were measurement dominated (Mager, 1962). The behavioural objectives movement was very controversial and as a consequence of the debate associated with this, the value of the concept of competencies suffered (Simons, 1973).

The KCs need to be seen as different from the earlier emphasis upon competencies as discrete and specific skills or behaviours as in the behavioural objectives movement. In contrast, the KCs described in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) are clusters of skills and abilities. The concept of key competencies became important in Australian education following the work of the Karmel, Finn and Mayer committees between 1985 and 1992 (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2003). In Europe the concept has been a subject

of discussion and debate since the late 1980s (Oates, 2002). In 1998 the OECD countries launched the *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies Project* (DeSeCo) to identify and describe key competencies. The project published its findings as a framework identifying nine competencies clustered in three groups

- *using tools interactively*: language, symbols and texts; knowledge and information; technology;
- *interacting in heterogeneous groups*: relate well to others; co-operate, work in teams; manage and resolve conflicts; and
- *acting autonomously*: seeing the big picture; planning and project management; asserting rights, interests, limits and needs.
  (OECD, 2005)

In New Zealand the key competencies had their origins in the eight essential skills identified during a major curriculum review in the mid 1980s (Department of Education, 1987). These skills were finally published in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993). The authors of the *Curriculum Stocktake Report* reviewed the outcomes of the curriculum derived from the framework (Ministry of Education, 2002) and recommended that the existing essential skills should be modified from the current organisation of fifty-seven essential skills in eight groupings to six essential skills and attitudes along with the motivation and discernment to use these skills. The six recommended were: creative and innovative thinking; participation and contribution in communities; relating to others; reflecting on learning; developing self-knowledge; and making meaning from information. These were worked on through the process of developing the revised curriculum and were finally published as

- thinking;
- using language, symbols and text;
- managing self;
- relating to others; and
- participating and contributing.
  (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12)

The key competencies are enshrined in *The New Zealand Curriculum* as one of the five "directions for learning" set by the national curriculum for English-medium learning years one to thirteen. The other four are vision, values, principles and learning areas. The first four of these directions are set in six pages at the very front of the curriculum. The learning areas are English, arts, health and physical education, languages, mathematics and statistics, science, social sciences and technology. The social sciences learning area focuses on the subjects of social studies (from years 1-10) and social studies, geography, history and economics in years 11-13.

In *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) social studies in the social sciences learning area places strong emphasis on social inquiry. We perceive this as an overarching approach that includes elements of social studies conceptualised in national social sciences curriculum since the 1970s (Barr, Graham, Hunter, Keown & McGee, 1997; Mutch, Hunter, Milligan, Openhaw &

Siteine, 2008) and developed in depth in the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997; Ministry of Education, 1998). These elements are familiar to us as social knowledge dimensions for thinking, social skills processes of inquiry, values, and decision-making, and as dispositions of attitudes and reflexivity. In Hunter's social sciences research (2005) an attempt was made to align key competencies with these familiar elements: "Key competencies are already explicit and implicit within elements of the learning area's conceptual framework and subject studies assessment for learning frameworks e.g. *National Education Monitoring Project* exemplars, *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* standards …" (Hunter, 2005, p. 22). We view key competencies as analogous to social inquiry, and therefore identifiable and "in play" in social studies planning and pedagogy. In our social studies work it has proved helpful to conceive of the key competencies as active student-centred processes and dispositions. Therefore, we visualise a social studies thinker; a user of language symbols and texts; a relator to others; a manager of self, and a participator and contributor.

As ITE teachers with a responsibility to prepare pre-service teachers for the post–2010 curriculum environment we considered it important to connect with the key competencies in our degree paper on the teaching and learning of social studies. The national curriculum suggests that the KCs should be used and developed "across the range of learning areas" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 38). This paper outlines the ways in which we connected key competencies and social inquiry in primary social studies and how pre-service teachers responded to this initiative. Our work was informed by our involvement in the development of the New Zealand curriculum over 2003–2007. Paul Keown researched values in the curriculum (Keown, Parker & Tiakiwai, 2005) and was a member of the Ministry of Education Curriculum Reference Group. Pip Hunter was involved with researching key competencies in the social sciences and in co-researching and writing a social sciences position paper (Hunter, 2005; Mutch, et al., 2008). Jill Wynyard trialled and developed social studies exemplars (Ministry of Education, 2005; Sewell, et al., 2005). These research initiatives have influenced our decisions about the design and pedagogy of social sciences curriculum papers for over three years.

How then do pre-service teachers engage with, and reflect on their understandings of key competencies in social studies? To story this, this article is developed in three parts. First, the research study design is contextualised within ITE social studies curriculum. Second, methods of data analysis are explained and key themes identified and exemplified by drawing on students' voices. Third, students' emerging ideas and thinking are discussed in light of our professional practice of social studies curriculum.

CONTEXTUALISING KEY COMPETENCIES IN ITE PRIMARY SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM PROGRAMMES

The team's social studies primary and secondary papers (undergraduate and graduate) have been designed over the past three years to model and develop pedagogy envisioned by *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Minstry of Education, 1997), and the social sciences best evidence synthesis iteration (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008). The decision to focus on key competencies in the research project was informed by ongoing evaluation of social studies pedagogy experienced in teaching programmes (2006–2009). The research involved a team approach to the task of examining ways ITE students identify and embed the key competencies in their social inquiry thinking. This was contextualised in a compulsory first year curriculum paper *Learning and Teaching Social Studies*, involving a cohort of graduate and undergraduate students from Hamilton and Tauranga campuses.

The paper's ongoing development has involved the compilation of a comprehensive set of readings to support and challenge students' social sciences thinking and practice. These readings were introduced in lectures and to ground workshop learning activities. Online guidance for independent readings work proved helpful for students' assessment and evaluative activities. Readings focused on the nature, purpose, and rationale of social studies (for example, Barr et al, 1997; Gilbert, 1996; Mutch, 2002; National Council for Social Studies, 1994), and pedagogy, perspectives and critical dimensions (for example, Daley, 2004; Gilbert, 2004; Keown, 1998; Sewell et al., 2005; Wendt-Samu, 2004). A set of articles focusing on social sciences literacies—historical, geographical, political, economic and cultural (Hoepper, 2006; Bliss, 2006; Gilbert, 2006; Forsyth, 2006; Mueller, 2006)—proved particularly helpful for conceptual work. Materials to inform key competencie*s* in social sciences (Hunter, 2005), and monitoring of social studies assessment assisted students (National Educational Monitoring Project, 2005) were included along with social studies exemplars (Ministry of Education 2005) and New Zealand curriculum support materials *Building Conceptual Understandings in the Social Sciences* (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b).

The paper consisted of two-hour weekly workshops, lectures, teaching experiences in local normal schools, online readings guidance, discussion and reflection. The teaching involved in-depth focus on the social sciences essence statement in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and the knowledge dimension of social inquiry. This involved thinking about concepts in relation to Levels 1–4 achievement objectives. Students then identified possible and appropriate contexts and settings for social inquiry. We supported this with teaching applications that developed the processes and skills of inquiry, values exploration, and social decision-making.

Once this learning was in place, the students were encouraged to think about their own pedagogy, through a further "layering" to introduce the key competencies. Students had worked with the key competencies as a generic set of capabilities for living and lifelong learning in their professional studies paper, but had not contextualised them in a specific learning area. Students were now given the opportunity to examine the complexity of the KCs and the relationship with

social studies pedagogy through a multi-layered approach, as they aligned the nature of the competencies to the social studies planning and teaching process. In summary, the teaching team deliberately introduced the KCs in a way that encouraged meaningful engagement, drawing on students' developing knowledge and understanding of their own social studies pedagogy.

Study Design

First semester student teachers in our 2009 social studies undergraduate and graduate classes completed an assessment task that explored their thinking about key competencies and social studies pedagogy following the work done of this in class and in teaching plans. The assessment task provided a means to collecting evidence to answer the following two research questions

- How do student teachers identify key competencies in their social studies teaching and learning?
- How does engagement with key competencies influence student teachers' thinking about future social studies teaching and learning?

Data gathering to inform the research was an assignment. Ethical approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent from the students was sought in accordance with University regulations.

The assessment task required students to reflect on their developing understandings of social studies by firstly writing a statement explaining what the key competencies meant for social studies teaching and learning. They then described how they planned for one key competency to be embedded into social studies learning and social inquiry through two social studies lessons taught in local normal schools. They also explained how engaging with the key competencies influenced their thinking about future social studies teaching, and how the key competencies might be considered in future social studies teaching.

Altogether, 213 scripts were received from three different classes and marked by paper tutors. We, as researchers, did not take part in this marking. The scripts with marks attached were then forwarded to a research assistant who drew a representative sample of 50 scripts across the class groups and across the achievement range. All names and marks were then removed and the 50 sample scripts returned to us for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed grounded and mixed methods techniques (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, 2000). The research was grounded in the sense that we were initially open-minded in our approach by seeking to identify main trends emerging from the data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) A selection of scripts was reviewed by each of us to identify key themes and trends evident in the scripts. We then meet to discuss ideas about a suitable a coding protocol for a full analysis of the scripts (Cohen, et al., 2000). The key items for analysis were identified as follows (student refers to student teacher)

- The way students initially identified and expressed their understanding of key competencies (KC) and ways in which they related these to the social inquiry approach (SIA), (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30);
- The selections students made of a particular KC to embed in their social studies planning;
- The selections students made of social studies contexts and strands for their planning;
- The particular responses students made in recognising and explaining links between the KCs and the SIA;
- The responses of students about the way they would use the KCs in social studies in the future, given the experience of completing this task; and
- Any other items of interest commonly raised.

We then used these six key coding headings to collect detailed data from the scripts under each heading. Again this was done using a grounded approach to allow trends to emerge from the data. Following this we met for a second time to review emerging findings and to establish sub-codes within each of the six main code headings. For example, under heading two, which KC each student embedded in their lessons was recorded using five second level coding categories, one for each KC. Thus researchers were able to identify and record the number of students who chose a particular KC to embed within their lesson. A similar code and count analysis was used in each of the six major categories above (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). Once we had identified the main sub-coding categories all scripts were reviewed again and a full code and count analysis was completed. While at this point the coding was relatively settled we were still open to the possibility that new categories could emerge from the data as the detailed analysis continued. Thus the grounded nature of the analysis was respected at all points of the data analysis.

At the same time each of us identified typical student comments exemplifying main themes and trends. These comments were highlighted so they could be used to provide further insight into the nature of student thinking about the main coded themes and ideas. We then selected the best illustrative quotations to be used to elaborate main findings. These main findings and some key illustrative quotations are presented in the next section.

EMERGING THEMES

1. Students' identification and understandings of Key Competencies in Social Studies

We introduced students to the key competencies about mid-way through the social studies paper including a lecture, practical workshop activities, and independent readings work. Emerging findings show that students confidently identified KCs in the generic sense as introduced in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 12–13). Many acknowledged the social orientation of KCs as highly relevant in the micro-world of the classroom, and reflected understandings of our conception of social studies learners. The cohort generally understood the

transferable nature of KCs to children's interpretations of their wider worlds. A student commented on the nature of authentic social studies pedagogy that connects with real life experiences:

> It is important to work within a context that the students can relate to, and can be encouraged to show the KCs within real experiences that they can learn from and take with them outside the classroom by making decisions, taking action, and reflecting on the outcomes.

An interesting finding is that many students identified KCs by referring to activities they had experienced in the paper's pedagogy. They also drew on examples of activities planned for and facilitated in their own practice. Some students internalised the KCs in relation to personal learning and professional development, evidenced in a student's reflection of the thinking competency:

> I experienced critical in depth thinking while looking at the visual source of the Emigrant Ship to New Zealand, in our historical literacies class.

Similarly, students communicated what working with language, symbols, and texts involves in social studies:

> It is crucial for the children to learn how to read a map, a picture, a poem or for example, understand the symbols on a piece of tapa cloth.

> A group of us viewed a picture of a Tibetan family ... [we] were asked to analyse it and decide on what items in the picture the family would consider most precious ...

Identification of the managing self KC was reflected in a student's transference of KCs to their own learning, and another identified the KC in relation to a workshop activity where students were involved in making a Kupesi (Tongan pattern board):

> Throughout the social studies lectures we have our own independent work set out where we conduct a "can-do" attitude. It is a powerful key competency as teachers can look at their students' self-motivation and what triggers their class and the different views people hold.

> This involved [us] in constructing a frame out of cardboard and other materials. Students displayed self-management skills whilst making and designing their own pattern board.

Relating to others in social studies was commonly identified as having a strong values dimension. One student cited an example of this by referring to an article about historical literacy in social studies (Hoepper, 2006) included in the paper's readings. In the article, the author discusses the Hitler Youth movement in relation to human relationships and values:

> The article shows how the teacher should encourage children to consider the different sides of the story to understand the event

> objectively and develop empathy for the protagonists. This helps to explore different values.

Participating and contributing was not clearly identified as a discrete KC in social studies. Students generally saw this as "what we do in social studies." This thinking is reflected in a student's planning intentions:

> In lesson one on belonging to families, children will be involved in interaction and intra-action. This builds up the children's sense of belonging within the classroom or group, their confidence to participate, and the importance of contributing.

It appears that students identified participating and contributing as a learning disposition that involves wider thinking about the nature of social studies.

2. Selecting a KC to Embed in Planning

When asked to plan for a key competency to be embedded in social studies planning and the social inquiry focus, the students chose overwhelmingly to focus on either thinking or relating to others. When other competencies were considered at the initial planning stage, the competency of thinking was strongly present as the primary competency, supported by one or more of the other competencies. The least referred to competency across the cohort to emerge from the data was understanding language, symbols and text.

Through their readings and workshop activities and discussions, the students understood that teachers make differing decisions about selecting or emphasising certain competencies for particular social studies contexts and activities. Decisions were made based on the social focus and conceptual understandings at the time of planning, which assisted the planning process and developing the skills, and values of the key competency. However, when faced with planning for their own lessons they commented on the complexity of the task:

> I found it easy to try and include all of the key competencies in my lessons, but then the lessons became very complex and hard to understand ... perhaps I need to concentrate on developing only one or two key competencies and one or two significant concepts and develop other competencies and other concepts in future lessons

Although students were asked to plan for one key competency to be embedded in their social studies teaching and they identified them separately, they could see that these competencies were a holistic "package" and not necessarily a "stand-alone" feature of planning and teaching. One student commented that

> A competency such as language is essential to social studies, but teaching it as a "stand-alone" does not make it social studies. This was a trap that I partially fell into in my lessons when I taught skills or included KCs without a unifying focus.

Another student also reflected on viewing the KCs as a "whole":

> Engaging with the KCs has allowed me to see how the KCs as a whole group are a useful tool for filtering teaching concepts

> through. I could see how each KC is somehow a foundational skill for effective learning, and how students who can use these competencies will be better equipped to deal with all learning situations and general life situations.

3. Locating KCs in Social Studies contexts and Strands

Student teachers chose a very wide range of contexts for their planning, so wide that it was difficult to identify clear trends. However, it was possible to group the contexts and settings chosen into the four strands of the social studies curriculum: identity, culture and organisation (ICO); place and environment (PE); continuity and change (CC), and the economic world (EW) (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30). The selected contexts were frequently associated with ICO (16) and PE (13). The other two strands were less popular; CC (7) and EW (5). Some students found it difficult to limit their embedding to just one strand and chose to use two. This is not surprising as the achievement objectives for social studies in the 2007 curriculum are integrated rather than exclusive to a strand.

In discussing the reasons why they chose to link particular KCs to particular strands students used a wide variety of justifications that were usually connected to how to get a best fit. Students had worked on possible contexts in previous work and so it was more a question of selecting a KC to go with a context rather than the reverse. For example, one student noted that that nature of their context which focussed on concepts and ideas of leadership, hierarchy, responsibility and identity was ideally suited to the KC *thinking*:

> Students given the chance to think about their thinking by discussing the issues of leadership and hierarchy ... students are involved in social decision making to show an understanding of the concepts and ideas of leadership, hierarchy, responsibility and identity.

Another who used a geographic context the, Te Wairoa district in the East Cape region, commented that this created opportunities to develop aspects of the KC working with language, symbols and text:

> The key competency is contextualised within the social inquiry approach by utilising a number of activities within the task in which students are required to source information, collate, analyse and display data. With the use of maps, pictures and books children are exposed to different language, symbols, and texts. Children design their own map of the Te Wairoa area.

4. Connecting Key Competencies and Social Inquiry

In the national curriculum a major social sciences aim is "... how people can participate as critical, active, informed and responsible citizens" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30). As the KCs are socially orientated students recognise their resonance with social inquiry because both embody the participatory nature and civic efficacy purpose of social studies in the curriculum. Some students viewed participation in social inquiry as supporting learning communities. Many student

teachers thought of social studies as significant for children's KCs development because of the possibilities for "real life" and valid pedagogy, as shown in this range of comments.

> The goal of the key competencies is to create good well-rounded citizens to make citizenship a reality for children, even from Level 1 of the NZC, as it shows to them that they are already a part of society and can engage in meaningful ways with it.
>
> During social inquiry students are able to appreciate and evaluate how individual people and groups of people in the past and present have participated and contributed to their society.
>
> Social inquiry is about asking the question "what is it?" values inquiry is asking "what do I think about it?" and social action is asking "what will I do?: Working with the KCs analyses children's understandings, participation and contribution to every community they are involved in. It enables students to critically think about issues within these communities and evaluate if the practices are appropriate and sustainable.

A prominent emergent finding is that the KCs focus students' attention on perspectives thinking, values analysis, ethics, and reflexive aspects of the SIA. Over a third of the cohort commented on ways the thinking KC offers direction for criticality in Social Inquiry and is seen as a helpful means to evaluate personal social studies curriculum decisions. Many students perceived the thinking KC as a significant dimension of Social Inquiry:

> Students need to have this thinking in order to have a conceptual understanding of society and be able to fully participate in it.

Research findings reveal a majority of students identified a strong connection between processes of values thinking in Social Inquiry, and the relating to others KC. Interestingly, this connection was mostly articulated through references to cultural contexts and ideas:

> Relating to others in social studies is an important aspect of the social inquiry, values inquiry, and the social decision making process .... Relating to others involves cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in society. Students who relate well to others are aware that words and actions have consequences for others.

Students also integrated KCs within Social Inquiry when evaluating their own planning decisions and questioning the "so what" of their pedagogy for themselves and others. Some found the KCs a useful evaluative device and a kind of checklist for considering balance, contextual choices, and ensuring active social studies.

5. Using the KCs in Future Social Studies Teaching

Student teachers reflected on how their experiences in the paper and working with the KCs embedded in social inquiry might influence their future social studies teaching. They identified a number of ideas that indicated thoughtful, informed and forward thinking responses. Students saw themselves as learners who reflected on their own personal and professional development in relation to the KCs. A number of students reflected on how they, as future teachers, could be considered as social studies thinkers, users of language, symbols and text, self-managers, relaters to others and social studies participators and contributors. One student thought that the process had been "validating for me as a teacher and a learner".

A heightened enthusiasm for teaching social studies in the future was expressed by a number of students, particularly when aligning their social studies teaching pedagogy to the KC of thinking. They reflected on the connection between aspects of the social inquiry approach, the KC and their own emerging position as teachers of social studies. They examined their own social studies learning and social thinking, and thought about how they might integrate the KCs to reinforce attitudes, values and decision making through exciting and relevant social contexts. One student, when analysing how her children had challenged perceptions of Kiwi identity, observed that

> A powerful social studies classroom using an inquiry approach can create opportunities for thinking and views to be challenged and possibly changed in a positive and respectful environment. Thinking should be generated by students with guidance from the teacher so that students can build up their own views and knowledge using the social inquiry approach to learning.

Understanding the KCs helped emphasise the holistic, inter-related and inter connected nature of social studies learning when students reflected on transferring KCs to other aspects of life. They could articulate how the KCs are intended to foster lifelong learning through aligning social studies knowledge, understandings, skills, attitudes and values in relevant social contexts and authentic real life situations:

> It is important to work within a context that the children can relate to and that they can see the links to the KCs within real experiences that they can learn from and take with them outside the classroom. I like the idea of building on competencies and skills children will need when they are adults participating in society.

Labelling and sharing the key competencies with children was an aspect that a number of student teachers thought worthy of consideration for their future teaching. As the student teachers had developed an awareness of the effectiveness of sharing and displaying social studies learning intentions with children, many also mentioned the power of labelling and sharing the key competency focus for each lesson they taught. They saw benefit in sharing information with their own students. Higher motivation and task orientation resulted when the purpose of the lesson and

the competencies that were contextualised in the lesson content were shared. Lessons were more effective (Clarke, 2001) and one student reflected that

> I will make sure that I draw attention to the competency a lot more. I think it needs to be explicitly stated to the students, so that they know what the focus and purpose is for that lesson. This can be done at the same time that we are sharing the learning intentions.

Another commented that

> Labelling the KCs near the start of the lesson will actually help to deepen students' understanding of the social studies concepts and perhaps allow them to take more ownership of them.

A number of students thought that lesson planning in social studies should address the needs of the learners not only in the conceptual development and skill processes through the social inquiry approach, but in the inclusion of the key competencies that should go "hand in hand" at the initial thinking and planning stage. This would address the needs of the learners in terms of the key competencies being contextualised through social studies contexts that were relevant to their lives. They observed that perhaps the key competencies needed to be embedded in the planning from the outset. One student concluded that

> Unfortunately, even though I had planned for relating to others to be a focus competency, most of the work ended up being independent work as I had added on the key competency as an afterthought and it did not fit in with my lesson plan focus.

It was interesting that a student wondered about whether the key competencies should be levelled the same way as the achievement objectives, and whether or not it was important for students to be able to "show progression within a key competency over time". The student also thought about assessment of the KCs so that the next steps could be planned to address students' needs. These ideas were not discussed at all in the taught paper, but indicated the students' willingness to think about aspects outside the framework of the paper content.

DISCUSSION

The results presented above make it clear that student teachers were able to readily connect all of the KCs to social studies, given that there was variability. The pre-service teachers also found that the KCs could "fit" with any and all of the knowledge strands, concepts and contexts of social studies. However, many found it difficult to restrict their use of the KCs in social studies to just one. They found that the overlap between KCs frequently meant they were using and developing two or even more of the KCs at the same time. This is not an unexpected finding, for in the national curriculum the correctedness is acknowledged. That is, the KCs are not "stand alone" but closely interrelated and overlapping (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). Further, as discussed later, a lack of clear and stable understanding of KCs at this point in time is probably also a factor. We argue that this study suggests focussing on one KC and deliberately infusing aspects of it into their planning

helped pre-service teachers get a better understanding of what the KCs are and how to integrate them in social studies.

Their experience in applying the KCs in social studies led student teachers to conclude that the KCs and social studies shared the goal of helping students become confident, informed, responsible and participating citizens. Again, given the way the KCs have been constructed in NZC, this is not surprising. NZC notes that "people use these competencies to live, learn, work and contribute as active members of their communities" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). Interestingly this addresses an idea that has been the subject of debate in curriculum theory over many years. Should the citizenship goal in education be "infused" throughout a curriculum, or should it be "carried" by specific subjects or learning areas, such as social studies? The way the KCs have been constructed and way that the curriculum emphasises the interconnectedness of the different "directions for learning" in the curriculum means that both are important. This research shows that in applying the KCs to social studies pre-service teachers could see the logic and the practicality of combining both the overarching curriculum concept of the KCs and the knowledge and process used in social studies to meet citizenship education goals.

Indeed, another key finding is that student teachers consider the KCs to be very similar to the kinds of things that are done in social studies. One noted: "the KCs *are* what we do in social studies". In other words there was a strong feeling that the KCs and social studies were mutually reinforcing, the development of one helped achieve the goals of the other. An outcome of this, and the whole experience of connecting the KC to social studies created a heightened sense of confidence and enthusiasm in student teachers. Because these two dimensions of the curriculum were clearly on the same wavelength student teachers seemed to feel reassured and strengthened. Most concluded that making a deliberate effort to include at least one KC in the planning of social studies lessons was beneficial. Indeed the perceived benefits were such that most concluded they would aim to do this future planning on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

International literature has pointed out that the KCs have been quite unstable over the 30-year period in which they have been debated and investigated (Oates, 2002; OECD, 2005). Not only is there a considerable difference in the way different countries and groups have selected and defined KCs, there has also been considerable change in nature of the selections and the definitions in individual jurisdictions over time, including terminology. Hunter (2005) has outlined the way this has played out in the case of New Zealand. The publication of the New Zealand curriculum in 2007 has made selection and the definitions clear for New Zealand over the next decade or so, However, at the moment the key competencies are really just a set of theoretical constructs. The journey has just begun. Schools and teachers will need to think about, work with and reflect on the key competencies for some time before a stable shared understanding can be achieved. We argue that the kind of activity reported in this paper is one important step toward understanding. If ITE institutions and teachers are grappling with the issues of how to implement the KCs in specific learning areas before teachers join the profession, new teachers will

bring ideas and experiences with them that can assist in establishing shared understanding and thus a stabilisation of the KCs.

Prominent curriculum scholar Lester Flockton refers to *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) as "the connected curriculum." By asking student teachers to show how the KCs and the social sciences can be connected through a deliberate attempt to build the KCs into lesson plans and actively teach and develop them through the social sciences, we are asking student teachers to connect two different parts of the curriculum (the KCs and a learning area). In doing this student teachers were gaining insight into the way one learning area (in this case social studies) is a vehicle or context through which overall curriculum goals can be achieved. However, at the same time we (both student teachers and curriculum lecturers) also found that doing this enhanced social studies goals. The results show clearly that student teachers both reinforced and developed in greater depth key aspects of social studies learning. In this case student teachers gained an enhanced understanding of the social inquiry approach. We suggest that other curriculum areas might want to explore a similar approach and may find similar benefits.

Further we would argue that it is likely that student teachers would gain similar benefits in being asked to formally connect other key "directions" or elements of New Zealand curriculum to specific curriculum areas. Our evidence suggests that effective connections could be made between values, principles and the curriculum vision and other aspects of curriculum. Understanding of the curriculum as a whole should be enhanced by such connections. Student teachers should come to see how one learning area contributes to the achievement of overall curriculum goals.

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