



A framework for developing action competence in education for sustainability (EfS)

Facilitator guide

The purposes of the framework

There are three main purposes for the framework:

1. **Clarifying what is meant by the term “action competence” in EfS**—it provides six aspects thought to be important in developing action competence in EfS, and explains what these aspects are.
2. **Helping teachers and their EfS facilitators to develop student action competence in EfS**—based on the aspects it identifies what learners and teachers might do in order to develop student action competence in EfS.
3. **Identifying evidence by which teachers could assess development of student action competence in EfS**—it identifies possible evidence that may be used by teachers to assess the development of action competence in their students.

The aspects of the framework

The framework identifies six aspects for the development of student action competence in EfS. These aspects have been explored through research in several New Zealand primary and secondary schools. Evidence has been found that each aspect is a factor in developing student action competence in EfS. The six aspects are supported in the literature and the learning of each aspect is grounded in the five key competencies found in *The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)*. Research evidence has found that the six aspects within this framework promote fruitful discussion about the action and cognitive capabilities of learners working to achieve the action outcomes of education for sustainability. It is recognised that EfS should promote a holistic approach to learning, and our purpose in isolating the six aspects has **not** been to suggest that each can stand alone. Rather it has meant to help identify the many aspects that must be developed together to foster action competence.

The following comments help in interpreting the action competence framework. The framework should be used with schools with guided facilitation. The framework describes six aspects for action competence development. Our current thinking is that we want

teachers to see that the key competencies in the *NZC* can also be developed through the development of action competence, indicating synergies and reducing concerns over extra work.

The framework has the following features:

- There are six aspects of action competence: experience, reflection, knowledge, vision for a sustainable future, action taking for sustainability, and connectedness. There is a full explanation of each aspect below.
- Each aspect has a definition underneath it to demonstrate our thinking about it.
- Each aspect has an explanation which seeks to orient the teachers' thinking within the frame of sustainability. The explanation can be shared with teachers as part of the facilitation process as the need arises.
- Each aspect has been considered for what the learner and the teacher might do in developing the aspect, and a brief description is provided as an overview.
- Each learner and teacher section has a number of suggestions of learning experiences and teaching approaches that you may wish foster in the school and to consider and observe when you collect and analyse any data.
- Within the learner sections, the letters in brackets refer to the key competencies (T = thinking, U = using language, symbols and text, MS = managing self, R = relating to others, PC = participating and contributing). This has been done to show possible connections between the action competence framework and the key competencies. You may see other connections or alter the connections through your work.
- As teachers and schools approach the development of student action competence and its assessment, the framework offers suggestions of where to look for evidence of demonstration of each aspect in their students.

The six aspects

1. **Experience.** The development of action competence requires students to have experiences from which to draw upon to understand, and develop attitudes and values towards, the environment. Teachers can draw on these experiences and help establish connections for students in guiding them to take action (*NZC*, p. 34). A key task is to enhance learning from those experiences through reflection.
2. **Reflection.** The development of action competence requires students to reflect on and in their experiences and actions. Teachers can help students develop critical reflection practices that can help them understand what and how they learn they learn (*NZC*, p. 9), and develop strategies for future experiences and actions (*NZC*, p. 34). Reflection is essential to make the connections between thinking, feeling and acting. It stems from a democratic process of participation in which students decide for themselves the action they will take. This requires a range of skills in critical and reflective thinking combining knowledge and personal experience that considers the

3. **Knowledge.** The development of action competence requires students to gain develop knowledge and understanding of the sustainability issues so that the actions they take are well informed. (*NZC*, p. 8). Teachers can help students identify and build on prior knowledge and provide strategies for lifelong learning (*NZC*, p. 34). Taking action for sustainability requires an understanding of the underlying causes of the issues being addressed. Therefore, knowledge should be developed in an integrated approach. It should include finding and analysing factual/scientific information, social, cultural and historical views and exploring alternative ways of doing things from these perspectives.
4. **Visions for a sustainable future.** The development of action competence requires students to know what they would like the action they take to achieve. Teachers can help students understand their place in the world, give voice to their hopes and guide them in exploring alternatives for change (*NZC*, p. 8). A vision for the future can be developed by examining social, environmental, economic and political influences through past and present actions, identifying issues and problems and developing a vision that reflects how you would like things to be, what they might look like, and what your fears and concerns might be about the future.
5. **Action taking for sustainability.** The development of action competence requires students to be able and willing to take effective action for sustainability (*NZC* pp. 8-9). Teachers can help students connect their experiences and their thinking to doing (*NZC*, p. 34). The action could be direct or indirect and be aimed at addressing the cause of a sustainability issue. Direct actions contribute to solving environmental problems, whereas indirect actions are those which seek to influence others to contribute to solving problems. Furthermore, Jensen (2004) and Uzzell (1999) argue that indirect actions involve “people to people” relationships, while direct actions refer to relationships between “people and the environment”. They emphasise that any action taken should be placed in the context of the problem to be solved and that children not only take action but also understand why they are taking that action. Therefore, action taking for the environment is when students take actions in ways that develop their competence for future action to solve or avoid environmental problems (Jensen, 2002).
6. **Connectedness.** The development of action competence requires students to understand that they are connected to other people and their environment (*NZC*, p. 8). Teachers can help students develop those connections by providing coherent pathways for learning (*NZC*, p. 9) that integrates knowledge from different learning areas but also by helping students to acknowledge their attitudes and values, and how they are linked to their behaviour. It includes understanding the interdependence of environment and societal aspects such as culture and social needs. It includes the connectedness within the learner’s own aspects of action competence, *and* the learner’s connectedness to other people and the environment.