



Beyond the 3R's

Competencies that matter



Summary

- Public education plays a central role in ensuring that the next generation is equipped to address the complex social, economic, and environmental challenges that the world is facing.
- There is broad acknowledgement that students need competencies beyond literacy and numeracy.
- Developing competencies in the domains of health, creativity, citizenship, and social-emotional learning provides students with the skills they need to live happy, healthy, economically secure, civically engaged lives.
- In order to ensure that our public education system can develop students' capacities in these domains, the competencies within them must be specifically defined, and must be understood as teachable and learnable.
- The school environment itself – the opportunities and conditions that support these areas of learning – plays an essential role in ensuring students' overall success.

com·pe·ten·cy (n.):

An ability to meet complex demands by drawing on combined skills, knowledge, processes, behaviours, and habits of mind.

The domains

We have identified five key domains that are essential for student success:

- health
- citizenship
- creativity
- social-emotional learning
- quality learning environments

Each of these domains includes specific competencies and conditions.

The movement toward global competencies

Around the world, educators, policy-makers, and experts agree that student success in both school and life consists of much more than literacy and numeracy skills and academic content knowledge (e.g. UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2015; Winthrop & McGivney, 2016). Students need to develop skills, competencies, and knowledge in social-emotional development, creativity, citizenship, and health (e.g. Christensen & Lane, 2016; OECD, 2016). Research also indicates that the school environment itself – the opportunities and conditions that support these areas of learning – plays an essential role in ensuring students' overall success (Bascia, 2014).

A number of education systems are moving to embed competencies into curricula, outcome expectations, and assessment strategies. Québec (Québec, 2007), British Columbia (BC, 2016), Alberta (Alberta, 2011), and Finland (Finland, 2016) have all moved in this direction.

Expanding goals to meet an expanding need

The shift to expand the goals of education systems is fuelled by changes worldwide:

- The automation of jobs, the growth of information technology, and the reality of a global economy have heightened international focus on preparing students for success in a knowledge economy, for job flexibility, and for frequent career re-orientation (e.g. Christensen & Lane, 2015; Winthrop & McGivney, 2016).
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all” (which Canada committed to in 2015), have increased global focus on broad competencies, including global citizenship education (e.g. UNESCO, 2015; UN, 2016).
- International recognition that education systems can and should have the capacity to support child well-being and health (e.g. UNICEF, 2015; WHO, n.d.).

The private and public good

Shifting the goals of education serves a two-fold purpose, embracing both the private and the public good inherent in strong public education systems:

- to ensure that every young person has the competencies required to navigate a complex world, and to live a happy, healthy, economically secure, and civically engaged life.
- to ensure that Canada has the engaged citizens, the imaginative thinkers, the strong workforce, and the equitable society it needs for a sustainable future.

Identifying what matters

After conducting reviews of international policy and research to identify key domains for young people's long-term success, People for Education recruited experts in each domain. The experts outlined why each domain matters for student success, where they are found in policy and curriculum, what critical competencies they include, how they can be cultivated, assessed and measured, and what conditions are necessary to support them (Bascia, 2014; Ferguson & Power, 2014; Sears, 2014; Shanker, 2014; Upitis, 2014).

While each domain has its own set of specifically defined, teachable and learnable competencies and/or conditions, the domains are interconnected, and the competencies identified in one are often linked to competencies named in another.

Creativity matters

Creativity competencies:

- are essential for success in a knowledge economy and in times of rapid change.
- are vital for critical thinking; collaboration on complex, ambiguous problems; adapting knowledge to new contexts; and using innovative, imaginative approaches to problem solving (Kare, Kim, Anderson, & Gustafsson-Wright, 2017).
- help students develop self-confidence, open-mindedness, and ambition (Feist, 1998); and are positively linked to academic achievement (Gajda, Karwowski & Beghetto, 2017).
- support students' capacity to evaluate products, ideas, and processes objectively (Upitis, 2014).
- apply across the curriculum—from arts to science to math.

Citizenship matters

Citizenship competencies:

- help students to become contributing members of a democratic society — members who know how to effect change, and understand themselves as part of a global community.
- enable people to work together empathetically and constructively — vital in a world with many diverse perspectives and cultures, and where many populations are struggling with polarization and ideologically driven extremism (OECD, 2016).

Health matters

Health competencies:

- build young people's capacity to make healthy choices, manage their mental health, and seek appropriate support for mental illness.
- lead to increased productivity, improved life expectancy, and greater capacity to cope with life's challenges; and can reduce the risk of chronic disease and mental illness (Ferguson & Power, 2014).
- help to create healthier populations, supporting an economically competitive workforce and reducing future health care costs.
- can be developed throughout the whole school environment, including the physical and social environment, community connections and partnerships, and policies (Rowling & Weist, 2004).

Social-emotional learning matters

Social-emotional competencies:

- support academic achievement, pro-social behaviour, mental health, and happiness (e.g. Caprara et al., 2008; Cicchetti, Ackerman, & Izard, 1995; Denham et al., 2001).
- allow people to establish self and social awareness in order to thrive in increasingly tenuous, rapidly changing environments (Kare et. al., 2017).
- are closely linked to the “soft skills” that employers consider essential to teamwork, communication, and collaboration.
- help students to develop appropriate strategies to solve problems, whether academic, personal, or social.

Learning environments matter

The opportunities, conditions, and resources that support learning play an essential role in ensuring students' overall success (Bascia, 2014).



The domains of health, social-emotional learning, citizenship, creativity, and quality learning environments are foundational to all learning. To reflect the centrality of these learning domains, we need a coherent and systemic approach to changes in curriculum, policy, accountability, resources, and assessment.

The OECD calls for change

Global Competence includes the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of global and intercultural issues; the ability to learn from and live with people from diverse backgrounds; and the attitudes and values necessary to interact respectfully with others.” (OECD, 2016, p. 1)

According to the OECD, one of the greatest needs in educational curriculum reform is finding “a new concept of growth” that measures beyond achievement in math, science, and literacy, and that addresses the competencies that students need to succeed in the current and future global economy.

The OECD calls for rapid curriculum evolution; for the creation of knowledge and understanding for the 21st century; for the rethinking of the skills, attitudes, and values that shape human behaviour; and for systems that enable students to achieve a set of competencies that will allow them to engage with and act in the world.

UN Sustainable Development Goal #4

The United Nations’ Sustainable

Development Goals came into force in 2016. These 17 goals work towards the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and span many topics including poverty, climate change, health, water, and economic growth.

Sustainable Development Goal #4 is to ensure inclusive and quality education for all, and promote lifelong learning:

“By 2030, ensure that all learners

acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” (UN, 2016)

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This work is supported by:



R HOWARD WEBSTER



THE HENRY H. SMITH
Charitable Foundation

