

Goal Setting to Shape NCEA into a great qualification for all New Zealanders.

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Introduction

Before writing this I asked some of my friends at uni about their experiences during NCEA. Feedback was positive, which made sense considering they all succeeded through the system and gained UE. However in talking to my friends about their lives in general I found that whilst many people had obtained success in high school, they weren't sure if they were now following a pathway they want to, with some not really enjoying their learning and concerned about the outcomes it will lead to. Recently lecturer told my class that over half of graduates from my degree don't go on to practice in the field we are studying, in reading articles about skills shortages in other work areas¹ after this, I began to wonder whether I would have taken a different path during high school had I known what I know now. Bearing this in mind, I developed a proposal to help NCEA encourage motivated and engaged learners each with their own goals and learning outcomes.

Rationale

Learning is a personal journey and it's different for everyone. NCEA's flexibility embodies this doctrine. It allows for a significant amount of personalisation and helps to ensure that the secondary school qualification attained by a student is one that they were engaged and interested in achieving, and therefore hopefully a qualification with a good result attached to it.

Criticism has been leveled at NCEA over the years due to its flexible nature. Flexibility has been viewed as a weakness that allows students to coast through secondary school and graduate underprepared for their future.² This has impacted NCEA's credibility amongst the public. Criticisms from universities that NCEA fails to properly prepare students for tertiary study also fuels this lack of credibility.³

By and large NCEA does produce quality graduates who can perform satisfactorily in whatever they go on to. This is a result of its flexible nature that allows students to choose learning to fit them as to ensure they're engaged. However, the criticism above must be acknowledged as symptomatic that some students on a learning journey through NCEA are not motivated and engaging with it. This can be seen in the number of 20-24 year olds who are not in education employment or training (NEET) which has consistently been above 10% for the past decade.⁴ If more students are better engaged by NCEA, then they will follow a pathway they desire and not end up NEET. It should also be acknowledged that engagement with education provides enfranchisement and meaning to youth. Logic follows that an education system which fails to do this may (alongside other societal factors) contribute towards broad societal issues, such as youth crime and New Zealand's high youth suicide rate.⁵

Aside from avoiding poorer attainment, being motivated is key to developing and possessing the qualities that facilitate good learning. A student who is motivated by NCEA will gain aptitude in organisation, critical thinking, working under pressure, and other skills.

¹Report Sounds Warning Bell on IT Skills Shortages. 18/12/17. Retrieved: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/99946471/report-sounds-warning-bell-on-it-skills-shortages>

²NCEA is damaging kids' learning and breaking teachers, thinktank report finds. 04/03/18. Retrieved: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/101824114/ncea-is-damaging-kids-learning-and-breaking-teachers-thinktank-report-finds?rm=m>

³NCEA system fails students, say Universities. 30/11/13. Retrieved: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11164854

⁴Labour Market Statistics: September 2017 quarter. 01/11/17. Retrieved:

http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/income-and-work/employment_and_unemployment/LabourMarketStatistics_HOTPSep17qtr.aspx

⁵Teenage Suicide. 17/10/17. Retrieved: https://www.oecd.org/els/family/CO_4_4_Teenage-Suicide.pdf

Students who are either not fazed by extrinsic motivation such as obtaining UE, and students who do not have an intrinsic motivation about their study can be identified as the types of students that NCEA needs to better motivate. I believe increased motivation among NCEA students as to lead to better engagement and more learning of a higher quality needs to come from a carrot, not a stick. NCEA should seek to kindle intrinsic motivation within its students in the form of a genuine love for the type of learning they are doing for NCEA, and also extrinsic motivation in the form of clear goals they want to achieve within NCEA, and goals further afield that NCEA is a stepping stone towards. Some proposals as part of the review such as a self-lead project during level one may have the effect of motivating and inspiring students in this way.⁶ Likewise, policies such as Labour's 'school leavers toolkit' which implements better careers counselling do so with the intent of creating big picture extrinsic motivation for students.⁷ However, no policy clearly has this as its goal or purpose. This proposal intends to create meaning and motivation for NCEA students by ensuring that they are engaged in their learning, and on their desired track towards something beyond NCEA. This proposal also intends to help students exploit motivation they develop to attain the best results possible.

It should be noted that there are many mechanisms other than assessment systems that can be used to better motivate students; most notably different curricula, and higher quality teaching. However, recognising that the challenge here is to shape NCEA specifically (not schooling broadly) to make it great for all New Zealanders, this proposal focuses only on how NCEA can be used to better engage and motivate students.

Proposal

A compulsory 'Goal Setting' course to be taken as part of NCEA level one. There will be two components to the course

Personalised Learning Plan (PLP)

- Students identify and explore their academic interests and broader goals for life. They use this knowledge to create a PLP outlining and justifying their course of study and goals for the rest of NCEA, what this will lead to beyond school, and why they want to pursue that. This plan is created in consultation with their goal setting teacher, careers counsellor, wider school community, and family.
- To develop the best PLP possible students may take part in work experience, other engagement with pathways they're interested in, as well as getting a feel for NCEA courses they wish to take (eg/ sitting in on classes).
- Emphasis is placed on students creating a plan and goals that will motivate them to want to come to school every day and give it their all, and look forward to their well mapped out options for the future.

Personalised Learning Strategy (PLS)

- Alongside developing their PLP, students will take into account their academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as other factors in their life that may pose a challenge to achieving their goals.
- Students will be provided with self-management strategies that they can incorporate in their PLS to ensure it provides them with ways to handle issues they anticipate such as procrastination, stress, anxiety.

⁶ Creating space at NCEA level one for powerful learning. Retrieved: <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-have-your-say/big-opportunities-he-aria-nui/big-opp-1/>

⁷ Labour's Education Manifesto. Retrieved: <https://www.labour.org.nz/educationmanifesto>

- Students can explore what type of learning and study processes are best for them, utilising these to attain better achievement throughout NCEA.
- Applying a PLS to their learning will allow students to be more resilient and stay motivated and engaged upon their learning and goals.

Both of these pieces of work will be internally assessed, and will be the only assessment for the course. This will be the full ambit of ‘goal setting’ provided by NCEA, but schools may wish to take this further, using the PLP and PLS as a basis for further mentoring from teachers and career counsellors through high school to ensure students remain motivated and engaged, potentially amending a PLP or PLS if it is no longer satisfying a student.

This proposal could be incorporated alongside the project proposed at level one as part of *Big Opportunity #1* with work experience or other research for PLP/PLS crossing over with a project. Potentially experiences in doing a project could help inform a PLP/PLS.

Background

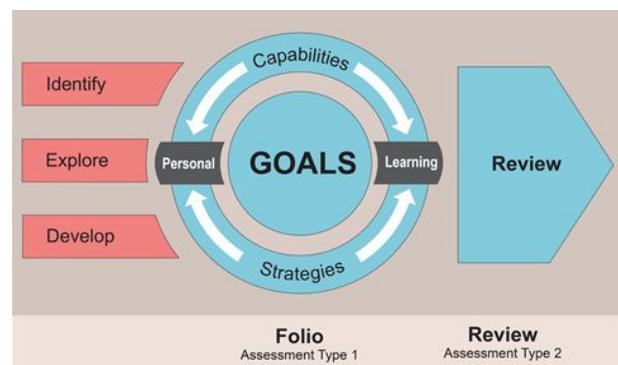
In its simplest form, a learning plan sets out ways to make learning happen, and the type of learning that is going to happen.⁸ We already see learning plans in New Zealand schools in the form of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for special needs students, developed between schools and parents to ensure the needs of a student are met.⁹ Following the same vein; all students have unique personal learning needs and desires that should be catered to and planned for, therefore all student should have a learning plan..

In the United States, ‘Individual Learning Plans’ are a mandatory requirement for graduation in 25 states, with the intention of an ILP being to assess a student’s learning needs and assist them with functioning in a standardised ‘one size fits all’ curriculum.¹⁰

NCEA is not a one size fits all curriculum, and the purpose of this proposal is not to assist students of a variety of shapes with fitting into a square mould. However in a flexible NCEA curriculum, a PLP can still serve the purpose of ensuring the student and their learning are meshing together as best as possible.

The closest real world example to this proposal can be seen as part of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). A compulsory course is taken by all students in the year prior to beginning their two year qualification called ‘Personalised Learning Plan’. In this course students investigate possible career choices and pathways practically and in the classroom, and set out a plan to work towards these.¹¹

The opposite graphic outlines the process SACE PLP students go through.¹²



⁸ Individualized learning plan fact sheet. 16/04/13. Retrieved: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/publications/individualized-learning-plans-fact-sheet/>

⁹ Individual Plans (IPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). 28/06/18. Retrieved: <https://parents.education.govt.nz/learning-support/learning-support-needs/individual-plans-ips-and-individual-education-plans-ieps/>

¹⁰ Individual learning plan. Retrieved: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_Learning_Plan

¹¹ Personal Learning Plan. Retrieved: <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/personal-learning-plan>

¹² Personal Learning Plan subject outline. Retrieved: <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/personal-learning-plan>

My proposal seeks to combine the pathway focussed SACE course, and the *ako* (teaching and learning) focussed individual learning plans of the United States. This will best address the five principles of NCEA, and improve NCEA outcomes not just for students who don't have a vision of where their NCEA journey will take them, but also students who may have goals but stand to gain from a personal learning strategy providing them with a map. The emphasis in 'goal setting' upon choosing a course that is desired and suitable for each student will ensure they move further into NCEA as motivated and keen to engage as possible.

Analysis

How will this proposal impact the principles of the NCEA review for Students, Teachers, and Communities?

Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A 'goal setting' course in itself will assist the wellbeing of NCEA students. In developing a clear plan that they're confident of, students will feel reassured about what they're doing and where it will take them. ● The emphasis on learning and study strategies will build confidence and resilience to maintain student wellbeing throughout NCEA. ● Having a teacher who engages with a student in depth about their goals and disposition will act as a wellbeing support mechanism ● Adopted alongside other changes to level one, this may be part of a decrease in teacher workload, ensuring the course only has two fairly standardised pieces of assessment will help too
Inclusion & Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The support provided to a student when crafting their PLP will make them feel included by NCEA and feel that they have a purpose to be there. ● All students will have equal opportunity to create a quality PLP that they've engaged with. ● Different types of learning, and different cultural dispositions can be factored in when developing study skills and learning strategies. ● In seeking advice on various pathways and what they could lead to, students will be engaging the wider community in NCEA.
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students will have a coherent plan of what their NCEA is going to look like, and a better understanding of NCEA in general. ● Explicitly working out what a student wants to focus on will mean they enjoy the learning in the rest of their NCEA, and extract richly from it. ● Will provide coherence of what NCEA is to parents and Whanau
Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All students will have a clear and rationalised pathway they wish to follow through NCEA and into adult life ● All pathways will be presented as equal to students, challenging biases they may have based on their own disposition and empowering them to choose what they want. ● If systematically managed, the program could steer more students

	<p>into and away from various pathways as to address skills shortages and ensure there are no surpluses of the wrong type of graduates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer pathways will ensure less students end up NEET.
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The credibility of NCEA largely lies within how credible its students are. Students who are motivated and effective learners will be more credible.

Criticism

A key criticism, to the points in the table above is the absence of comment on how this proposal will specifically enfranchise students of ethnicities that attain poorer NCEA achievement. Whilst a PLP curriculum does force more engagement on a personal level with all students, it does not do so in an explicitly culturally responsive manner, meaning it may fail to enfranchise students who are at risk of lower achievement.

Alike any other NCEA subject, goal setting should accept assessments in Te Reo, and there will be flexibility for schools and teachers to present the subject to their students in a way they see fit, adopting methods to enfranchise where necessary.

However, following the doctrine of Pierre Bourdieu, an education system that has been constructed by a group with one habitus will always favour them, and disadvantage other groups.¹³ An effective way to counter this is to allow opportunities for other groups to assimilate and enfranchise, ‘goal setting’ seeks to do this.

This proposal does not simplify NCEA. It does not reduce overall teacher workload or confusion about how NCEA works within the wider community.

Conclusion

Reflecting upon my foreward alongside my proposal, I believe ‘goal setting’ could potentially have changed the course of my learning journey, and that of many of my peers who succeeded in NCEA. Therefore, I have no doubt that it could have an even bigger impact upon students who struggle with NCEA, and ensure that they not only don’t become a NEET statistic, but also learn to engage with and enjoy their learning, making NCEA greater for all New Zealanders.

¹³ Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.