Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

Guidance to support learners with special educational needs
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Introduction

At the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. The Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework aims to help learners develop their skills for lifelong learning and operating effectively in society.
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Thinking Skills

We develop most of our thinking informally as we engage in both everyday and school activities. Developing thinking skills means designing learning so that learners will think more skilfully than they would otherwise do.

Personal Capabilities

Personal and interpersonal skills and capabilities underpin success in all aspects of life and are particularly important for learners with a special educational need. Developing personal capabilities means creating opportunities for learners to experiment with ideas, take initiative, learn from mistakes, work collaboratively and become more self-directed in their learning. It is important that learners’ self-esteem and self-confidence are explicitly fostered, along with their ability to manage their own emotions, to interact effectively with others and eventually to regulate and enhance their own learning.

The Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities link closely with:
• Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at Key Stages 1 and 2; and
• Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 3.

Further information on the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework can be found in Appendix 1 of this guidance or through the following website www.nicurriculum.org.uk
Aims of this Guidance

This guidance supports the planning, development and assessment of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for learners with special educational needs (SEN). It includes information about progression maps, as well as supporting activities and resources.

Many learners with SEN have fragmented and unsystematic patterns in learning. This means there may be delays in the acquisition of knowledge and skills that others may develop naturally. We have to be aware of the skills that learners need to develop and be able to identify the steps that will help them make progress.

This guidance will help you to:

- understand the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework;
- plan for the acquisition and development of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for learners with SEN;
- identify progression that learners are making; and
- decide on and plan for the next steps to take.

We have developed the progression maps to:

- make connections between curriculum and assessment resources available for SEN;
- identify progression that learners may make;
- give examples of possible classroom activities;
- encourage the use of the language associated with the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities;
- support you in your planning and development of the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities; and
- support you in assessing learners’ skills.
Using the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Progression Maps for SEN

We have designed the progression maps for SEN to help you in the planning, development and assessment of the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. They complement the ‘From-To’ grids for primary and post primary and subject-specific progression maps for Key Stage 3.

There are 14 progression maps which are available online and in the *Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities: Guidance, Activities and Resources to Support Learners with Special Educational Needs* ringbinder. These maps are:

- Asking for Help
- Building Confidence
- Class Routines and Following Instructions
- Communicating Appropriately
- Curiosity, Exploration and Questioning
- Gathering Information
- Making Connections
- Managing Behaviour
- Organising Themselves
- Planning a Task
- Problem-Solving and Taking Risks for Learning
- Self-Help
- Target Setting and Feedback
- Working as a Group.

Each map shows the progression that a learner may make, including a list of statements under the headings:

- Learners demonstrate emerging skills by:
- Learners develop their skills by:
- Learners extend their skills by:
- Learners are able to:

The maps are not a definitive list of all the actions that learners will take to achieve a target or develop a skill. Progress is often not smooth and linear. A learner’s profile may be ‘spiky’, presenting strengths in some areas of learning and significant deficits in others, and some of the steps listed may not be appropriate for every learner. It is important to take a flexible approach when considering progression.

As well as showing the development of skills, the progression maps provide you with example activities. Many of these refer to an assessment tool or thematic unit developed for SEN, which you can find online at www.nicurriculum.org.uk or in print. You may wish to use some of the suggested activities in your classroom alongside your own ideas.

You can find further suggestions for activities in the Active Learning and Teaching Methods booklet for Key Stages 1 and 2 or Key Stage 3.

If the learners extend beyond the skills listed in the progression maps, you may need to consult the primary and post-primary Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities documents.

See Appendix 2 for details of these and other relevant resources.
Planning and Assessing Using the Progression Maps

When planning, it is important to ensure that you are providing the learners with experiences that promote the development of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

This can involve using a range of strategies, expanding classroom practice in a way that supports a more explicit emphasis on thinking and active learning. For example, where appropriate, share learning intentions and allow opportunities for reflection that are tailored to the learners’ abilities and appropriate for their needs.

Use purposeful, meaningful learning and teaching activities to embed the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities throughout the Areas of Learning. Plan to infuse the skills and capabilities into your lessons and the learners’ day-to-day experiences; they aren’t intended to be developed as stand-alone skills.

Take into account:
- the abilities, difficulties and levels of understanding within the class;
- the range of learning styles;
- the types of support individual learners may need;
- the length and complexity of an activity;
- the amount of processing (thinking) time being provided;
- the type of language being used;
- the learners’ ability to work in different contexts such as in groups, with an adult and with a partner;
- the activities that have motivated the class or individual learners; and
- the resources at your disposal.

As learners’ skills develop, ensure that they have sufficient opportunities to progress. At first you will be using activities that are easy and familiar to them; then you can bring in progression by increasing the demand or challenge. This will give the learners the opportunity to generalise the skills they have developed in one area and use them in other areas or activities.

You will also need to provide varying levels of support/direction for the learners. At first they may need a lot of support/direction in how to go about an activity, the language they use and the skills they select to use. As they grow in confidence, you may wish to decrease the support/direction and allow them to become more independent and try activities for themselves.

It is very important to acknowledge that the need for decreasing levels of support demonstrates significant progress for a learner.
Using the Supporting Activities and Resources

As well as the progression maps, you will find further support in the Activities and Resources sections of your Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities: Guidance, Activities and Resources to Support Learners with Special Educational Needs ringbinder.

The range of detailed activities provided are a snapshot of the types of activities that you will be using in your classroom. They illustrate how you can use everyday activities to develop the learners’ Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. Most of them apply to real-life contexts, which allows the learners to connect them to everyday situations.

Each activity card is split into two sections. In the left hand column, you can check how the activity links to the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework, the progression maps, the Cross-Curricular Skills and the Areas of Learning. There are also details of the resources you will need and the organisation of the class. In the right hand section, you will find details of the activity and ideas for differentiation. These are suggestions only, and you can of course change the structure or progression of the activity to suit the learners.

Each activity is accompanied by one or more resource cards, which you can print out from our website at www.nicurriculum.org.uk and/or photocopy from the Resources section in the ringbinder to use with your class.

In the Resources section, Resource 1 consists of a range of Visual Cue Cards. These cards support visual learners who may find it difficult to process auditory or written directions.
Appendix 1

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework

The following is a summary of the key aspects from each strand. For a full description, please see our Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities booklet for Key Stages 1 and 2 or Key Stage 3, available at www.nicurriculum.org.uk

Managing Information

Asking, Accessing, Selecting, Recording, Integrating, Communicating

The purpose of this strand is to develop your learners’ abilities in an information intensive environment.

Learners should discover how to:
• ask focused questions;
• plan and set goals and break a task into sub-tasks;
• use their own and others’ ideas to locate sources of information;
• select, classify, compare and evaluate information;
• select the most appropriate method for a task;
• use a range of methods for collating, recording and representing information; and
• communicate with a sense of audience and purpose.
Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Searching for Meaning, Deepening Understanding, Coping with Challenges

The purpose of this strand is to engage your learners in active learning so that they can go beyond the mere recall of factual information and the routine application of procedures.

You should help your learners discover how to:
• sequence, order, classify and make comparisons;
• make predictions, examine evidence and distinguish fact from opinion;
• make links between cause and effect;
• justify methods, opinions and conclusions;
• generate possible solutions, try out alternative approaches and evaluate outcomes;
• examine options and weigh up pros and cons;
• use different types of questions; and
• make connections between learning in different contexts.

Being Creative

Imagining, Generating, Inventing, Taking Risks for Learning

The purpose of this strand is to encourage your learners’ personal responses.

You should help your learners discover how to:
• seek out questions to explore and problems to solve;
• experiment with ideas and questions;
• make new connections between ideas/information;
• learn from and value other people’s ideas;
• make ideas real by experimenting with different designs, actions and outcomes;
• challenge the routine method;
• value the unexpected or surprising;
• see opportunities in mistakes and failures; and
• take risks for learning.
Appendix 1

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework (Continued)

Working with Others

Being Collaborative, Being Sensitive to Others’ Feelings, Being Fair and Responsible

This strand enables your learners to engage in collaborative activities and to make the most of their learning when working with others.

You should help your learners discover how to:
• listen actively and share opinions;
• develop routines of turn-taking, sharing and co-operating;
• give and respond to feedback;
• understand how actions and words affect others;
• adapt their behaviour and language to suit different people and situations;
• take personal responsibility for work with others and evaluate their own contribution to the group;
• be fair;
• respect the views and opinions of others and reach agreements using negotiation and compromise; and
• suggest ways of improving their approach to working collaboratively.

Self-Management

Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses, Setting Goals and Targets, Managing and Regulating Self

The Self-Management strand helps your learners become more self-directed, so that they can manage their learning in new situations and in the longer term.

To help foster your learners’ self-management skills, you should help them discover how to:
• be aware of their personal strengths, limitations and interests;
• set personal targets and review them;
• manage their behaviour in a range of situations;
• organise and plan how to go about a task;
• focus, sustain attention and persist with tasks;
• review learning and some aspect that might be improved;
• learn ways to manage their own time;
• seek advice when necessary; and
• compare their own approach with others’ and in different contexts.
Appendix 2

Supporting Resources
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

The Think Pack
This area of our website at www.nicurriculum.org.uk contains links to Thinking Cards, with accompanying resources and tutorials, Wise Up and Think and Listen and Think books, Talk about Thinking posters and a Classroom Toolbox of supporting resources.

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Progression Maps for Key Stage 3
This is a range of progression maps that are subject-specific.

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for Key Stages 1&2

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for Key Stage 3
These documents include ‘From–To’ progression maps from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3.

Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stages 1&2

Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stage 3
You can refer to either or both of these booklets for a range of suggested activities that may be suitable for your learners.
SEN Resources

**Quest for learning**

Quest for learning is a guidance and assessment resource to support teachers and classroom assistants of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties, providing ideas for and pathways to learning.

**Thematic Units**

This range of curriculum resources is designed for learners with a moderate or severe learning difficulty and includes units written for all Key Stages. The suggested activities in the Thematic Units provide opportunities for developing the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

**Prerequisite Skills (Q Skills)**

The Prerequisite Skills or Q Skills are an assessment resource to support teachers and classroom assistants. The skills described in the resource build towards Level 1 in the Levels of Progression for Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT.

The Q Skills provide a broad and inclusive framework for assessing learners, taking into account age, cognitive ability, learning difficulties and other significant complex needs.

**LLW Reading Books**

You can use the Learning for Life and Work reading books to support the Thematic Units for learners with severe learning difficulties. Each book has three levels in order to differentiate for the needs of all learners.
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