

Module 2: Connecting the Core and Curricular Competencies

Video 2a: G.O.S.S.I.P.

In the next section we'd like to talk about the connection between core competencies and curricular competencies. What we've learned is that it's really important when we think about the structure of the curriculum to look at how we can find the bridges between things. Otherwise, there's a chance that gets to be a little overwhelming with all the components, if we see them as disparate things. So we're going to focus on core and curricular competencies. This next little section is on the connection between the two. Tammy's just going to introduce a short activity to get us started.

If you're on your own we want this to be kind of a pause and reflect, but ideally if you're working with a group, this is a strategy called GOSSIP. It's a Susan Close strategy, and GOSSIP stands for Go Out and Selectively Seek Important Points. The first part of GOSSIP is you spend two to three minutes just jotting down your ideas and then we're going to ask you to find a partner and share your information with that partner. If Heather was my partner, I would share my ideas with Heather, Heather would give me her ideas, and I would write her ideas down in partner one. Then you find another partner after that, and this is where the GOSSIP starts. You're no longer able to talk about yourself, you have to share the juicy gossip. So I'm going to have to say, "Guess what Heather says? Heather's tried this with curricular competencies, here's her understanding," and then you take down the information that you hear from your partner. Then we ask you to do it one more time, and then that's where you get to decide who had the best gossip that you've heard so far and share that additional gossip. This strategy gives you a chance to hear different things that are happening in the room, and also time to reflect on your own learning and what you've tried so far. GOSSIP as a strategy, is awesome to use in the classroom. For one, kids love anything called gossip. I love to use this strategy if I'm using any kind of literature where I might have students in that first box maybe reflect on theme or conflict or some aspect that we're working on. And then work with each other in the room to get more ideas before they go into a quick write, just to kind of help everyone get as much information as possible before they go into an independent activity.

I love using it on Mondays so that students get to rethink about what the big concepts were from the week before. It helps focus the conversations so it's less about the weekend and more about the learning they did the week before. It's also great if you have a student who's been away or a student who is struggling with language that you can pair them up and have a group of three so that they're actually listening in as they move through the first stage. But then they're able to share someone else's idea through the second and third partnerships.

And another great way is if students are going to be doing some kind of assessment, it's a great way to get everyone into the room and talking about what might be coming up on the assessment. And in my experience, it increased its value when kids could keep in on their desk while they were doing the actual assessment. Right away it has more value and kids are more enthusiastic. And lastly, I think we'll just say we really believe it's a strategy that allows for all students to access the work because it is a talking, sketching, writing kind of activity. So if students traditionally may have trouble with reading, writing pieces they're able to participate wholly, fully in this activity and it really leverages all the student voice in the room.

Video2b: Competencies Connections

Just so we're on the same page with the definition of competency, because this is a bit of a global movement and it has been for a few years around competency-based education and B.C. is at the forefront of that, but the working definition that the authors of the curriculum used was that it's a set of skills, processes, behaviors, or habits of mind. So when we're looking at the competencies, the curricular competencies in particular, we should have that in mind, that it's not just a set of skills. It is more than that, and different curricular areas have a different emphasis on different aspects of that definition of competency.

What you should notice about curricular competency structure in the curriculum is that they're in bands. You'll find that the grade 10 curricular competencies are either identical to, or almost identical to, the grades around it. For example, Math 10 is very similar to Math 9 and Math 11. Don't be limited by the grade because they are so universal within bands.

What we'd like you to do now is actually select a curriculum or two curriculum, three curriculum, whatever you want to explore, and we're actually going to ask that you take time to sort those curriculum against the core competencies. We suggest that you also print the core competency bands and then you look at the curricular competencies. We try to say get off the fence. We know that intention can make a difference as to where a curricular competency may fit in any given lesson, but we're saying just kind of best fit right now where would you place it. So no Venn diagrams or multiple places.

We want you to just commit. Where would you place that curricular competency when you consider that core competency? If you're in a group, ideally work with two or three partners and have that conversation. Maybe pick one curriculum and then do another one next, just so you kind of get a sense of more than one curriculum.

When you're finished, we're going to ask you to notice and wonder. What do you notice about the patterns in the curriculum and what do you wonder about? So just have that in mind as you're working through it with your group and then we'll reconvene.

Video 2b: Helping Students Understand Connections

We hope you had the chance to talk to your partners about what you noticed when you did the sorting activity. Sometimes we hear comments like, "Wow, I didn't realize how similar one curriculum was to another," or, "There's lots of ways that we could maybe look at this in an interdisciplinary way." Other comments from folks?

How about how well distributed some curricular areas are? For example, people are often surprised at the personal social connections found in science or in math. It's just looking at how curricula are distributed and how they compare within themselves, and then how they compare across curricular areas.

Our big reason for wanting us to do that work together is for us to really, again, Heather said it earlier, we really want people to understand that connection, because we really believe that as teachers we are intentional about the skills and competencies we're developing, but sometimes we aren't explicit with what we're saying to students. So it's that reminder of how do we be

explicit with students so that when they go to self-reflect on core competencies, they have that authentic connection to what does it actually mean and where have I experienced it in the classroom and in which context. A student might be able to say, "I was working on critical thinking when I was doing this specific activity in science." It just helps us be more aware so that we can be more explicit.

One of the people we've worked with this year is Tom Schimmer. One of the language that he offers us is around the connection between the core and curricular competencies. He suggests that the core competencies are acting as the synthesis of the curricular competencies. So if we take all the curricular competencies and we distilled them down to fewer things, we get the core competencies. Conversely, we can say that the curricular competencies are the contextualized version of the core competencies. So take the core competencies and say how do they actually fit, how do they come to life in our different curricular areas, and then that's what we have as the curricular competencies.

The design was intentional, in terms of making sure they're connected, and as Tammy just reminded us, it's about making sure that students are aware of how that connection exists and being explicit with the language with our students.