

TAKE 5 MINS

#2

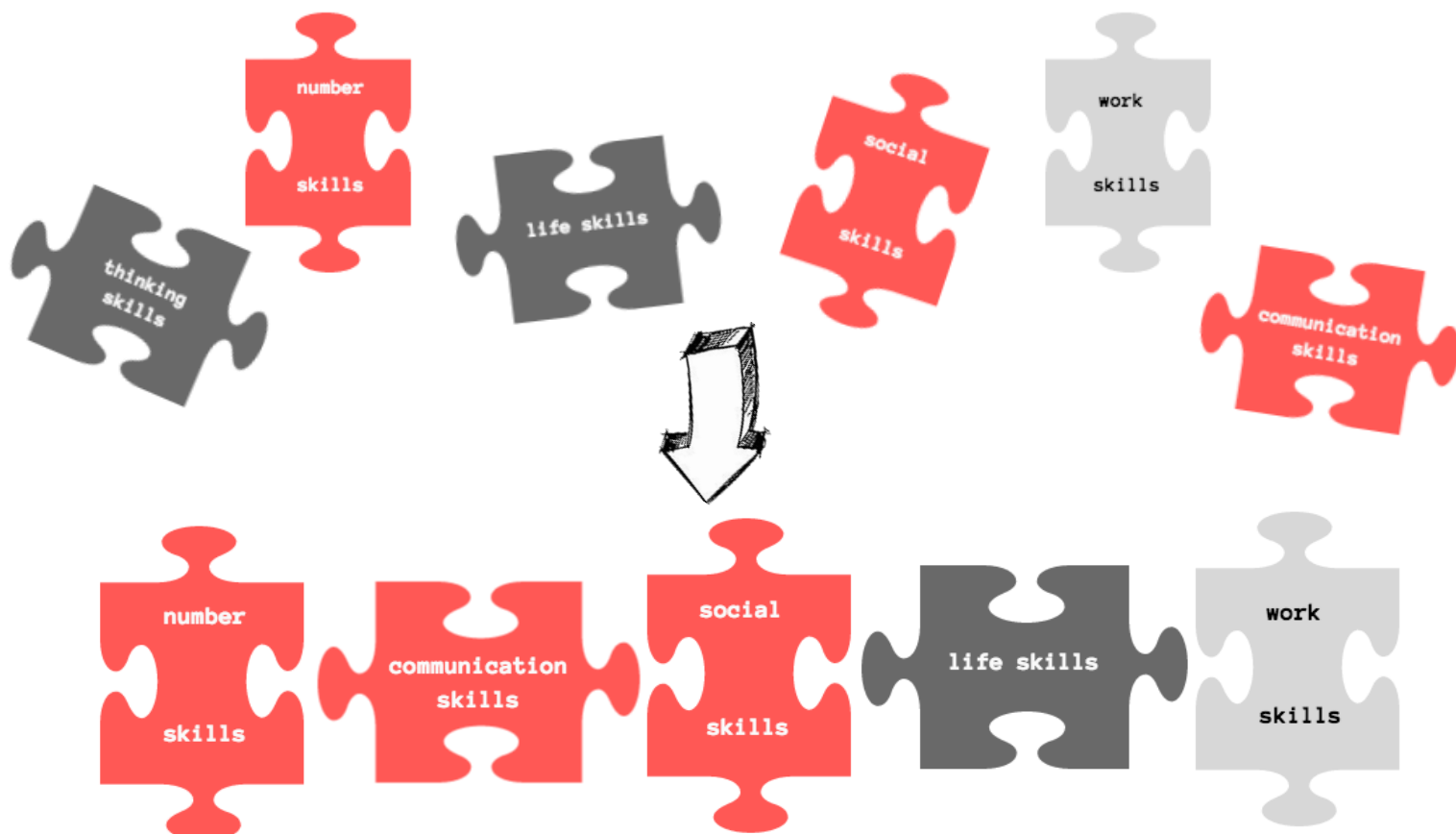
Putting together a jigsaw puzzle

It is the time of the year when many schools/organisations start thinking how can they can offer some different options to students or are starting to think about a programme for next year that offers more opportunities or credits for targeted students and is at the right level.

We know that when you look at different options you consider many things – key competencies, curriculum levels, assessment levels, testing, SEN, attainment, staffing, timetable, parents, pathways, NCEA credits, peer pressure, budgets etc. The list of challenges you face can feel endless some days, but sometimes it is as simple as just finding a starting point ... the first piece of a jigsaw puzzle!

We often need a jigsaw puzzle offering options for staff, which will then offer more opportunities for students. We know there are students who may need some adapted programmes and resources and we know there are many options for putting a jigsaw puzzle together which makes it exciting to plan!

Your jigsaw puzzle of topics, themes or programmes can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it ... but keep in mind, the longer you take to decide on skills, topics, themes and assessments, the longer it may be before your students are putting the first piece of the puzzle together.



When we put together themes or programmes we use two clear options when planning:

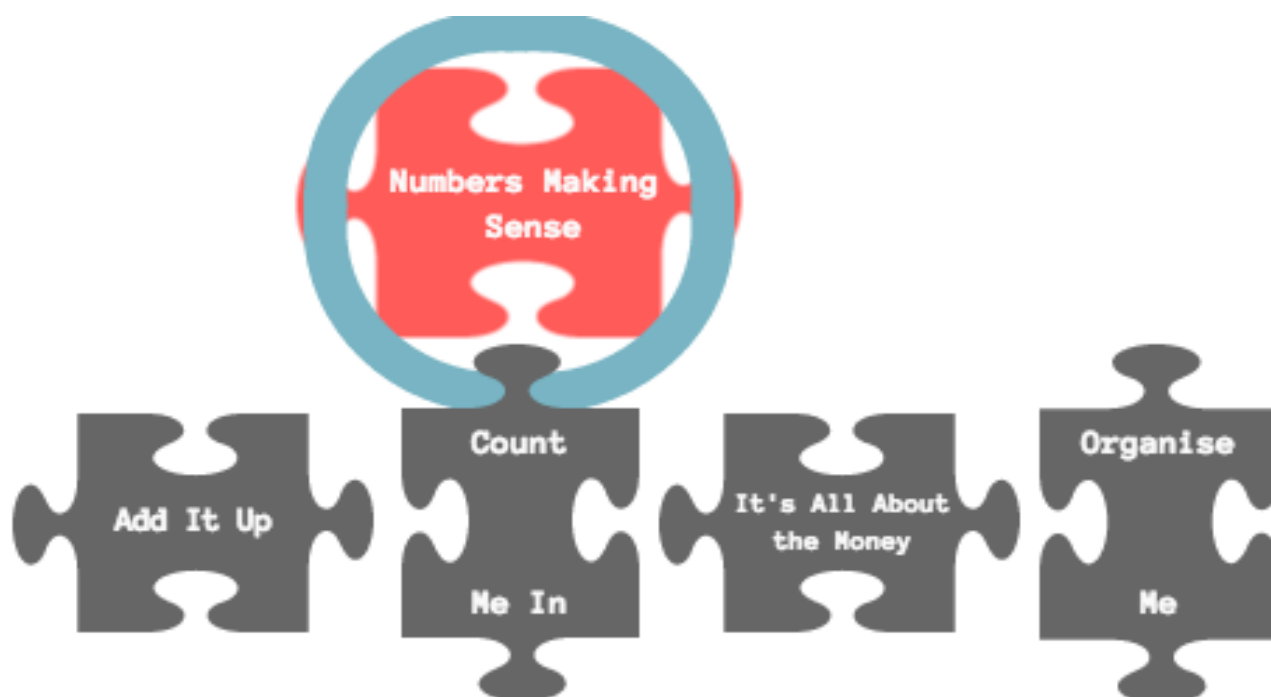
Short, focused topics ...

... when we need a smaller topic to start with, to fill in a wider programme or as an alternative.

When thinking SHORT AND FOCUSED, THINK about the following to find a starting point:

- An interest area for a student
- A task they like
- A key skill to focus on
- A subject they enjoy (or could with the right material!)
- Building in assistive technology or creative, active learning
- An outcome or reward that means something to the student
- Working with staff they have positive relationships with

Jamie is in Year 9 and is starting to cause some concern about his ability when working with numbers. When we talked to Jamie, he said that he found the work too hard and he didn't see the point. In fact, he told us he was rubbish at anything to do with numbers. Not surprisingly, Jamie wasn't willing to keep trying and failing in his class and it was developing into a daily problem. The school decided to simplify by using some different resources that were more appropriate for his level and wanted to see if a more active approach to working with numbers would work better for Jamie. They started small with some key numeracy skills in short workbooklets that he could work through at his own pace ... and it is working brilliantly for Jamie! While he might not be up with his peers, he is enjoying his "Numbers Making Sense" booklets and as a result is willing to try different more topics after these!



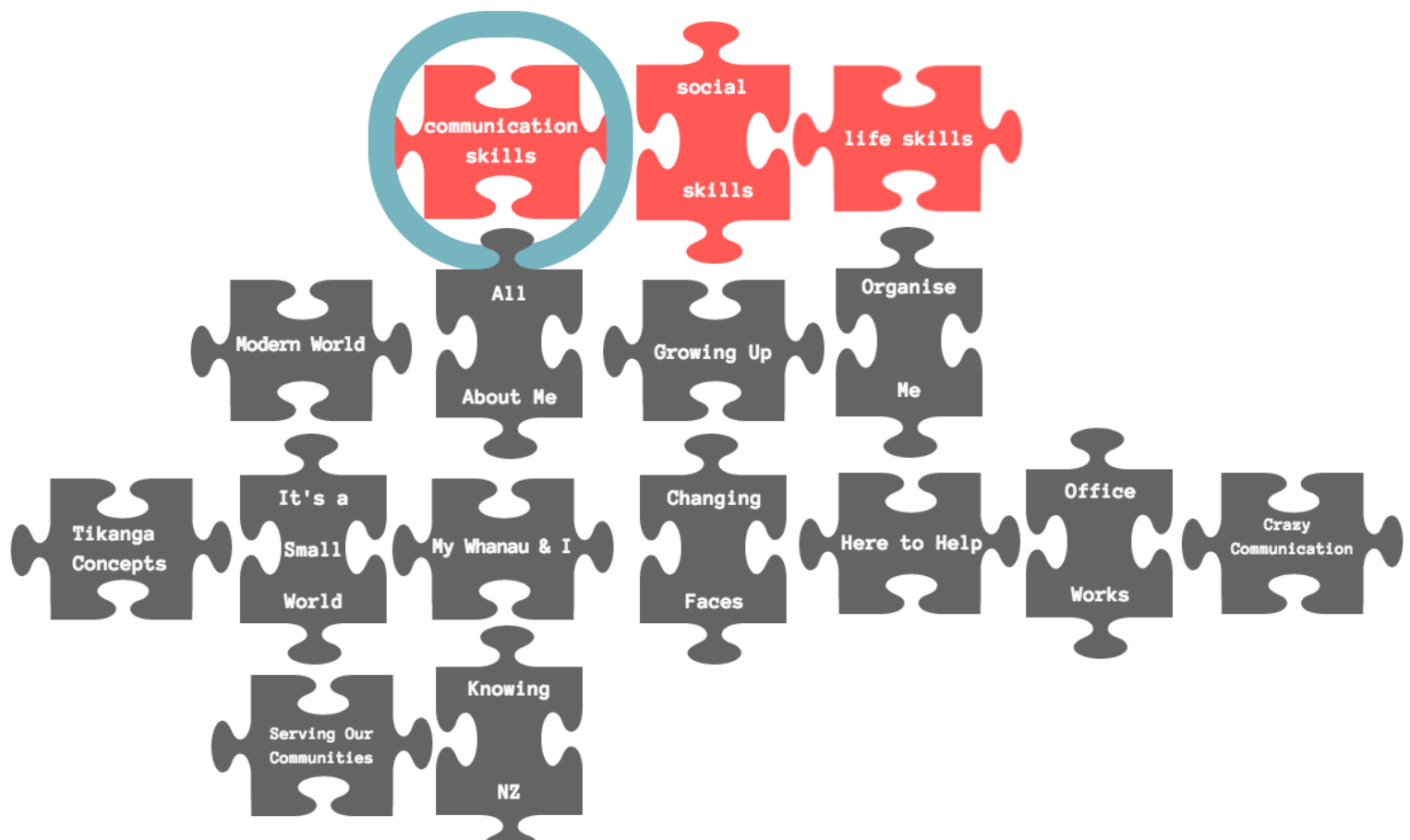
Wider programming ...

... when we are developing a programme over time that may link themes or develop pathways

When thinking about WIDER programming, THINK about

- Topics that could link together
- Building themes that can link together for some students OR be stand alone for others
- Offering options for some topics to link into student interests
- Building in flexibility about the order of topics/themes
- Offering different assessment opportunities
- Offering something more appropriate for a student than what already exists
- Developing pathways that could lead onto targeted school courses, different qualifications, tertiary experiences and/or work experience
- Working collectively or collaboratively between staff/depts./communities etc. to utilise subject specialists, subject resources, strengths, partnerships and networks.

We worked with a school who had an interesting "literacy" programme but they knew it wasn't working for some students. They had specialist literacy support in Year 9 and 10 but even the teacher didn't feel they were making great progress. We talked about how many of the students enjoyed talking and working together and many enjoyed being active. We also talked about building in important social and life skills so the students felt they were the focus rather than "literacy" as the focus. For the students, it gave them the opportunity to explore lots of issues, have conversations, learn and apply key skills in a non-threatening way through engaging topics that they could apply to their own lives. And for the school, they built a programme that was engaging, offered flexibility, had different assessment options and focused on key "literacy" skills from Year 7 to NCEA L2 for students that had already been classed as "at risk of not achieving".



WORKING ON the jigsaw puzzle together ...

... every school has different options and opportunities. The following steps are useful to consider when starting to put your own jigsaw puzzles together.

WORK ON putting together a jigsaw puzzle of topics/themes by working through the following steps:

Start with:

1. Look at what already works ... but be honest about it working for students who may need an adapted programme or resource!
2. Think about what targeted students are interested in and what has already engaged them.
3. Think about the different skills students need as they progress so you can see where to head.
4. Look at potential themes that may link resources together with purpose.
5. For a wider programme, start to link themes/skills over different levels and build in transitions.
6. Think about all the different ways/tools to deliver a topic and create flexibility (Plan B's, C's and D's) to leap over barriers and solve on-going or new problems that may arise.
7. Decide where your gaps are and look at additional or better resources/assessments.
8. Add in different assessment opportunities or simple learning checklists where appropriate (and remember, NOT EVERYTHING needs assessing!)

Move onto:

9. Think about staff who may work well with targeted students and what their skills and interests are.
10. Have conversations with wider staff or communities to see what else they could offer within a theme ... it could be a small or larger contribution depending on your jigsaw puzzle.
11. Promote student self-management skills rather than always lead from the front to create flexibility.
12. Build links between NCEA levels to develop pathways.
13. Communicate with tertiary providers to see potential opportunities.
14. Talk with workplaces to look at flexible and purposeful models for different students.

And most importantly ...

Keep your jigsaw puzzle simple, easy to follow and adapt ... AND most importantly, just select your first piece of the jigsaw and get started!!! "By changing nothing ... nothing changes". Tony Robbins

Note: Thoughts in this series are based on Supporting Learning (SLR) experiences with over 900 NZ schools and schools worldwide, as well as research used for articles, presentations and study and while SLR examples are used in this Take 5mins, there are many other valid options that will suit your students.