

The Socialisation of Teachers into the Culture of Assessment

Susan Lovett and Linda Sinclair



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

WELLINGTON

2005

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
P O Box 3237
Wellington
New Zealand

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ISBN 1-877293-47-4

Distributed by NZCER Distribution Services
P O Box 3237
Wellington
New Zealand

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank a number of people who agreed to meet with us and share their knowledge and experiences of classroom assessment. The support of four teacher education providers made it possible for us to interview a small group of their final year students and form some insights about student teachers' perceptions of the classroom assessor role. We extend our thanks to the student teachers who contributed to this project and gave their personal time to be interviewed. We also thank the principals and staff in the two case study schools who shared documents and made time to talk to us despite their busy schedules. In particular we would like to acknowledge the willingness of the beginning teachers and their assigned tutor teachers who shared their learning and interactions over a period of six months. Their interview data have increased our understanding of the ongoing challenges facing teachers in their roles of classroom assessors. The authors also appreciate the support of NZCER staff. In particular we thank Rosemary Hipkins for her critical feedback on several drafts of the project and the expertise of Christine Williams in formatting the report.

Tribute to Linda Sinclair

Sadly, Linda died as this project was nearing completion. Linda and I were co-researchers for a project that explored the ways in which beginning teachers learnt and practised their classroom assessment role in the first six months of their teaching careers. This project excited Linda. She was able to draw on her school experience of being a tutor teacher for beginning teachers, her knowledge of effective assessment strategies, and her recent work in developing assessment tools for classroom use. It was clear that Linda was in her element interviewing teachers. While we had established questions for each interview, Linda always had additional probing questions at her fingertips to ensure the participants shared their successes and challenges.

Linda was a hard worker who also believed in making her work fun. We shared many emails and phone calls as we analysed the interview transcripts from our respective bases in Wellington and Christchurch. It was easy to communicate despite the geographical distance between us. Linda's thirst for knowledge and new experiences meant that she was a stimulating person to work alongside. She loved learning and had a steady stream of questions, often being unnecessarily apologetic about asking them. I consider it a privilege to have worked with Linda. I'm grateful to NZCER for giving me the opportunity to work with a treasured colleague. She will be fondly remembered and sadly missed.

Susan Lovett

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Executive summary

While new graduates of teacher education programmes are employed as provisionally registered teachers, they are still expected to plan, teach, and assess a full classroom programme with support from a tutor teacher. This small-scale study explores the ways in which beginning teachers learn their classroom assessment roles and responsibilities. The learning process begins with their initial teacher education programme and is completed by the employing schools, who are responsible for providing a support and guidance programme over two years, and for documenting graduates' progress towards full registration.

The socialisation of teachers into the profession involves multiple influences. Accordingly, this study is informed by three conceptual frameworks: symbolic interactionism, school (organisational) culture, and organisational learning. These frameworks allow the socialisation of a beginning teacher into the profession to be understood in terms of the formation of professional identities, and of how their interactions with more experienced teachers, along with the setting in which they are placed, shape that emerging identity.

Final year student teacher interviews

The question of how student teachers are prepared for their teaching role is of particular interest in the teacher education literature and for initial teacher education (ITE) providers reviewing their programmes. With this in mind we interviewed 12 final year primary teacher education students to ascertain their perceptions of the extent to which they considered their ITE learning to be useful preparation for classroom assessment. As predicted by the research literature we found that final year teacher education students perceived they had been more influenced by the views and practices of experienced classroom practitioners than by what they had learnt in their ITE courses. There were similarities in their understandings of classroom assessment, and in their confidence levels and concerns about the challenges they expected to meet in their initial appointment as a teacher. While their responses showed a good understanding of the principles and purposes of classroom assessment, there were inconsistencies in their use of terminology related to formative and summative purposes for assessment. This was an area in which they expected to receive further guidance from their employing school concerning the tools to use, and how and when to implement these tools.

The student teachers were conscious that schools had their own particular schedules for assessment and of their need to comply with these. Some were tentatively looking past this stage to explore the ways in which data could inform their next teaching but wanted further help. This was the one aspect of their teaching for which they felt the least prepared. Particular mention was

made of the need to observe experienced teachers collecting assessment data that they subsequently used to inform their teaching. The student teachers were confident in their knowledge of the mechanics of what to assess in literacy and numeracy but shared concerns about the ways they could manage assessment across all curriculum areas, for each individual in the class. They were all well aware of the potential for over assessment in schools, and believed that too much assessment did not necessarily serve a useful purpose. Many of the student teachers were also concerned that practising teachers had not yet found ways of managing their assessment so that it could truly be said to be impacting on the teaching and learning process.

Case studies of beginning teachers

Case studies of two beginning teachers document their progress over the first six months of teaching as they worked alongside their tutor teachers and other more experienced teachers in their schools. These case studies were analysed within an interpretivist tradition, placing emphasis on each teacher's ability to shape and establish their core assessment beliefs and practices as they interacted with their more experienced mentors. Because such learning is dependent on a range of internal conditions that are unique for each school, we included school culture and organisational learning as one framework for the analysis. This approach allowed us to highlight the range of factors that may help or hinder the professional learning of beginning teachers. We found that these factors include the size of the school, the number of senior staff who can support the work of beginning teachers, the confidence of the experienced teachers in their assessment roles, the quality of the school's assessment data gathering and analysis, and the beginning teacher's own confidence. These factors played out very differently in each case study and we found interesting differences in the two teachers' learning progress and in their assessment beliefs and practices six months into their new careers.

One teacher, working within a school environment where assessment was a focus of enquiry and discussion for all staff, was endeavouring to use formative assessments to group the children according to their learning needs, and to use summative assessments to provide proof of their learning gains. Her increasing confidence was apparent in her decision to devise her own success criteria, which would be her checklists for teaching. These were quick and easy to administer and at the same time gave her a paper trail of the children's progress to use for discussion at parent interviews and to provide opportunities for instant feedback to the children. The other beginning teacher's emergent assessment practices were governed by what the school provided and required of him. Working in a small school where he received minimal feedback about his assessment practices from the over stretched senior staff, he focused on the administration of pre-tests that could be repeated as post-tests at the end of a teaching unit, particularly in mathematics. This teacher was typically using tests that others had provided for him, and results were not discussed

with individual children. Neither had the children been involved in setting future learning needs or goals. Assessments appeared to have been completed for compliance purposes rather than to benefit the teaching and learning of children.

Aspects for further consideration

Our findings highlight three broad areas where practices related to the socialisation of beginning teachers into good assessment practices could be strengthened. First, there is a need for closer links between programmes of ITE and the schools employing beginning teachers to ensure that schools understand the baseline knowledge and skills that can be expected from beginning teachers. The second area relates to support at the school site. Here we suggest that support and qualification programmes for tutor teachers could be actively promoted by teacher education providers, and that schools could be required to appraise tutor teachers' roles and provide their own internal support structures for them. The third area relates to school size. Beginning teachers need opportunities to work in schools that have staff willing and able to model reflective practice as a community of learners. If beginning teachers are placed in very small schools there may be too few senior staff to provide the necessary support and so other types of support systems may need to be investigated and implemented.

1. Introduction

Beginning teachers enter the classroom having gained some professional knowledge about learning and assessment theory from their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes but it is only the start to what may be a long and never-ending journey. Shanker (1996) reminds us that student teachers are not instantly transformed into teachers the minute the ink dries on their diplomas. Instead he argues they must learn through a continuing process of discovering what works and what does not, of observing experts, and of discussing teaching dilemmas with their peers (p. 222). This is both a journey of self-discovery and learning from significant others who provide professional support.

The transition from initial teacher education marks a new phase in the professional preparation of new teachers. Suddenly the security of learning the theory and applying it in temporary practicum placements is over and the beginning teacher has full responsibility for their own class. While they are supported in their new workplace, there is much to learn on a daily basis as they make adjustments to having a class of their very own. Their ultimate survival in the world of the classroom requires not only knowledge and skill but also the ability to work with colleagues (particularly a tutor teacher), knowing how and when to seek advice and a willingness to learn from their mistakes. The underlying purpose of advice and guidance programmes is that they will model effective practices so that the beginning teacher moves from a state of dependent to more independent learning. New teachers need time to learn what it means to be a teacher and develop their professional identities. More experienced teachers in schools can help the socialisation of beginning teachers into their school's culture.

The socialisation of teachers occurs on two fronts. Beginning teachers need to see themselves as individuals and as members of a profession. This means developing a professional identity, working towards full registration status, and making a contribution to the profession as a whole. Their overriding goal will be one of improving the learning outcomes for all students. To achieve this they will need to identify what to do and how to achieve it.

Recent changes to education policy have placed improved outcomes for all students as the highest priority for schools. This has been accompanied by the introduction of new assessment tools and the requirement that teachers should provide evidence to show how assessment data can inform the next steps in their teaching. Statements of annual achievement targets, strategic plans, and analyses of variance are now sent to the Ministry of Education to show the extent to which individual schools are making a difference to student achievement. When beginning teachers are

working in schools which are still adjusting to these assessment changes, this may hinder the effectiveness of the beginning teacher's socialisation into the classroom assessment role.

The focus of this study is the way the primary teacher education profession socialises its newest members into the classroom assessment role. This task is fraught with difficulty because the requirements of assessment are constantly evolving, changing, and increasing in number and causing considerable stress amongst the teaching profession. This study recognises the complexity of classroom assessment, including the tensions between monitoring for accountability purposes and collecting data to inform future teaching. It also recognises that there may be multiple sources of support for new graduates as they enter classroom teaching and that these will differ for each individual according to the setting in which they are employed. Because school settings are so very different and unique we felt it was more appropriate to adopt a case study that could focus on those individual settings in two different schools. We hoped to use the richness of each case to identify and explain differences in the ways more experienced teachers are able to shape and contribute to the development of beginning teachers. Recognising that beginning teachers come to this role equipped with their learning from their ITE programme we also interviewed 12 student teachers in their final year of teacher education.

The research questions

There were two phases to this project, each phase with its own research questions and approach.

Phase One: Initial teacher education programmes

What is the nature of final year student teachers' assessment literacy?

Phase Two: The case study schools

What dilemmas do new graduates face in developing assessment practices in schools?

Who/what shapes teachers' assessment practices over time?

What are the points of similarity and difference in assessment knowledge, practice, and confidence for the new and experienced teachers in the case study schools?

In what ways are these schools developing shared visions and perceptions of effective assessment and planning improvements to practice?

2. Theoretical frameworks for the research

In recent years, New Zealand research in teacher education has been dominated by studies exploring the quality of ITE programmes and support for beginning teachers (Cameron & Grudnoff, 1993; Lang, 1996; Mansell, 1996; Meek, 1998/9; Renwick, 2001; Renwick & Vise, 1993). The focus of these studies has ranged from beginning teachers and their preparation for the classroom to induction (advice and guidance) programmes in schools. Renwick (2001) argues that all of these studies have emphasised the fact that initial programmes of teacher education can never fully prepare a beginning teacher for the classroom. This then makes the study of the socialisation processes for the beginning teacher by their employing school an important topic to investigate. Our study has addressed both ITE and teacher initiation, focusing on the classroom assessor role, as experienced by final year teacher education students and new graduates in their first six months of employment as teachers in learning their classroom assessment role.

Our decision to focus on the beginning teacher's socialisation into the classroom assessment role was made against a background of concerns that teachers in schools are themselves struggling with the demands of assessment and adjusting to new assessment tools and reporting requirements. We wanted to explore what schools expected of beginning teachers in their assessor roles, how they helped them to implement those roles, and how this information was used to inform their next steps in teaching. We also wanted to match these expectations alongside the perceptions of final year teacher education students and the beginning teachers as they worked in their first jobs to gain a sense of their preparedness for the assessor role and how they felt about themselves in their new role as a teacher.

In choosing to focus on the socialisation aspect of the assessor role we have signalled our interest in learning processes rather than learning content on its own. This is because we believe that the long-term health of the teaching profession will be dependent on its ability to sustain itself as a learning profession, one which can continually adapt. McLaughlin (2002) holds a similar view and argues, "research on teachers' learning is typically more concerned about the content of teachers' learning than with the processes that stimulate, support and sustain it" (pp. 95–96). Our concern, if the knowledge domain is emphasised at the expense of process, is that we will have a dependent and static profession. We believe creative responses are needed in times of change and uncertainty. We would like to think that advice and guidance programmes for beginning teachers can contribute to the ways future teachers might reflect and question their practices and plan for improvements. It is for this reason that our data gathering has focused on the ways the individual beginning teacher has learnt their classroom assessor role within and around the constraints of the setting of their first employment.

Stuart and Thurlow (2000) maintain that research on teacher socialisation reflects two contrasting traditions—the functionalist and the interpretive. The functionalist tradition assumes that the individual teacher is socialised to match the status quo of the school’s culture, and that their teaching philosophies are subsumed into the existing school culture. The interpretive tradition places more emphasis on the individual teacher’s ability to shape and establish their own core beliefs and practices, as they interact with others. This interpretive tradition underpinned our study and the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism, school culture, and organisational learning are tools we used for the analysis. They allowed us to explore the ways in which the professional learning journey towards full registration is shaped by the beginning teacher’s own mindset and experiences, and by the influence of those who work closely with them in the school setting. The contribution of each of these theoretical areas is briefly outlined next.

Symbolic interactionism

The socialisation of teachers into the profession involves multiple influences. Nias (1986) refers to teacher development as the development of the self alongside significant others. Beginning teachers need to understand themselves as individuals, for example who they are, and what they believe, and the reasons why, if they are to develop their own individuality and identity as a teacher. At the same time they need to see themselves as members of a profession and this involves accommodation and adjusting to group norms. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that can be applied to explain the process of becoming a member of a social group, which for our purposes is the teaching profession and a member of staff at an employing school.

This theory rests on the premise that human beings have minds and selves that co-emerge from an ongoing process of social activity (Layder, 1981, p. 30). This means that people shape one another’s existence and the self is co-constructed through these interactions. Lauer and Handel (1977) suggest “one’s behaviour is a process that involves carving out a line of action that mediates between one’s impulses and the expectations of the social environment, observing and responding to one’s own and other’s behaviour, and adjusting and directing one’s subsequent behaviour on these two bases” (p. 67).

Although symbolic interactionism is not a homogeneous and unified school of thought, its emphasis on understanding the self through others is very useful. An early theorist in this area, George Herbert Mead, discussed the primacy of interaction in the shaping of minds, selves, and societies. He explained the “self” in terms of two phases of process, the “I” and the “me”. He claimed that the “I” was never predictable, but the “me” reflected the generalised expectations of the social environment setting the limits within which the “I” could act. This conceptual framework offers the flexibility to understand the actions of emerging professionals within their particular work cultures given their constraints. Lauer and Handel (1977) suggest that we cannot understand behaviours unless we understand what they mean to the actor concerned. When conversing with both the beginning teachers and the “significant others” who provided them with

support and guidance, we were conscious that our interactions and questions may have increased participants' consciousness of their actions, thereby helping them create new meanings.

School culture as a conceptual framework

A number of writers continue to acknowledge the usefulness of the school (organisational) culture concept as a tool to understand the ways people work with one another in their work setting (see Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1991; Dalin, 1993; Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Hargreaves, 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Such a framework is useful for understanding why some schools are better able to support their beginning teachers than others, and it can highlight particular factors that make that difference.

In any organisation there will be ways of working which emphasise power relationships, roles, and procedures, tasks and/or the individual person (Handy, 1986). These aspects may also apply to an advice and guidance programme in which the tutor teacher is the experienced professional working with a new member. The manner in which they work with the beginning teacher will potentially impact on a range of factors. These include the beginning teacher's self-esteem, the way their knowledge is acquired, their dependence on others, what they do in the classroom, and whether this is governed primarily by what others tell them is expected or what they begin to think from their own perspective.

The concept of school culture is useful for explaining the large amount of variation in school effects. Because schools share the same classification of "school", it is tempting to assume that they are alike in other ways and that similar programmes and approaches for working with beginning teachers will be successful. Similarly, beginning teachers differ from one another in many ways and adjustments will be needed to suit their dispositions and preferences for learning the teaching role.

Organisational learning

Organisational learning theory begins to answer the key question of whether schools can be called learning organisations for teachers. If we accept that the new teaching graduate still has a lot of learning to do after completing their initial teacher education programme, then it is important to know what schools are currently doing well to support beginning teachers and identify areas for improvement. The case studies in this research highlight some of these factors, but are also offered as examples of teachers working within unique settings.

Like the theory of school culture, this theoretical framework recognises that the processes of organisational learning are complicated by the uniqueness of each workplace, its personnel, ways of working, power plays, and past and present practices. The theory itself is an attempt to work with these individual differences and provide a framework for enhancing learning. This approach

also recognises that application of the same model or strategies will not suit every school. Conditions that both foster organisational learning and allow it to flourish are identified from a range of factors as a menu rather than as a set recipe for improvement. That each school will require a different selection from this menu adds to the challenge of helping schools and teachers socialise their newest members. The following generic questions serve as a starting point for determining possible areas requiring attention:

- Which leadership styles engender learning amongst beginning teachers?
- How can schools/teachers welcome new members in ways that will ensure they are accepted as valued members of staff?
- How can new members retain distinctive teaching styles but still be accepted by the established school community?
- What structures will make it possible for teachers to learn from one another, share concerns, and plan for improvements to practice?
- How can higher levels of teacher interactions and dialogue about the practice of teaching be encouraged for all teachers regardless of their career stage?

A special feature of organisational learning theory is the importance it places on the value of interpersonal relationships and the need to demonstrate strategies which will help people to collaborate and thereby create communities of learners. When developments only emphasise tasks and their completion, these are interim “quick fix” measures and do not sustain learners for long-term survival.

Support and guidance: the role of the tutor teacher

Primary schools employing beginning teachers are required to provide a tutor teacher for each beginning teacher. The tutor teacher is expected to provide personal and professional support to the beginning teacher throughout their two years of provisional registration. During this time they will observe the beginning teacher in the classroom at regular intervals and work alongside them. A formal programme of support and guidance will be formulated, meeting schedules devised, and progress documented with monthly reports submitted to the principal. The tutor teacher will also assist the beginning teacher to set goals, plan and prepare work, locate resources, and implement assessment policies and procedures as needed. There will be some negotiation with the beginning teacher as they identify particular teaching and learning needs and a process for addressing these needs.

Effective induction for beginning teachers

Renwick’s (2001) report to the Ministry of Education, *Support for Beginning Teachers*, provides an account of responses from 229 beginning teachers in primary schools (approximately 79 percent of the total beginning teacher population at the time of the review). This study used

questionnaire responses to gain information about the characteristics of beginning teachers, the types of schools in which they were employed, and the support they received. The report was confined to reporting the perceptions of beginning teachers, as they experienced their period of provisional registration, with respect to how effective they thought their advice and guidance programmes had been. Questions explored the support they received in terms of the time per week they spent with a tutor teacher, their agreed programmes of support and the activities undertaken, and sources of support from within schools. The beginning teachers were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their tutor teachers, and state the three most important qualities and skills tutor teachers should have. Four qualities and skills of tutor teachers were singled out by primary and secondary teachers as being important. In order of importance, these were:

- personality and personal skills;
- experience as a teacher and knowledge of the tutoring role;
- communication skills; and
- availability and time.

Further findings of this study (as pertaining to the primary sector) suggested that the effective induction of beginning teachers was dependent on the following:

- having a tutor teacher responsible for their professional development and support programme;
- having a tutor teacher who met with them regularly; and
- regarding their tutor teacher as their main source of support (Renwick, 2001, p. 31).

Six indicators of requirements for good induction practice have also been listed by the Education Review Office in their 2002 report on provisionally registered teachers. This list is closely aligned to the legislative and regulatory requirements of schools employing beginning teachers. It includes the provision of a good support programme, meeting registration requirements, keeping suitable records as evidence for full registration, the formalisation of a support programme, effective use of the 0.2 full-time teacher equivalent release time, and good progress by the teacher (p. 6).

These findings informed the design of the interview schedules we used for gathering data about the ways teachers at two very different schools contributed to the socialisation process of beginning teachers in learning their classroom assessment roles.

3. Summary of the research process

This section outlines the overall research process and explains how the two separate stages contributed to the overall analysis. In the first stage 12 student teachers in the final year of their ITE programme were interviewed. In the second stage, case studies were carried out in two school settings where beginning teachers were in the first year of their teaching careers.

The student teacher interviews

The intention of data gathering in the context of several ITE programmes was to gain a sense of the perceptions held by a sample of final year teacher education students regarding their future classroom assessment roles. Information gained from these interviews was used as a point of reference to inform the case studies of two beginning teachers and how they might apply a similar knowledge base to their practical work in assessment in their employing schools.

Twelve primary student teachers from four different teacher education programmes were interviewed. These programmes represented providers in three main centres of New Zealand, with two of them located in the same city. We asked the directors of each programme to find us three students who would be willing to participate in the study. We did not specify any particular characteristics for the sample, for example gender, ethnicity, age, or ability. We worked with this small group of students so that we could record their perceptions and practices in more depth than would have been possible had we used a survey process with a larger number of participants.

Data collected

With the students' permission interviews were taped and verbatim transcripts were subsequently produced. Each interview was semi-structured, using a basic framework of 14 questions (see Appendix 1). These established each student teacher's understandings of their classroom assessment role, and their views of the usefulness of ITE programmes as preparation for that assessment role. The interview ended by asking each participant to say how confident they felt as an assessor of children's learning and what more they might need to know. They were encouraged to provide examples of their course work or professional practice experiences as they addressed the questions. The overall time frame for this stage is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Time frame and actions of phase one of the research

Time frame	Action
October 2003	Contacted ITE providers Students invited to participate Student consent forms returned Interviews arranged
November 2003–January 2004	Interviews held Transcripts typed for each interview

The two case studies

In each case study school we sought to gather data that would allow us to explore each beginning teacher's learning journey within their learning context. A case study approach provided opportunities to explore the perceptions and interactions of the key players in more depth and to see how the support systems adapted to the needs of the beginning teachers who were finding their professional identities. This approach enabled us to identify the key factors which were contributing to the beginning teacher's growing expertise in classroom assessment, or were hindering that development. In this way we were able to view the beginning teacher's progress within the context of their working environment to show how the various parts were working together to support the beginning teacher's assessment practices.

The interviews with the beginning teachers took place on three occasions during their first six months of teaching. The interviews focused on establishing what they knew about effective assessment, how this had been demonstrated in their practice to date, and what they considered would help them to be more confident with classroom assessment. Specifics of their practice of classroom assessment of literacy and numeracy were sought in order to find out the nature of the data that was being collected and how it was being used to inform subsequent teaching. (The three interview schedules are included as Appendices 2, 3, and 4.) Twice during the study we interviewed tutor teachers who had been assigned to work alongside these beginning teachers. (These interviews are included as Appendices 5 and 6.)

Towards the end of the study we extended the interviews to include a range of more experienced teachers and the principal of each of the schools. This helped us to determine the level of support these people had offered to the beginning teacher in terms of learning their classroom assessment role (see Appendix 7). All of the interviews were semi-structured and provided opportunities for the participants to share relevant documents with us. Some of these documents included school reports, children's portfolios, and records of achievement. In addition we studied the schools' planning and reporting documentation sent to the Ministry of Education and the most recent Education Review Office reports on the schools.

Interviews were audio-taped and written transcripts were subsequently prepared. Two researchers were involved in each case study. Both of us visited the case study schools to introduce ourselves

to the beginning teachers, tutor teachers, and the principals. Thereafter we took turns to do the interviewing and alternated our work with each of the schools.

Selecting the case study schools

The process of selecting the participating schools took several months. It began with the identification of schools likely to be employing beginning teachers for the start of the 2004 school year in the city chosen for the study and proceeding in the sequential steps shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Phase Two sample selection processes

Steps	Actions
1	Schools advertising a teaching vacancy suitable for a beginning teacher in one particular city identified from <i>Education Gazette</i> (October 2003)
2	Nineteen of these schools contacted by phone to establish if they had appointed a beginning teacher for 2004 (January 2004)
3	Established that 10 schools had employed one or more beginning teachers
4	Phoned these 10 schools to seek details of their beginning teachers (e.g. gender, class level taught, full-time employment status, recent graduate and New Zealand qualified) (February 2004)
5	Decision made to select one female and one male beginning teacher, one teaching Years 1–3, and one Years 4–6
6	Phoned school principals to explain the project and explore possible involvement
7	Established one school willing to participate which satisfied the sample for a beginning teacher (female, teaching Years 4–6)
8	Continued phoning remaining principals until involvement of a male beginning teacher of a Years 1–3 class was secured
9	Sent information letters to the participating case study schools
10	Visited the participating schools to establish a schedule for data gathering, met participants, answered any questions about the research process and collected consent forms (February 2004)

As already noted, interviews were scheduled with three groups of people within each school. These were the beginning teachers, their tutor teachers and significant others who included the principal, and one or more other teachers who offered guidance and support for the beginning teacher. The timing of these interviews is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Timing of interviews during 2004 year

March	Beginning teacher, tutor teacher
May	Beginning teacher, tutor teacher
June/July	Beginning teacher, tutor teacher, principal, and other teachers

4. Perceptions of students in the initial teacher education programmes

Introduction

A number of themes were explored during the interviews with the 12 student teachers. These areas included their perceptions of the classroom assessment role, useful resources and strategies, and their concerns about being classroom assessors with their own classes. When exploring their levels of confidence and competence, we also asked them to talk about their initial teacher education programmes and how they had seen assessments implemented in the classrooms they observed. Interview data are included to illustrate the overall findings. These responses are coded according to the provider (A, B, C, or D) and the assigned student number (1, 2, or 3).

Three common themes emerged as the student teachers discussed their preparedness for the teaching role. These themes related to their understandings of classroom assessment, particular challenges they expected to encounter in their initial appointment as a teacher, and their confidence in the assessment role. Each theme is explored in turn.

Perceptions of the classroom assessment role

Because we saw merit in gaining some idea of the theoretical base which could be expected from new graduates entering the profession, we began by asking the student teachers to explain the purpose of classroom assessment. This gave us insights into the theoretical underpinnings of their assessment practice.

The student teachers considered that classroom assessment activities would help them to align their teaching to children's actual needs. One student teacher said classroom assessment was about "what the children already knew and what they didn't know" so that teaching could be relevant (A1). Assessment was understood to occur before, during, or at the end of a unit of teaching and had the potential to inform teachers about where to set future directions for teaching. Another student described "being able to find out what children's learning requirements are and cater for those" (A2). In addition to establishing achievement levels or progress of children, these student teachers considered that assessment information would indicate where teaching had been effective. While most of the responses emphasised the role of assessment in providing information to the teachers themselves, two student teachers made mention of assessment

information being shared with parents, the school as a whole, and the board of trustees as evidence of learning (C1, C2).

Perceptions of differences between assessment theory and practice

We explored the links between assessment theory and what was practised in schools. Here the student teachers identified differences between schools. One student teacher (A1) was critical of the volume of assessments and the potential lack of relevance to learning outcomes or targets. The example given was assessment of written language. The student teacher's view was that it was unnecessary to assess every little thing such as commas and fullstops if the focus was on descriptive writing. With regard to formative assessment this student teacher was also of the opinion that teachers in schools practised more summative than formative assessment. She said, "I found the criteria very strange to be quite honest. I sort of thought, well maybe it's time some of these teachers had an update on some of the things that they should be looking at when they are assessing." This comment suggests that the student teachers could be critical of what they saw experienced teachers doing and were aware of practices that were not "in tune" with their lectures.

"Assessment overkill" was mentioned as another issue. Once again it was noted that every school was different. A student teacher said, "I found some of them way too over the top, assessment driven, where they were assessing every time a child does anything" (A2). This view was supported by an example of assessment occurring at a sports afternoon. The experienced teacher was observed ticking names on a piece of paper to record whether the children could kick a soccer ball. Instead the student teacher thought that the teacher ought to have been teaching the skill and ensuring the children had fun rather than continuing to make assessments. The student teacher commented:

We were just ticking boxes and she was running around asking me if so and so could do this. I just found it completely irrelevant and a pointless task. What they were intending to do with that piece of paper, I have no idea but to me it seemed madness (A2).

One student teacher (B2) noted that she had seen more informal assessments of children whilst on professional practice in schools. She felt that schools were looking at social outcomes and the whole child rather than a sole emphasis on more academic outcomes which had been her own experience of initial teacher education.

A telling comment was made by one student teacher (B3) who claimed not to have seen any successful assessment practices whilst on professional practice. She said, "I still don't feel I've seen assessment done successfully in a manner that I could reproduce in my own classroom. I've heard all the theory and it's wonderful. I understand why I need to do it and it's fantastic... I don't think they know how to manage it."

Views of preparation for the classroom assessment role

We then asked the student teachers to recall particular topics, techniques, resources, or experiences that they had found to be useful preparation for their learning about how to assess children's progress. We thought this information could provide us with useful insights into what the beginning teachers might find helpful as well. The most useful examples related to instances of actual classroom practices where classroom teachers had either talked about or demonstrated their use of various assessment strategies. One student teacher (A1) recalled a lecture towards the end of her course at which a practising teacher had talked about her particular use of assessment, what she did, and how she did it. This student teacher had liked the practical advice offered by the teacher, particularly the samples of assessment records and had subsequently used these herself when on a school practicum. Others talked about working alongside associate teachers who had modelled various practices and had then had "a go" themselves. Whilst in schools, the student teachers had observed a variety of assessments which had typically included personal portfolios, peer- and self-assessment, diagnostic assessments, e.g. running records of reading and conferences with the teacher as well as teacher-designed pen and paper tests. All of these examples illustrate the importance of seeing assessment practices in action.

One student teacher talked about a strategy she had developed herself. It included using a list of questions she would ask herself when justifying the type of assessment she might use with children. These questions addressed issues of who, why, what, and how. This "little procedure" as she called it, had given her confidence to justify her reasons for the assessment so that it was not just a matter of assessment for assessment's sake (A2). Presumably this "procedure" had stemmed from her internalisation of assessment theory from her teacher education courses.

Some of the student teachers were aware that there were resources which would help them to identify achievement levels and how to measure them. One student teacher (B3) mentioned that the Assessment Resource Banks were particularly helpful for what she considered to be one of the more difficult curriculum areas to assess, namely the English curriculum. This student teacher had made a comparison between assessments in mathematics and English saying, "Maths is by far the easiest thing to assess in my opinion. It is very much, 'Yes they can do it or no they can't.'" This comment reveals a limited understanding of the nature of mathematics learning, where the curriculum focus has moved beyond getting the right answers to assessment of aspects of mathematics such as problem solving. Assessment of written language was considered more complicated because of the need to comment on both the deep and surface features of the writing, e.g. quality and choice of words and matters of punctuation and spelling. It should be noted that the focus for our study was on the students' perceptions and we did not check the student teachers' responses against the content of their specific ITE programme.

While schools and providers of teacher education receive regular issues of Ministry of Education documents specifying the assessment requirements of schools, not all of the student teachers were aware that such documents existed. There was some awareness of the *Policy to Practice* book (B1, B3, C1, C2, C3), although not all knew the name of it and referred to the colour of its front

cover. Others knew about *Unlocking Formative Assessment* (Clark, Timperley, & Hattie, 2003) or said they used the separate curriculum documents to guide their decisions about what, when, and how to assess children's work. No mention was made of the National Education or Administrative Guidelines (NEGs or NAGS) or the Education Standards Act for an overview of assessment requirements. The students were more focused on the specifics of what they needed to assess. Some expected to be told by the school what they were required to do. One student teacher expected principals or syndicate leaders to tell her what assessments would be required for a particular year or unit of work and expected that there would be differences between schools (A1).

Concerns about learning to assess children's learning in the classroom

These student teachers had some concerns about the types of assessment they had seen teachers use. They had a particular dislike for pen and paper tests. While they accepted that such tests were easy to administer, they could see the disadvantages of shorter answers not necessarily providing sufficient information about the substance of what children knew or could do. The student teachers claimed to favour teacher observations as a way to gather in-depth information about individual knowledge and achievement. This was not, however, without some concerns about how they might manage such practices with a whole class of children as alternatives to pen and paper tests (B3). This concern was one we would later follow with interest in our interviews with beginning teachers to see if they still retained this preference for classroom observations.

Some of these student teachers were concerned about how to conduct assessment across the huge range of curriculum areas. This was in part due to the timing of each curriculum course in their programmes of study. They were well aware that the curriculum areas, which had been introduced in their first year, had emphasised the content of what to teach rather than showing how that content might match individual needs of children through assessment activities. One student talked about the need to go back and revisit the curriculum areas introduced in their first year so that they could be linked to the bigger picture of assessment. Such information about possible gaps in their assessment knowledge would have been useful for their employing schools.

While the student teachers were generally satisfied with assessment being a major focus of their professional studies courses, there was still a feeling that their confidence would have been enhanced if they had dealt with assessment issues much earlier in their programmes of study. For some, assessment had remained somewhat of a mystery. It was seen as an add-on which was left to "float out there" or was just another bit to add to the teaching episode (A2) until the requirements associated with having full control of a class for a block of time necessitated more in-depth assessments of children's abilities and progress. What the student teachers said they needed was an earlier linking into a bigger picture to allow connections to be made across areas in order for them to see how assessment provided meaning and direction for their teaching. A student teacher (A3) talked about planning and teaching a lesson and then having to work out how it might be assessed with little guidance from her lecturer. The same student teacher recalled that

in post-lesson conversations with college lecturers she had seldom been asked how she knew the children had met the learning outcomes. These comments indicate that the student teachers appeared to require more in-depth content on assessment principles and practices throughout their ITE programme.

Giving assessment feedback to learners

The giving of feedback to children was an area that we wanted to explore with both student teachers and new graduates. We asked both groups how they gave feedback to children and asked for specific examples in story writing as a means of checking beliefs against practices.

Commenting on the particular techniques they had observed classroom teachers using when giving feedback to children, student teachers mentioned both oral and written feedback. They noted that the teachers they had observed had been generally positive and constructive. One said:

They always start with the positives and then they will go on to tell a child if there are any weaknesses. For example, in story writing ‘Oh that’s a beautiful story and I like the way you’ve done that. Could you next time try and do this?’ (B1).

Mention was made about the children’s reaction to feedback and whether this was given to them as individuals or within hearing of other children. Both effort and achievement were seen to be important.

Another positive example of feedback was identified by a student teacher who said:

I think the best idea for me was the teacher questioning the children, getting them to sort of develop their own understanding.... Not telling them what it is that they are not doing...but actually getting them to see for themselves.... Asking them questions about where they need to go or why they think that’s not working (A2).

The emphasis of constantly moving children on towards further achievement was apparent in the responses of several other student teachers. One referred to the way a teacher had placed written statements such as “We are learning to...” on the blackboard to indicate a purpose and a direction for learning (A3). Student teachers had also observed recording future goals in their written feedback to children (C2).

Written feedback was seen as more problematic. One student teacher said:

Sometimes I feel that I’ve seen a lot that’s not specific enough. You get the ‘good girl’, ‘well done’, that type of thing that’s often not really saying what is good, what is being done well, what is good about that particular piece of work. I think a lot of teachers, me included, fall into that trap of giving that very broad general feedback... Even at training college I’ve come across it from some of our lecturers too (A1).

One student teacher was critical of much of the written feedback that she had seen teachers provide to children and said:

I've seen a lot of written assessment by teachers and it was a complete waste of time because they don't have enough time to do it justice in terms of marking books. You've only got so many hours in the day and to me ticking it and putting 'good'.... But if you did write a comment, like a sort of constructive comment towards developing a better understanding the child might not read it and you would actually need to talk it through with them to get some benefit from it. I struggle with that whole sort of physical marking of books and getting something positive out of it in terms of assessment" (A2).

Other methods of feedback student teachers recalled included teachers giving nods, smiles, and the thumbs up signal to children as they moved around the room. Notes for children to take home to their parents were also mentioned as were stamps and stickers (B3). The roving conference was another frequent occurrence in classrooms. Some referred to this as conferencing or one-to-one talking. Such conversations would typically focus on what the teacher had seen as strengths or weaknesses of work the day before, providing encouragement and reminding the child how they might improve their work that day (D1).

The interviews explored the messages the student teachers thought teachers were giving to children when they gave children feedback on their work. They were asked to provide examples of the ways teachers addressed issues of presentation (layout, neatness), surface features (punctuation and spelling), quantity of work, effort, and/or its quality.

One student teacher was critical of a teacher who did not provide feedback that would assist children to know how to improve their work. The student teacher said, "[There was] a lot of red pen over the [child's] writing pointing out that something was spelt incorrectly, fullstops, capital letters, all that sort of thing and often not a comment about the quality of the writing. Things scribbled underneath to say use a ruler to rule off" (A1). This student teacher went on to recall the feedback given to a particular child who was described as "not being the neatest of writers". She remembered that the child's poem was actually quite good but that this was not acknowledged in the teacher's feedback. Instead the teacher had referred to the absence of a surface feature.

In a similar vein, another student teacher was critical of feedback which focused on punctuation and surface features, especially when that had not been the focus of the initial teaching. She said, "It's about what's being taught. What the success criteria the kids know they're aiming for. That's what you should be feeding back on" (A2). An over emphasis on presentation by teachers was mentioned by other student teachers as well. One had a more positive example to report saying, "The teacher may say that's lovely work, nice and neat, if it is but there will never be any negative feedback if the work is messy because my last two placements, story writing was about the quality of the content not the presentation" (B1). However, this was not the experience of all of the student teachers. In talking about feedback given to homework exercises, one student teacher said, "I've seen a lot of teachers have a bee in their bonnet about neatness and layout. I've seen a couple of horrific things, pages ripped out of the book, in front of the child, start again" (B2).

It was acknowledged that for some children the quantity of writing they managed in any one session could be an issue. In cases where children were struggling to write much, a student teacher recalled observing a teacher sitting beside a child to brainstorm ideas, giving time limits to

see how many ideas could be given in one minute. This provided a challenge to the child but was dependent on the topic being able to motivate the child to succeed.

One student teacher admitted that teachers all had their idiosyncracies about what they considered to be of importance and their expectations might vary from child to child. For example she admitted to valuing effort and being more lenient with a child who presented messy work yet had put effort into the task. However, she also said that presentation was important to enable other people to read their ideas. This was seen to be an important life skill and was reiterated by two of the student teachers (B3, D1).

Student teachers did not consider that feedback had to be written. In fact one student teacher recalled a teacher spending a lot of time with her class encouraging the use of peer feedback. Checklists were used to highlight how many words were correctly spelt and the correct use of full stops and capital letters. In this way the children could monitor their own improvement (C1). This student teacher said the most effective feedback was formative, occurring whilst the children were working on a task. Another student teacher mentioned the teacher moving around the class while the lesson was in progress saying things like, “This is what you need to do, this is what you need to improve” (D1). This strategy was seen to serve also as a reminder to other children.

Knowledge of strategies that involve students in assessment

The student teachers were excited by the variety of assessment methods they had seen used in schools. They liked the notion of giving responsibility to children for their own assessment. One said, “Giving responsibility to the students I thought was really important and really helps the children to understand what they’re learning and why; giving them purpose for learning” (C2). This strategy had appeal for the student teachers because it had the potential to help the children to know what their learning goals were and how the teacher would help them to meet those goals. In this way the teacher and children could work as learning partners. Once again, this view was one we would explore with the new graduates.

Views of readiness for their classroom assessment role

A lack of knowledge and confidence in assessment was apparent for two of the student teachers who claimed to have learnt, through some hard knocks, valuable lessons about their need to know what standards to expect prior to testing children. The following anecdotes illustrate how and when these students made the links between teaching and assessing. One had made this link when she realised that she needed to establish some success criteria prior to using any assessment with children. Here she recalled a learning experience that had given her quite a jolt and said:

I remember the first time ever doing something...just giving them a test and not knowing how I was going to measure that or I gave them a writing task once and I had no idea what was going to be a good piece and what would be an average and what was going to be a

'please do it again' piece. As a result the quality of work I got was lower because I hadn't told the children either (B3).

A student teacher (A2) mentioned not being ready for her assessment role because she was so focused on her planning and the coverage of curriculum content. She had had a similar "wake up call" in her third year when she realised that assessment mattered in determining the next steps in her teaching. While appreciative of guidance given, one student teacher (B3) noted that there were also "assessment black holes" that could only be addressed through practical experience and learning on the job.

Areas identified as challenges

Areas considered to be challenging for the student teachers in their assessment roles covered several themes. One was the manageability of classroom assessment and not overdoing assessment. One student teacher was concerned about making her feedback specific enough when she was faced with "a whole line of kids standing with their books waiting for feedback". She admitted to having "fallen into that trap" when in a hurry of saying "great" and moving on to the next child (A1). Being able to make adequate assessments for all the children in a class was another issue of concern. One student teacher was planning to "pick out three or four children a week and really concentrate on their work and write up little reports and notes in her roll book" (B1) in order to make her assessment sufficiently useful and specific.

For another the challenge was "knowing the children well enough to know when they had moved on" (A2). Consistency and avoiding bias were listed as other challenges along with being honest with parents when a child was not achieving. One student teacher mentioned feeling caught between wanting to help one child at the expense of others saying, "I would hone in on that child, maybe to the neglect of others... It's difficult in a class of thirty children because teachers have said to me, 'Oh they'll catch up'... I find it really difficult to let those kids cruise along and push others up" (A3). Thus catering for a large range of ability levels was seen to be problematic particularly when there might be children who had not mastered a skill at the end of a teaching unit (D3). For others, seeing children as individuals and resisting the temptation to make comparisons with others was yet another challenge as well as resisting pen and paper tests (B3).

Time for assessment was a further area of challenge. This included time to test individuals as well as the need to keep written records (D2). Using assessment time wisely to assess what mattered was also mentioned by two of the student teachers (C1 and C3) who were concerned that assessments matched the various curriculum levels. Interestingly, no mention was made of time being needed to analyse the assessment information as an indicator for the next teaching.

Preparedness for classroom assessment

In terms of their preparedness to undertake classroom assessment responsibilities these student teachers' responses covered the full range from real confidence to total inadequacy.

One student teacher, who claimed to be well prepared, said, “It’s something I’ve given a lot of thought to. I’ve made a big effort to be more specific in my comments... I evaluate at the end of the day so that I can see areas for myself that I need to improve on... I use that to inform my next teaching... I sort of feel, oh I need to go on with that or split these into two groups” (A1). Another student teacher with a high level of confidence said her focus had been to identify children’s needs and develop programmes to suit their needs and find their strengths and weaknesses. She also referred to the usefulness of the national exemplars to indicate achievement levels (B1).

Others, however, were less confident. One said she would flounder because she had only had practical experience of assessment in two out of seven curriculum areas. Assessments had been “bitsy” with the classroom teacher helping in the background (A3). Two others expected their confidence to increase once they had their own class of children (B2, D1). One said, “I think I’ll learn a lot more from actually being out there...than reading up lots of different books and having a wee introduction to them but nothing to really practise those skills on” (B2).

There was a strong expectation that tutor teachers would provide guidance in the area of assessing children’s work. This was seen in terms of modelling manageable strategies and helping the new graduates to feel they were addressing suitable content in their teaching and at the same time satisfying the school’s systems for accountability (A2, B3).

Suggestions for improvements in developing knowledge of assessment in Initial Teacher Education programmes

The student teachers indicated the need for further modelling of assessment practices with children in classrooms. One suggestion was for them to observe the assessment cycle, i.e. seeing a teacher doing a diagnostic assessment, analysing it, and interpreting the data to improve their teaching content and/or teaching methods (A1). One suggested walking around with a teacher whilst they were assessing children and having them explain it on the spot or at a later time (B3). As well as being able to understand what the teacher was going to do with the assessment information, this student teacher wanted to know how that teacher would record the information. These were all things that a practising teacher could model.

Additional resources/assistance

The student teachers had high expectations that their needs would be met at the school site with the help of their tutor teacher, syndicate leader, and principal. One said, “Theoretically if you’ve a good tutor teacher, they should hopefully cover what you need to do or what you need to know... They should maybe show you how they like it to be recorded, how they like the information to be kept, where it should be kept, how much of it, who needs it, how often it needs to be seen” (A1). Information about keeping systems manageable was also high on the priority list. For example, one student teacher was undecided about using clear files, slips of paper, an assessment book, or computer files (B1). Another wanted opportunities to talk with teachers in addition to their tutor

teacher in order to explore how much consistency there was within the school and to compare strategies used by the teachers (D1).

One wanted to be handed an assessment information pack on her arrival at the school which stated in writing what the school's assessment systems and expectations were. She did not want to find any surprises awaiting her at week 10 such as suddenly finding out that she was required to have data for reports or parent interviews. The same student teacher also admitted that it would be a "matter of luck" whether the rapport she could establish with her tutor teacher would result in useful assistance (A2). Having a formal introduction to the school's assessment policies, and templates for use was wanted prior to the first week of teaching by two student teachers (B3, C2). It was suggested that this then be followed up with release time specifically for assessments.

Modelling and lots of discussion were seen as necessary by several other student teachers who wanted to see samples of assessment for different subjects or topics (A3, C1, C2). One suggestion given was for "someone to mark with you so that they can explain how and why they have marked the child the way they have" (B3, C3). Reassurance that their assessments were good enough was important because it was considered that their teacher education programmes had not indicated what was enough or what was acceptable (A3). This feeling was similarly endorsed by another student teacher (D2).

Assessment in the wider context

Student teachers were also asked what they thought teachers, principals, boards of trustees, parents, and the Ministry of Education wanted from assessments of children. They thought teachers wanted assessment information to indicate when and where a change of approach, pace, or content level might be required to better meet the needs of the children they were teaching. Their perception of what was important for principals, boards of trustees, and the school as a whole had a different emphasis. Here assessment information was seen as evidence which could be used to satisfy the Education Review Office or individuals in the school's community who might have questions about curriculum coverage, the progress made by groups of children and reassurance that learning needs were being met (A1, C3). This was explained as "wanting information to show their staff [were] on track with individuals and that programmes [were] running at the right level" (C1). Only one student teacher made mention of a range of subgroups and how assessment information could be used for classification and comparison purposes. She said, "Whether certain groups are having their needs met, say Asian students or girls or boys [and] making sure that those groups [were] being looked at and achieving." This emphasis on evidence as proof of learning was reiterated by one student teacher who said, "You can show them, these people are struggling with this... They've improved from here but then you can also say that half of my class do know that and they're already onto the next steps. They just really want to see that you're implementing what you're saying you will" (D1).

On the other hand, the assessment information thought to be of interest to parents related to their children's achievement ranking within their class groupings. This was expressed as "What slot does my child fit into? Are they average, below, or above? Is there an area where they could be given extra help? What can [we as] parents do to help? (A1, B3). One student teacher made the comment, "I think a lot of them would like some sort of standard mean which they could base their children on" (C1). Several of the student teachers claimed that in doing so the parents also wanted information about their children's ability levels in literacy and numeracy (A2, A3, B1, C1, D2). In addition to academic matters, parents were also seen as concerned about socialisation. The student teachers claimed that parents wanted to know how their child related to his or her peer group. Some of the student teachers were parents of school-aged children themselves. One said:

It doesn't worry me if she's up the top or at the bottom or wherever, as long as I know she's happy in the class and making some headway... I want my child's self-esteem to be intact first and foremost and I think most parents would want that (B2).

Student teachers believed that the Ministry of Education required assessment information from schools as evidence of achievement of national standards. In this way the Ministry of Education could utilise assessment information to guide future resource development and target and support schools' and teachers' assessment knowledge and needs.

Summary

Findings of our interview data from the final year teacher education students confirm the notion that student teachers are highly influenced by the views and practices of experienced classroom practitioners. It was apparent from the students' responses that no matter how well the ITE programmes prepare student teachers for teaching, they cannot fully create or sustain an environment that genuinely equates with the reality of full-time teaching (Loughran, Brown, & Doecke, 2001). Thus at the end of their ITE programmes student teachers could identify challenges they had yet to resolve and did not feel fully prepared for the teaching role.

We considered the student teachers' responses did show understanding of the principles and purposes of classroom assessment. We noted that although the formative and summative functions were part of their responses they did not consistently use this terminology in their responses but the meaning was apparent. Assessment was mentioned as an area in which they expected to receive further guidance from employing schools in terms of what assessment tools to use and how and when to implement them. They were conscious that although schools each had their own particular schedules and ways of working in assessment, there was still an accepted belief that assessment data could provide proof that what teachers were doing was making a difference to students' learning. Our conversations with the student teachers highlighted their confidence in knowing the mechanics of what to assess in literacy and numeracy but uncovered their concerns about the ways they could manage assessment across all curriculum areas for each individual in their classes. They were all well aware of the potential for over assessment in schools and that too

much assessment did not necessarily serve a useful purpose. Many of the student teachers were also concerned that practising teachers had not yet found ways of managing their assessment so that it could truly be said to be impacting on the teaching and learning process. This contributed to the recognition that assessment was a difficult area.

5. The case study at School A

Introduction

To begin this study, the school is introduced with details of its setting, staffing, and ways of working. These are important considerations for understanding the support systems and learning journey for a beginning teacher. We have used the pseudonym, Andrea, for the beginning teacher employed by School A. Andrea's learning journey towards effective classroom assessment practices is reported from three interviews where she has reflected on her progress. Her progress is also explored through interviews with significant others (e.g. the tutor teacher, principal, and acting deputy principal) who have each played a part in helping her to become an increasingly effective classroom assessor. Each of these perspectives is also placed alongside school-wide assessment documentation to highlight the broader realisation of how assessment information is collected and used to inform children's learning at School A.

A description of School A

The size and corresponding numbers of senior staff available to support beginning teachers were special features of School A with its 16 classrooms. Staffing included a non-teaching principal and deputy principal. The deputy principal was the professional leader of teaching and learning. The remaining staff worked in three level areas. Level 1 catered for Years 0–2 children, Level 2 for Years 3–4 children and Level 3 for Years 5–6 children. Each level area was led by a senior teacher. Each level therefore had both senior and middle management staffing to support beginning teachers. A permanent part-time teacher was also employed for reading recovery for 6-year-olds. Other part-time staff were involved with release for senior staff. Teachers' aides were provided for resource management, ESOL, RTLB support, mainstream support, and classroom support.

Staff turnover was expected within the school as a number of teachers were employed on fixed contracts. For example, 2003 staffing included long-term relieving positions due to parental leave and several job shares. Nine appointments were made during 2003 with six staff being farewelled from fixed contracts, because of resignations, or temporary absences due to parental leave or secondments to other agencies. The school had taken particular care to ensure that despite an expected turnover of staff, systems were in place to support new staff.

Resources to support beginning teachers

The school employed several beginning teachers who were supported by tutor teachers and a well defined beginning teacher induction programme. The programme was supported by job descriptions for the tutor teacher as well as a release teacher. Both beginning teachers and their assigned tutor teachers were provided with clear files containing resource material for developing an individualised programme. A week by week, term by term list of topics was drawn up to ensure coverage of both administrative and teaching matters. Care had been taken in the compilation of this list to ensure that overload was avoided and there was a smooth transition for beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. Where possible support was provided in advance of particular events such as parent interviews and assessments so that the beginning teacher was able to systematically collect the necessary documentation and feel well prepared for these events. This structure of support within the school meant that other staff appointed to the tutor teacher role had clear systems to follow. This was an important point for 2004 because the person responsible for developing this programme took leave of absence and was replaced by a staff member who had no experience or training for such a role.

Programme documentation included a set of templates for recording details of the support offered, issues discussed, and actions required from both the tutor and beginning teacher. Samples of lesson observation recording sheets provided clear messages about what was required from beginning teachers as they worked through the process of meeting professional standards for full registration. These had rating scales to indicate standards which were either very acceptable or needing further development. Templates included areas such as curriculum knowledge/delivery, classroom management, pupil learning and achievements for which brief descriptors were listed. The remaining template was for the monthly report. This acted as a summary document noting points of strength and development and was signed by the beginning teacher, tutor teacher, and principal. These resources complemented the support kit for schools entitled *Towards Full Registration* compiled by the Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Council.

A profile of the beginning teacher at School A

Andrea was one of several beginning teachers employed by School A. She taught a parallel class to her tutor teacher at Year 5 and was located next door to his classroom. She was able to draw on the expertise of all the teachers in her syndicate that included the acting deputy principal, syndicate leader (with responsibility for performance appraisals), and her tutor teacher. While Andrea had a regular schedule of meetings with her tutor teacher, she also had ready access for more immediate issues. It had also been to Andrea's advantage that she had her final teaching practice placement at School A and had a head start on the school's ways of operating. She said:

I had my last section here so felt I knew quite a lot. In a five week section with three weeks of full control I assessed everything that I taught. I also had some portfolio samples I administered. Over the holidays I was in here reading up on the school folders and policies

before I actually started. So I felt pretty confident about the school's assessment policy and practice.

In her first month at the school, Andrea indicated that she considered her formative assessment practices to be one of her strengths in assessment. She was keen on observing the children as they worked and also collecting in their books on a regular basis to determine where they were struggling so that she could adjust her teaching to suit their needs. Her biggest concern at this stage was knowing just how much assessment she was expected to do and when to stop assessing. This was one of the first questions she asked her tutor teacher. His response was to show her what he did in his classroom and to make suggestions for managing the assessment role.

Andrea had confidence in her assessment knowledge from her university and ITE studies. She felt the tutor teacher's role was to help her to meet the school's standards for assessment. In particular her tutor teacher had shown her how to set up routines for assessment, what to collect for the portfolios, and had shared examples of his own assessments which served as points of comparison for Andrea.

By the end of February, Andrea had conducted PAT tests, spelling tests, pre- and post-tests in mathematics, diagnostic testing for the integrated unit, and collected samples of handwriting. She had appreciated being able to "pop" into Sam's (the tutor teacher's) classroom at any time with her questions. She had also spoken with other teachers who were familiar with the same teaching level and they had also shown her how they ran their spelling programmes.

The challenge of getting the spelling programme up and running was given repeated mention in the interviews with Andrea. Apparently the teaching of spelling had been glossed over in the ITE programme. She said:

It's something that does get skipped over a bit at college because they tell us that spelling shouldn't be important. It's the children's written work that counts but when the school has a 'set in stone' programme, you have to go with that... It was a big thing for me... Actually using spelling lists and keeping track of where everyone is at was something very new to me. I feel I've learned a lot now and I'm impressed with the programme the school has in place and the assessment of it.

Andrea was well supported with written guidelines for assessment practices at the school. In fact she had two boxes of folders which she had initially found somewhat intimidating and was doubtful whether she would be able to remember it all. However, she later began to appreciate these resources and said, "I loved having it all laid out for me so that it was there if I wanted... Each folder contained a broad outline of what should be taught at Level 3 for each subject, the assessment requirements, like when to assess it and what kind of things should be assessed within that subject." Mention was made of the handwriting example which had been labelled as being at the beginning of Level 2 and this had served as a point of comparison.

Another area of learning for Andrea as a beginning teacher was using learning intentions. This was something she had discovered on her teaching practice placement at the school. All of the teachers were focusing on determining learning intentions with the children at the start of every

lesson. Each lesson was then expected to end with some “low key” self-assessment for which the children gave a “thumbs up” if they had achieved it, a “thumb sideways” if nearly there, or a “thumbs down” if not achieved stating one thing they might be able to change so that next time the learning intention might be achieved. Andrea subsequently admitted that her ITE programme had included some information on learning intentions, but that it was a bit vague and unstructured. On the other hand, in the school setting she had seen teachers using large charts with speech bubbles saying “We’re learning to.... We’ll know we’ve achieved this when...” This structured approach appealed to Andrea.

Andrea’s reflections on her assessment practice

Throughout the first three months of her teaching Andrea had realised that she was doing a lot of assessing but wasn’t necessarily recording it. She explained how she didn’t have the “evidence” on which she had based her decisions about groupings and next steps for teaching. Having realised this, a large part of her first term holiday had been spent recording children’s achievements in retrospect. She was feeling clearer about what she had to do to meet the school’s assessment requirements and how she might improve her practices. The challenge for Term 2 was for her to produce clear statements of the children’s achievements which could be used for both written reports and the interviews with the parents. She was also aware that the best support she could have from her tutor teacher for this task would be the provision of examples and advice about the wording. Opportunities to discuss her assessments with her tutor teacher and syndicate colleagues were appreciated.

In describing the ways she gave feedback to children, Andrea had moved away from just using praise to giving more constructive feedback. She now endeavoured to give specific information to the children about what and how they had achieved well and what and how they could improve on in the future. In this way she was also making connections between the original learning intentions and her feedback. Classroom observations by her tutor teacher were also proving to be a useful source of information guiding her classroom assessment strategies.

One indication of Andrea’s increasing confidence with classroom assessment was the way she was developing her own methods to assess student achievement and then converting the same data to fulfil the school’s assessment requirements. For example, in physical education she said she had made up rubrics to show how the children were achieving each skill in terms of four levels (exceeded the level, achieved, not achieved yet, and really struggling). The ongoing support from her syndicate colleagues was also apparent in her mention of their shared unit planning, identification of assessment tasks, and discussions about what should be kept for the school’s records.

A profile of the tutor teacher at School A and his approach

Sam was a first time tutor teacher who had been assigned to work with Andrea. Although new to this role, he, like Andrea, felt well supported by everyone in the school. When he had wanted to discuss aspects of his tutor teacher role, the principal and other senior management staff had willingly given him time. He had received no professional development for this role beyond what the school provided with meetings and supporting policies and documentation. Once he was in the tutor teacher role, he attended a half-day in-service course which he had found helpful.

Discussions with other tutor teachers attending the course had made him think about how he balanced the time demands of attending to his own classroom teaching and being accessible for the beginning teacher. He indicated that he would also have welcomed an earlier timing of the in-service course so that it was held before he had started working with Andrea. In that way he would have had more of an idea of how to establish their working relationship. He said, "It would have been nice to know just the little intricacies of what to do, what not to do, how to go about it in advance." Similarly he thought that there would be benefits for tutor teachers if they were able to meet as a group from time to time as did the beginning teachers. Sam's associate teacher experience was also of value as he has been accustomed to modelling and observing teaching practices and providing directed feedback sessions.

The beginning teacher programme for Andrea

Whilst Andrea had daily opportunities for discussing aspects of her teaching with Sam, they also had scheduled fortnightly meetings. These scheduled meetings had generally followed the guidelines as stated in the school's beginning teacher induction programme information. However, there was some flexibility in what was covered at those meetings. Sam was very responsive to Andrea and considered her needs a priority at these meetings.

When Sam was asked to describe their way of working together, he replied:

We set up what should be discussed at the next meeting, record any actions that are needed and we have different observation sheets for specific things. Our first meeting concentrated on management and those issues are then taken to the next meeting and discussed. Then we have sheets specifically targeted at pupil achievement, curriculum delivery, guidelines for an observation, and various templates for marking up the events. Not necessarily all have to be done but different suggestions if they are appropriate.

Sam continued by saying:

We talk about professional standards and then it goes into a bit more about feedback and assessment. We have a long-term plan that we set for each term and we just jot down things on the long-term plan that are coming up, what we should be focusing on, special things that have come about, what we should work around, setting up dates... Setting up the assessment folders, making sure all the assessment is being looked at but once again, not stressing out too much and getting into too much detail. Basics like running records, PATs, and the spelling programme.

These descriptions of their programme indicated that Sam was endeavouring to work beside Andrea, anticipating what was coming up on the school's schedule and ensuring that she was prepared for each event.

Sam thought highly of Andrea's teaching ability and admitted that he was also learning from her and thinking in new ways about his own teaching. He considered Andrea had gained a lot of confidence and just needed to keep asking questions and practising what she was doing, finding the things that were working and those that were not. He wanted her to try new things as well and not be afraid of doing this. This "having a go" attitude was prevalent throughout Andrea's syndicate and was particularly evident in the ways in which the planning and reporting templates had been devised and constantly revised.

Sam was aware that he was learning the role as he went, however, there were occasions when he was unable to give Andrea the time she required. At the same time he was conscious that she needed to develop her own professional identity. He said:

I don't want to be on her coat-tails the whole time because I think it's important that we don't baby them and they have their own thoughts and way of doing things. If it all turns to custard, I would hope that (Andrea) would come and see me about it and we would work something out to solve the problems.

Sam had found the school's use of standardised tests helpful for grouping children and reporting progress to parents. He had taken particular care to spend time with Andrea, ensuring that she knew when to administer each test and how to analyse it.

School A's assessment documentation

We accessed the Education Review Office website for the most current ERO report for the school to help us develop our understandings of the school's assessment practices and processes. The principal also supplied us with copies of the school's annual planning and reporting documentation which had been forwarded to the Ministry of Education. Further samples of tracking sheets were provided by the acting deputy principal who showed us what was expected from classroom teachers.

Education Review Office report

One focus area for the most recent review by the Education Review Office (January, 2004) was particularly pertinent to our study. This agreed focus between the board of trustees and ERO was for a review regarding the quality with which student achievement was being assessed, monitored, and reported in the school.

We read the Education Review Office report and noted the comments made about this focus. The school's strengths in curriculum planning, delivery, and assessment across the school were identified in the report with the following words:

Curriculum management systems are effective. A strength of curriculum delivery is the high level of consistency in teachers' planning and assessment procedures across all classes. The leadership of the senior managers and the syndicate leaders has been significant in this regard. The role of the deputy principal as the curriculum leader in the school has been of considerable benefit. Regular weekly meetings of the senior staff provide a valuable opportunity for professional reflection, direction setting and professional development. Curriculum policies, procedures and programmes provide clear direction and support for the teachers, and regular curriculum reviews allow the senior managers to monitor performance in all learning areas.

Systems for curriculum management within the school also received positive comment from the Education Review Office. Comments included:

The curriculum structures provide effective support for teachers in delivering the curriculum. Responsibilities are delegated to make the best use of the strengths of staff. The role of the deputy principal as the leader of learning results in a high degree of consistent practice at the school. The syndicate leaders provide effective leadership for the teachers. Curriculum teams also play a useful role in maintaining an overview and reviewing progress in their respective learning areas. Efficient curriculum management structures result in consistent practice across the school.

In reporting on the quality with which student achievement was being assessed, monitored, and reported, the Education Review Office stated:

Much of the professional development undertaken at the school since the previous review has involved improving school systems for assessing student achievement and monitoring and recording their progress. This process has involved the preparation of student work portfolios and cumulative records. ERO and the board believed that a review of these developments would confirm the good practice and indicate areas for further development.

Furthermore areas of good performance were noted regarding portfolios and the tracking of student progress.

Portfolios

The portfolios were viewed as providing an informative record of students' progress in all learning areas, teacher analysis of work samples in relation to appropriate achievement levels of the New Zealand curriculum, and comments by students about their personal learning goals. The Education Review Office made particular mention of the clear guidelines provided for teachers about the compilation of the portfolios, particularly what was to be collected and when. The portfolios were perceived as being a valuable resource when teachers met with parents and their child to discuss learning progress as part of the school's reporting process.

Tracking progress

The ERO report acknowledged the significant progress teachers had made in tracking student progress in English and mathematics but that assessment in social studies, science, and technology, the subjects covered through integrated studies, was not as regular or as complete as in English and mathematics. It was noted that the best achievement information had come from standardised tests in reading and mathematics but that increasingly accurate information was being recorded about written language. Teachers were working on developing clear criteria that provided an accurate indication of where students were in relation to the levels of the New Zealand curriculum and of their acquisition of the essential learning skills. The need for further development in the area of essential skills was realised by the school. A start was also being made to computerise the recording of achievement data so that there was a convenient process for identifying the progress that students made while they were at the school.

Analysing classroom assessment data

Assessment information was gathered on a regular basis. Some of this information was being analysed to identify next learning steps and those students who might need further assistance. Time was devoted at syndicate meetings for teachers to discuss samples of work and this collegial sharing of strategies was providing a culture of reflective practice by all staff.

The annual report

Careful scrutiny of the annual report documentation revealed the ways in which the school had devoted considerable time and energy towards improving its structures and programmes of work. A regular schedule of self-review was one way of ensuring that continuous improvements were made. For example, the curriculum report included a list of the policies reviewed from the two-yearly review cycle. The school had nominated two areas of self-review for which summaries and survey results were provided. The homework review identified parents' and teachers' perceptions and the ways in which teachers have modified their practices. The remaining focus area of reporting to parents similarly explained the self-review process and how the principal had collected information from other schools about their reporting systems to parents and had subsequently sent random surveys to a sample of parents at each level of his own school. Senior teachers were also canvassed for their views.

These review statements provided an opportunity for the school to justify its actions and also reminded others of the purpose behind setting homework activities. In the case of homework, the review report stated:

All teachers agreed that homework was necessary. Homework gave the children time to practise skills learnt in class. It allowed interaction with parent and child so each knew what was happening at school. The teachers noticed improvement through practice in reading, spelling and mathematics and research skills. It helped children with time management and learning to take responsibility in the child's own learning (life long skills).

To supplement the above documentation, the principal offered us a copy of the annual curriculum goals which listed achievement expectations for reading, spelling, and mathematics. These statements provided a very clear indication of what could be expected from 80 percent of the children at each age level.

The variance report showed where the benchmarks had been placed and whether achievements had exceeded these expectations. Similarly, reasons were provided for targets which had not been reached with accompanying statements of intent to indicate where future efforts would be made. The following example for Year 5 achievement shows how the school was justifying its actions:

Year 5 achievement has been lower than other levels in most literacy areas. Many of these children have been in support programmes as well as receiving in-class support. 66 percent of Year 5 children are currently reading at or beyond their chronological age so we will adjust the target to a 6 month gap for 2004.

Interviews with significant others

In addition to the tutor teacher's advice and guidance, the beginning teacher was able to access the support of other staff. Data reported in this subsection relate to interviews held with the principal and the acting deputy principal from School A. Unfortunately the syndicate leader was on leave and it was not possible to interview her.

The principal's perceptions of the classroom assessment role

Roger, the principal of School A, described the role of classroom assessment as being about identifying the next learning step(s) for children. He viewed assessment as both feeding forward and feeding back. This meant it occurred at the planning stage with teachers being aware of what they were trying to achieve with children in terms of achievement objectives and curriculum content. The next phase was looking to see if these objectives had been met and asking, if not, why not and then determining future action steps.

Senior teachers' knowledge of the pre-service teacher education programmes

Roger said he really didn't know what ITE programmes did in terms of assessment information and skills. He assumed that they talked about the theory of assessment so that student teachers would have some basis for understanding what they saw happening in schools. He expected ITE to focus on assessments in numeracy and literacy in particular and suggested that they needed to set up situations for the student teachers which would be typical of practices in schools.

Wanda, the acting deputy principal, was also unaware about what assessment knowledge and skills were developed in programmes of initial teacher education. She suggested that it was difficult to prepare student teachers for their classroom assessor roles because each school had its own system and expectations. She accepted that ITE should provide a very broad coverage of assessment rather than any in-depth detail for day-to-day assessments. Furthermore she didn't think it were possible for ITE to "mirror what would happen in schools". Roger held a similar view saying that new graduates might want to go into a particular school and do things in a certain way and they might not be able to do that because schools worked different systems. Nevertheless, Roger did not want all teachers to be clones. He wanted a basic framework that would help those whose practice was poor but at the same time did not want to stifle innovation, experimentation, and really good ideas. He certainly didn't want the more able teacher being told, "No you don't do that, you do it this way." His preference was for the "Kiwi way" which was to do it your own way and then share it with others.

Roger indicated that at his school, each beginning teacher was "picked up from where they were and taken through the basics of the school's assessment philosophy and procedures". In making this statement, he clearly was accepting that schools would be helping beginning teachers with their assessment practices. To this end each beginning teacher was given an assessment calendar, explanations of the portfolio system, their role in reporting and maintaining cumulative records of student achievement. Roger had considerable confidence in the school's assessment systems and said "Maybe this is a little arrogant, but maybe if you sent someone in that had nothing, with the right tutor teacher, with the right systems, we could bring them up to speed." He also admitted that he thought the school had been able to select reasonably able beginning teachers so they had faced few difficulties.

From her experience as an associate teacher Wanda had repeatedly found student teachers were gathering masses of information and not doing anything with it. While she agreed that student teachers needed practice, she wanted this to be meaningful practice and linked to later teaching. Interestingly, Andrea was well aware of her own "magpie" instinct to gather lots of assessment information and realised her challenge was to then use it to meet the needs of individuals within her class.

Strategies for helping beginning teachers

Roger maintained that the best way to support beginning teachers was to surround them with other teachers who planned co-operatively and who talked about their assessment criteria. His responsibility was to ensure careful placement with a tutor teacher who understood the school's systems and that they would then model good practices, encourage questions to be asked, and work beside them. If these methods failed, then help would be sought from outside of the school.

As the principal of the school, Roger saw his role in beginning teacher induction as seeing that the process was happening rather than working alongside the beginning teacher. He said, "The reality is while I try and keep up with curriculum and what is happening, I don't have the expertise that

other people on the staff have so I give them release to do the job properly.” However, he still kept in contact with the beginning and tutor teachers through their formal monthly report meetings and was confident that if problems had been identified he would be informed.

Extending new graduates’ knowledge and practices in classroom assessment

School A has a culture of continuous improvement in which teachers talked about their practice. Wanda suggested such talk just happened naturally at syndicate meetings. She described her syndicate’s discussions on the systems they used to get assessment information and the extent to which they were giving the teachers the information they needed. An example was given of the recent STAR test. One person had said, “Look I was reading the manual on such and such and have you realised that this has actually got....” Further examples were given to illustrate a teacher’s experience in collecting samples for portfolios and sharing her disaster with the others. In fact it was accepted practice that any good ideas were shared and developed by the syndicate members.

Similarly, Wanda indicated that Andrea was contributing to syndicate discussions and often came with things she had been doing to share with the other teachers. Often these were things she had hunted out on the website and they appreciated that “she was someone who looked beyond the piece of paper in front of her”. The influx of new staff had also challenged the syndicate to justify its actions and to look towards alternate ways if practices were deemed to be even slightly dodgy. Their combined focus on learning intentions meant that there was a greater clarity of purpose and ideas were being picked up through demonstration lessons by the senior teachers.

Summary

The special features of School A which had contributed to the confidence of Andrea its beginning teacher were:

- the size of school and its support systems;
- a well defined induction programme for beginning teachers;
- job descriptions and support for tutor teachers;
- a tutor teacher who taught the same class level as the beginning teacher;
- regular meetings at which assessment was discussed; and
- modelling from experienced teachers who were using data to inform decisions about teaching.

6. The case study at School B

Introduction

In this section we provide details of the beginning teacher (named Danny for the purposes of this study) who has been working with a Years 2–3 class in a small urban school. Background information has been provided to explain the school setting, its staffing, and systems for supporting beginning teachers. This information is followed by profiles of both Danny and his assigned tutor teacher (Marcia). Interview data from their work in classroom assessment is shared to highlight the developments made over the six months of the study. These insights are supplemented with profiles of other staff members who were interviewed and asked to explain the ways in which they had worked alongside Danny. The remaining section provides an account of school-wide work in assessment as reviewed in the annual report (planning and reporting documentation to the Ministry of Education) and the most recent Education Review Office report on the school.

A description of School B

Unlike School A, the smaller size of School B made the support for a beginning teacher more difficult to manage with only one senior teacher. Danny's full registration as a teacher was dependent on the quality of support offered by his employing school and the extent to which he could be accommodated into the school's existing ways of operating. As each school has its own ways of supporting beginning teachers it was useful to explore the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, knowledge, and classroom practices for teachers working at School B.

School B was an integrated school with six classrooms in an urban setting. Staffing included a non-teaching principal and six other teachers with additional teacher aides. After many years with very few staff changes, the school had had a change in principal in the last two years and was currently without a deputy principal or senior teacher. Vacancies had been filled by temporary appointments or beginning teachers. The current beginning teacher was employed in a one-year relieving position and his 0.2 release entitlement was covered by another beginning teacher. He also had the largest class in the school and this was a composite class. The acting deputy principal was the tutor teacher for this beginning teacher and received some release for this role. Both beginning teachers had been attending the in-service programme offered to beginning teachers by their local college of education. The tutor teacher had not attended courses for this role but was an

associate teacher. There was no formal programme for the beginning teacher. Topics were addressed according to the school's time frame for parent interviews, report writing, or as needs arose in curriculum areas or behavioural management. The principal had left this responsibility to the tutor teacher.

Some change to the school's assessment was being initiated by the principal with the introduction of school-wide benchmarks and recording of specific learning objectives against performances. This involved bringing teachers together to share samples of children's work at the various levels and providing written records for individual children's portfolios. Integrated topics had also been introduced across the school with each class taking a different slant. The Term 1 theme was "Life in Antarctica" whilst it was "Life in Medieval Times" for Term 2. Interviewing skills were selected as a school-wide assessment target for all children. We were not given any indication of the reasons for this school-wide focus.

A profile of the beginning teacher at School B

Danny was a mature, male, beginning teacher who had responsibility for a J2–3 class at School B. He had attended a staff meeting at the end of 2003 at which time he was given some idea of a long-term plan, what was to be assessed and how. He also had several meetings with Marcia, his tutor teacher, before the school year had officially begun. In hindsight, Danny would have liked more information than he received but he was able to draw on his own resources and prior experiences and considered himself to be adaptable and just "leapt in". He would also have liked the school to have provided him with templates to use as assessment checklists. He was aware that there was no consistency between teachers in the presentation of assessment data.

At the end of his first three months teaching, Danny made more mention of the school-wide assessments which had been undertaken rather than assessments he might have devised himself for his particular class. At the third interview, the same examples of school-wide assessments were still being highlighted. In each case the syndicate's moderation process had helped him to clarify benchmarks and formulate statements to share with the parents at interview time. This support was highly valued.

By June Danny had just finished parent interviews. This had involved considerable preparation in compiling portfolios for each of his 29 children. These included test samples and running records, some of which had been scored by other teachers who had either modelled the scoring routine or had assisted Danny as part of the .2 release component. Both Danny and his tutor teacher made mention of the busy time getting ready for these interviews.

In our final interview with Danny, he arrived as requested, with a portfolio sample and explained its contents. Unfortunately he had not made a wise choice in the portfolio he had selected for our discussion. The portfolio included a running record which had been administered and scored by another teacher. This meant that Danny had some difficulty telling us what the sample indicated

in terms of future teaching points. Despite being unable to answer our probing questions about what the various sections meant, Danny seemed unaware that he really did not understand how to make the most from a running record. This was another example of compliance rather than quality performance. Danny had certainly adhered to the school's assessment schedule and produced the necessary bits of documentation but the quality of that documentation was questionable in our opinion. We were surprised to discover that a beginning teacher had not fully grasped the analysis of a running record because we knew that his initial teacher education programme taught this in some detail. His tutor teacher had also told us that she had shown him how to administer and score a running record.

Danny's reflections on his assessment practice

At the second and third interviews with Danny, we asked for examples of completed assessments to focus our discussion about his approach to assessment. On two occasions previously, Danny had brought the same assessment example: the school-wide literacy benchmarking instigated by the principal. Each time we had asked him to provide an example of his assessments, he had assured us with comments such as "It's going really well" or, "The spelling programme is ripping along famously." He was unable to provide sound evidence of his classroom assessment. The one example he had provided at both the May and June interviews related to the school-wide unit on the Antarctic for which the language assessment had been an interview with an imaginary seal. His explanations of this assessment which had included attention to surface features and particular presentation and knowledge dimensions had lacked purpose and been jumbled. His other assessments were limited to the pre- and post-tests for mathematics which other teachers had provided for him and then his own anecdotal notes on the children's performances. He had developed these into a series of bullet points for use at the interviews to highlight each child's particular strengths.

Despite the issues we have outlined, Danny was consistently confident about his teaching abilities. When we asked him about his assessments, he was quick to tell us that everything was going to plan. This confidence had convinced other staff that he knew what he was doing. The only thing he did admit was that in future he would try to avoid a last minute rush to complete all the assessments.

A profile of the tutor teacher at School B and her approach

Marcia, Danny's assigned tutor teacher, held additional responsibilities such as acting deputy principal and syndicate leader for the junior school. The school had no other senior teacher which meant that Marcia and her principal had multiple responsibilities and calls on their time. Marcia had the added responsibility of teaching the new entrant class. Marcia was interviewed twice during our project, once in February and then again in June.

When asked to describe the guidance programme for Danny, Marcia indicated that the main focus for Term 1 had been classroom management. This had included setting classroom routines including routines for using exercise books, using positive reinforcement, and establishing homework routines. In Term 2, the focus had moved to the teaching of reading and the extent to which Danny was able to provide purposeful activities for the children who were working on independent tasks. Procedures for scoring running records for reading had been modelled early on in the year. After some brief checking, Marcia admitted to having left Danny to complete records for the whole class. Help with details of what to assess in mathematics and how this might be done had been directed to another teacher who was teaching the same year level. The syndicate meetings also provided opportunities for teachers to clarify expectations and procedures for planning and assessment. These were based on shared unit planning for integrated units. The opportunity to observe another classroom in action had been talked about, but had not as yet taken place. Marcia noted that Danny had been busy with extra curricula activities such as the PTA and the music festival.

In making decisions about what to focus on in assessment with Danny, Marcia had “cast her mind back to what it was like to be a first year teacher”. She therefore anticipated that mathematics and spelling would be among the first areas of teaching which would require assessment information and set about putting processes in place to ensure this happened. She then organised for Danny to spend time with another teacher in the syndicate who was teaching the same year level so that he gained some sense of the school-wide plan for mathematics including the long-term plan with its initial focus on number. She hoped that this would lead to Danny being able to access suitable resources for teaching and knowing when to do pre- and post-testing.

Marcia mentioned that the principal had been introducing school-wide benchmarks and how the staff were all trying to adapt to this change. She described it as “nerve-wracking” to say the least. She was also well aware that if the staff were struggling with the change then the beginning teacher would need additional support. This reality made Danny’s own learning about his assessment responsibilities more difficult because the other teachers were finding their own ways and lacked confidence in their assessment knowledge and skills.

Marcia had received no training for her tutor teacher role. She assumed the position because there was no one else available for the role in the school and drew heavily upon her associate teacher experience with student teachers and her long distant memory of being a first year teacher herself. While the principal ensured that regular release time was provided for her tutor teacher responsibility, she received no other support from within the school or beyond. She had not received training for her role and said she would welcome support and reassurance from the college of education that she was on the “right track”. One suggestion made in her interview with us was for the college of education to make two on-site visits to schools employing beginning teachers where they would observe the beginning teacher working in the classroom and have a discussion with the tutor teacher as was the practice with associate teachers and supervising college lecturers on teaching practice. Having another pair of eyes to affirm existing support or make suggestions for further development was seen as advantageous from Marcia’s point of view.

The school itself had no documentation to support a formal advice and guidance programme for beginning teachers and Marcia admitted to learning the role on the job. Even Danny described it as “a hand-in-hand operation” but he was also quick to add that he had never felt he was left to struggle alone. The other staff had always given him time and resources when he needed them. The school’s beginning teacher induction programme was largely verbal, responding to needs of the moment with regular time for discussion between the tutor and beginning teachers. Anything Marcia had learnt about her responsibilities as a tutor teacher had developed from conversations with the two beginning teachers on the staff who had themselves attended in-service courses and talked about their learning on returning to the school. Marcia admitted that she began the year feeling somewhat “in the dark” about her tutor teacher role and having particular concerns about what and how she might record information, formulate written reports, and use the .2 allocation time for supporting Danny, the beginning teacher. Above all, Marcia wanted to be reassured that her support of the beginning teacher was appropriate and would fulfil registration requirements.

Marcia admitted that the long hours spent with Danny in the three weeks leading up the parent interviews had been a “wake-up call” for both of them. It had taught Marcia that in future she needed to ask for evidence and not just accept that everything was in process. It had been a shock to her that she had been misled into believing that Danny was keeping pace with the assessment requirements.

Interviews with significant others

As well as the principal, we interviewed three teachers from Danny’s syndicate who provided support. These teachers have been named Kate, Jennifer, and Felicity for the purposes of this study. **Kate** was the most experienced teacher in the syndicate apart from the tutor teacher. However, for the 2004 year, she was out of her class for half of the week doing reading recovery training. This meant she did not work with her own class for reading, mathematics, and story writing, each of which represented the main areas for assessment in the school. Her class teaching responsibilities were at the J2 level so there was some interchange of children with the beginning teacher who also had J2 children.

Jennifer worked in the classroom next door to the beginning teacher with a Years 3–4 class. They had some interchange of children for reading and religious education. She had also shared some of her mathematics objectives and pre- and post-tests for her Year 3 children with the beginning teacher. Danny took her class for physical education lessons alongside his own with Jennifer sitting in with the lessons. She had recently returned to classroom teaching having had a number of years in other employment. This transition had required considerable curriculum updating for her.

Felicity was the remaining teacher in the junior school who worked in a job share in the next door classroom as well as doing the beginning teacher release. Some of that release time was spent

doing running record assessments for the beginning teacher. She was attending the same in-service programme as the beginning teacher.

Perceptions of the classroom assessment role

The principal explained this as a process undertaken to inform teaching. The other teachers had slightly different ways of expressing the same sentiment but added a reporting to parents' dimension. Jennifer mentioned pre- and post-testing and sharing these results with the children. She claimed that these test results also formed part of the paper trail for parents to indicate what the children knew and could do. Felicity broadened the reporting aspect to include other teachers, parents, and the board of trustees. Kate thought of assessment primarily in terms of what messages it gave to teachers. These messages were described in terms of the children's levels of achievement, what they had gained from the teaching episode(s), and areas/skills for future teaching.

The principal's school-wide assessments had required teachers to share samples of work for moderation purposes. Unfortunately these had only amounted to one assessment a term, but had helped the teachers in determining learning criteria and using these as benchmarks. Future school-wide assessments were planned for poetic writing and the health curriculum.

Knowledge of pre-service teacher education programmes

Teachers at School B were unable to answer questions relating to the ways teacher education providers were preparing student teachers for their classroom assessment roles. (Had they been associate teachers, in regular contact with a teacher education provider, they would have been more likely to have this level of awareness.) They were then asked for their opinion about what they might expect teacher education providers to do in preparing students to be classroom assessors. Kate was unsure how to answer this question saying that this was complicated by each school having its own way of assessing and areas for assessment. She thought that the best preparation would be one that noted this flexibility both between and within schools. Felicity was similarly frustrated that schools all used different systems and methods for assessment. She said that sometimes the procedures or tests someone else used were not necessarily useful for others which indicated that she wanted to be introduced to a range of assessments so that she could make her own decisions about what to use. One way of doing this was for lecturers to include more observations in schools where practising teachers showed what they did with assessments. She also realised that initial teacher education programmes could not cover everything that schools might do and use. Jennifer differed in her response and wanted beginning teachers to arrive in schools knowing how to use informal prose tests and have some awareness of other national tests like PATs. She was also quick to add that it was a familiarity rather than confidence with particular tests and continued practice would be needed. The principal wanted beginning teachers to know how to break achievement objectives down into specific learning objectives in order to

unpack the curriculum in a meaningful way for teaching purposes. He also wanted new teachers to link assessment information with planning and be able to record it.

Teacher support agencies work with beginning teachers

The principal thought that the School Advisory Service could be called into schools to work alongside individuals rather than working with whole staff groups. He suggested that sometimes an outsider might be better able to address learning needs rather than someone from within the school. Mention was made of another pair of eyes giving regular feedback on the strategies being trialled.

Jennifer had no knowledge of what the beginning teacher induction course covered with either teacher from the school. All she could say was that she understood they had attended several meetings away from the school. Felicity had attended some of these courses and admitted that assessment had not been emphasised. Their focus to date had been sharing practical ideas.

Responsibilities for schools in extending new graduates' knowledge and practices in classroom assessment

All of the teachers were aware that preparation for the recent parent teacher interviews had been very stressful for Danny. The principal commented that the enormity of the assessment role had not been realised by Danny until he needed all his records completed for reporting to parents. His tutor teacher had taken some responsibility for this last minute rush and pressure on Danny having realised that she had not sufficiently checked Danny's assessments. She planned to remedy this by having checklists for the future.

Felicity thought that schools needed to be clearer about their assessment expectations and not assume that beginning teachers knew what to do. Her principal agreed that beginning teachers needed clear yet narrow directions. Jennifer talked about a step-by-step approach, filling in gaps as these became noticeable alongside the school's assessment schedule. She was well aware of beginning teacher overload and the need to proceed slowly. Kate was similarly mindful of the pressures on all teachers and not just the beginning teachers with the constant changes to assessment requirements and approaches. She was aware that if other teachers were finding the going hard, then it would be twice as hard for beginning teachers and it was the responsibility of schools to ensure support was available.

Jennifer didn't mention the time management aspect but responded to this question from an interest in teacher resources. She gave the example of the new mathematics curriculum document which included pre- and post-tests and supporting homework sheets and her particular disappointment that teachers had not realised their potential. Jennifer also expected that experienced teachers in schools ought to be able to address the beginning teacher's knowledge gaps and, if not, then others would be called upon for help. Her strategy was one of checking understandings, a practical demonstration, and then observing the beginning teacher using the

assessment with one or two children and affirming that those practices were correct. Such a strategy meant there was less chance of having to repeat assessments if they had been incorrectly administered with a whole class.

Support for tutor teachers

While it was mentioned that the principal had played a supportive role with beginning teachers at the school, the real work of support was left to the tutor teacher. In a small school this was an added pressure for the tutor teacher who had other management responsibilities especially in the absence of other senior staff to lighten loads. Release time was made available to the tutor teacher as well as some programme notes Kate had used several years ago. The tutor teacher was also acting upon suggestions brought back from the beginning teachers who had attended in-service courses.

While Danny's syndicate leader had accepted the role of being his tutor teacher, none of her performance management goals for the year made mention of the tutor teacher role. In the absence of any monitoring of her tutor teacher role she also did not receive any professional development. This meant that any support she had acquired was somewhat left to chance encounters and her previous experiences as an associate teacher working with student teachers.

Beginning teacher's confidence with classroom assessment

As a consequence of Danny's last minute rush to prepare for the parent interviews, the principal had decided that future practice would be to make a statement at the beginning of each term outlining what was required by a particular week in the school-wide assessments. In setting deadlines he hoped it would be clear when work needed to be completed, collated, assessed against established criteria, and then moderated by staff. This would avoid a repeat of Danny having to transfer assessment data to a reporting format at the last minute.

The remaining staff were reluctant to talk about Danny's assessment knowledge and, as might be expected, they had not learnt anything about assessment from him as a beginning teacher. It seemed they could only base their opinions on informal conversations and his contributions to syndicate meetings where assessment schedules had been developed. The principal commented that he considered Danny had some strengths in collecting anecdotal information on children but was less certain of his ability to record such information and then for him to retrieve it for assessment purposes.

School B's assessment documentation

School B's most recent ERO report was released in 2002. This review coincided with the current principal's first term at the school. At the time of the review, the teachers were reviewing their

programmes in reading and mathematics with the aim of raising achievement levels even further. The ERO report stated:

The principal and teachers are improving systems for assessing and monitoring student achievement. The teachers have increased the amount of assessment information they collect at the classroom level. Their challenge now is to refine their assessment practices to allow them to collect assessment information that shows clearly the progress of the students and that they can analyse to identify the trends and patterns of students' achievement. They can then use this to plan the next steps of learning for the students, evaluate the teaching programmes and report with more accuracy to the parents and the community.

One agreed area of focus for this review was the effectiveness of the school's reporting practices in providing the board, parents, and teachers with an overview of student progress and achievement.

Specific comments from ERO regarding this area of focus acknowledged the teachers' recent efforts to develop new written and oral reporting systems to keep the board and the parents informed about student achievement. ERO had acknowledged that the teachers had modified the format of the written reports so that parents were provided with clear and meaningful achievement information. The importance of collecting high-quality assessment information had been noted as an area for improvement by the school itself. Thus the review team investigated the quality of the school's assessment procedures and the way in which information was reported to the board and the parents. They also investigated the ways in which teachers used assessment information for planning further teaching.

Three areas of good performance were included in the ERO report. These areas related to the twice-yearly reports to parents, the acknowledgement that some progress had been made on the analysis of assessment information, and the involvement of students and parents in goal setting. The first two of these goals are discussed below.

Written reports to parents

The school was congratulated on the level of detail supplied to parents in both written reports and ongoing discussions. It was noted that the reports provided parents with a grade for achievement and effort in each of the essential learning areas and on the student's personal and social skills. In addition parents had good opportunities to share information about their child's progress both in scheduled interviews and through open and frequent informal contact with the teachers.

Analysis of achievement data

The ERO report recognised that efforts had been made by teachers to both analyse assessment information and use it as the basis of future planning and improvement. It was noted that in 2001, the principal had analysed information the teachers had collected about the literacy and mathematics programmes and had prepared comprehensive reports on them for the board and community. This information had subsequently been used by the teachers.

Four areas of improvement were mentioned in the report. These addressed the tracking of student achievement, guidance for teachers, consistency of assessment practices, and the quality of the portfolios.

Tracking of student achievement

While ERO could say that there was an established school-wide system for tracking coverage of the achievement objectives of the New Zealand curriculum it was concerned that it did not show how well students achieved the national curriculum objectives. Their comment was that “Teachers do not yet have the range of assessment tools such as criteria and benchmarks to make reliable judgements about the level of students’ achievement in relation to the expectations of the New Zealand curriculum.”

Guidance for teachers

ERO was not satisfied that the school’s assessment policy and the programmes of work provided sufficient guidance for the teachers on assessment. Evidence was lacking on the ways teachers could identify learning outcomes, what kind of assessment procedures to use, and how the resulting information should be recorded, analysed, and used.

Consistency

ERO did not consider that assessment practices were of a consistent quality across the school. It considered teachers were collecting a large amount of assessment information but that it was not always related to specific learning outcomes. This meant that teachers were having difficulty in making judgements about students’ achievement that they could then share with the students and parents. This information was not being used to plan the next learning steps for the students.

Portfolios

Weaknesses were also identified in the content and quality of information about students’ achievement. These included evaluative comments from the teacher or the student but, in most cases, the work samples did not clearly indicate the progress the student had made.

The annual report

In 2003, School B focused on four aims/targets for its planning and reporting to the Ministry of Education. These targets related to spelling, the retelling of stories and comprehension, playground behaviour, and the speed and accuracy of basic fact recall. In its analysis of variance, the school acknowledged that these were ambitious targets but that it had wanted to “reach for the sky and make changes”. Background information was supplied to justify the choice of each target. These targets bore no relationship to any of the identified areas of weakness signalled in the 2001 ERO report.

In their planning and reporting documentation, the school had used test data to demonstrate the extent to which these targets had been met. The robustness of these tests was a problem. In the case of spelling, the school realised that it had no suitable tests to use for establishing baseline information. Their comment justifying this target was therefore based on personal observations which said, “Although children at the school were accurate spellers in test situations, this ability was not transferred into the writing programme...and despite the strong phonic awareness established in the junior classes, this was not being transferred into the senior school.” The target of having 90 percent of children spelling 1.5 years above their chronological age was unrealistic and not achieved. Future actions were identified in terms of programme resources which it was hoped would provide the teachers with more support for their teaching.

In justifying the second target, results from an informal prose inventory had revealed that recall and comprehension were below average. The teachers had then established that they would be looking at whether children could identify the main points of a story line, in particular the beginning, middle, and end of stories.

Data informing the choice of the third aim showed frequencies of inappropriate behaviour. In being aware that there were more incidents reported than were desirable, the teachers had returned to look at their rules and the programmes which might support their implementation.

The remaining aim of increasing speed and accuracy of basic fact recall applied to all age cohorts across the school. Programme improvements were listed as well as a time frame for standardised testing across the school.

The setting of these targets had highlighted a common focus and what teachers could do to enhance their programme delivery for these areas. Further work was needed to ensure that the school had sufficient rigour in its assessment evidence. Attention had also been given to the ways in which the targets corresponded to the National Education Guidelines and the Administration Guidelines.

Summary

At School B, the quality of Danny’s assessment practices had been adversely influenced by school structures and ways of working, many of them out of his control. These included:

- lack of resources to support a beginning teacher;
- staff turnover;
- a tutor teacher who had too many other roles and responsibilities;
- the school’s lack of confidence in using assessment data to inform teaching; and
- being assigned the largest class in the school.

7. Building strong assessment practice: dilemmas and possibilities

Introduction

In this final section we draw on findings from both stages of the project to outline dilemmas that arise when supporting beginning teachers to develop sound assessment practices. As we have seen, the professional learning that takes place in the vital first year of teaching is not simply related to the willingness of the individual to learn. It also depends on many factors beyond their direct control. However, the identification of the dynamics at work also points to rich possibilities for providing the support that beginning teachers need. As we discuss, often the seeds of the possibility reside within the dilemma.

A recent Education Review Office evaluation of Year 2 teachers (ERO, 2004) focused on the practices that impacted on the beginning teacher's ability to improve student achievement and suggested ways school processes, practices, and programmes could be improved to facilitate the beginning teacher's induction and professional development. Features they said worked well for the socialisation of new teachers included providing reviews of performance that gave both feedback and feed-forward, working relationships based on collaboration and shared inquiry rather than an "expert-tells-novice form of relationship", and an effective balance of mentoring, encouragement, and challenge.

Primary teachers are fortunate that they are assigned to a tutor teacher at least for their time of provisional registration. Their opportunities for observation of and by other teachers, provision of release time, and professional talk with colleagues are the envy of more experienced teachers. Little (1999) notes that beginning teachers are even more fortunate if "they are able to experience a culture in which the resources for inquiry into student experience and learning are supplied and teachers share responsibility for student well-being and achievement and the organisational scale enables sustained exchange regarding student learning" (p. 235).

ITE can only lay foundations

The student teachers who were interviewed could all articulate what the classroom assessor role was. Typically, their answers showed the value of classroom assessments for teachers and how that information could assist them to make decisions about what to teach next. Several of the

student teachers also mentioned the value of assessment data being used as evidence for reporting to parents through interviews and individual portfolios.

While these student teachers appeared to have a general understanding of the purposes of classroom assessment, they were less sure of their ability to manage whole-class assessments for all curriculum areas. Most of their assessment attention had been drawn towards literacy and numeracy in their ITE programmes. They had had practice with running records, responding to children's written work, and administering pre- and post-tests for mathematics.

Final year student teachers argued that the most powerful messages about the practicalities of classroom assessment in ITE programmes had been given by practising teachers either on teaching practice placements or when invited as guest lecturers. Student teachers consistently welcomed any practical information about what worked well in the classroom setting. They were also able to talk about practices they would not replicate.

It seemed there was a sudden awakening to the realities of classroom assessment when student teachers experienced a period of sustained teaching when they had responsibility for teaching the class programme for a period of weeks, and were required to undertake assessment of their teaching. They admitted that until this time, assessment had been practised but had little meaning for them. Once the student teachers had had a taste of this responsibility, they soon realised that it was both a time-consuming task and difficult to manage for a whole class. They were aware too that many experienced teachers were admitting to a similar challenge.

The adequacy of assessment theory and practice in ITE was problematic because it needed to be addressed in every curriculum area. The student teachers from one of the teacher education providers were critical of curriculum areas introduced early in their programmes of study because they didn't always link curriculum content with assessment strategies or examples. Thus, near the end of the course, as the student teachers faced teaching responsibilities across the curriculum, they did not always feel sufficiently well prepared and then depended on the schools to help them during teaching practice placements. There is a dilemma within a dilemma here because early in their course of learning, student teachers are unlikely to be ready to deal with the complexities of assessment for learning.

This analysis suggests that beginning teachers do not, and indeed probably cannot yet have, a sufficiently coherent knowledge of assessment principles and practices to enable them to assess, analyse, and report on the learning of children in their future classrooms. They need considerable support during their first year of teaching as they make the transition from being learners about assessment to being purposeful assessors of children's progress and next learning steps. But, looking at the issue from the other side of the coin, beginning teachers are not ready for the professional learning of their first year's teaching unless their ITE programme has laid rich foundations. It is not a case of either/or, but of both learning situations working in harmony.

Recommendation: strengthen cross-sector communication

This small-scale study supports the findings of Renwick (2001). That is, that stronger links need to be made between the initial teacher education provider and the employing schools of beginning teachers. Schools need to know more about the ITE curriculum and what key competencies can be expected from graduates. Similar links need to be established between those working in ITE programmes and those who offer professional development to beginning and tutor teachers in the school setting. Each should know more of each other's programme content so that messages are not only consistent but are developed to meet the needs of the emerging professionals.

The experience of the tutor teacher

The two first year teachers in this study began their teaching careers feeling diffident about how to manage assessment in their classrooms. While they had some confidence in their theoretical knowledge about assessment, they were less sure of their ability to maintain assessment records for a whole class of 30 children and this was a real concern to them. At the same time they wanted to satisfy their employing school's expectations of them as classroom assessors and knew that their tutor teachers and principals were the ones with responsibility for recommending their registration. It was therefore most unlikely that they could resist or challenge what their schools required of them. For example, Andrea just accepted that she needed to follow the school's spelling programme even though she had not been prepared for this in her ITE programme.

It seemed that for Danny especially, the "daily grind" of teaching and perhaps his unpreparedness for assessing children's learning were causing him to follow the school's schedule rather than develop his own momentum and decisions for classroom assessments. He followed the school's assessment requirements and this took all his energy. Over the five months of this study, Danny's talk about assessment differed from his actual practices. It was becoming increasingly apparent that his assessments were tacked on to the end of teaching for compliance purposes rather than to direct his teaching. He was fully stretched to keep pace with the assessment schedule in his school. Danny's seeming confidence did not stand up to close scrutiny of his actual practice.

Danny and Andrea were dependent on their tutor teachers for advice and guidance across the board as well as with regard to assessment so it is important that schools choose the most appropriate staff member for this role. This is in accord with numerous New Zealand studies that highlight the importance of tutor teachers (Lang, 2001; Mansell, 1996; Renwick, 2001). In Danny's case, the school had no choice but to ask the only senior teacher to take on this role. Whether the school should have considered making a beginning teacher appointment given the existing pressures on the only senior teacher is a question worth asking. In the absence of any supporting documents explaining the school's advice and guidance programme for beginning teachers, the school was particularly vulnerable because there was no-one to deputise for the sole tutor teacher.

School A, on the other hand, did have procedures in place which had made it possible for a different staff member to slot into the tutor teacher role, even though it was a new role for him. When selecting the tutor teacher, the principal had considered workload and the necessity for them to be teaching at the same level as the beginning teacher. The other senior teachers in the syndicate already had broader responsibilities in curriculum and assessment or within the syndicate and it was a chance for someone else to become involved in the induction of a new staff member. For Sam, because he did not have additional responsibilities beyond his own classroom and was ready for new challenges, this was an opportunity to open up his career path. Sam welcomed this opportunity knowing that he would be supported by the senior management team.

Recommendation: strengthen support for the tutor teacher

Policies about the support and induction provided to beginning teachers are important. Tutor teachers need to be supported by the school's management team and be given sufficient release time to fulfil their tutor teacher responsibilities. Schools should not overload tutor teachers with multiple management responsibilities in their schools. Accordingly, small schools should consider whether they have sufficient numbers of experienced teachers to support a beginning teacher appointment, or at least investigate ways of providing extended support. There is a strong case for registering tutor teachers for their roles. For example, registration could be granted for a limited time (1–3 years) and require evidence of professional development, appraisal of their work with beginning teachers, and evidence of exemplary teaching.

ITE programmes to support the work of tutor teachers should be widely available so that every tutor teacher has the opportunity to attend. School advisers could play a role by visiting the classrooms of beginning teachers and their tutor teachers once or twice a year to offer support and guidance. Tutor teacher networks should be encouraged in the same way as those for beginning teachers.

The school culture impacts on the outcomes for the beginning teacher

The assessment knowledge and confidence of teachers at School A were considerably higher than those of School B. School A's learning culture had developed through the efforts of a strong leadership team. This was evident through written documentation from the annual plan, assessment templates, portfolio exemplars, the staff development work on assessment, and the feedback from the Education Review Office. Systems were in place at syndicate and whole school level to ensure that teachers were supported in their learning and had time and opportunity to work alongside other colleagues. The documents produced by syndicate members working together were impressive. Each teacher had templates for assessment which gave very clear indicators of the teaching steps and how learning could be demonstrated. Records for each class could be retrieved by teachers and comparisons made. These templates had been devised as a

group giving a sense of clarity, direction, and purpose for teaching. They were also being revised. Examples of student assessments linked the learning intentions, criteria, level achieved, as well as a next teaching step. Conferences were held with children so that they were aware of the learning goals and the expectations the teacher had of them.

Andrea looked to all of the teachers for support and was not afraid to make approaches. By the end of the study she was making her own decisions about classroom assessment and seeking confirmation from her colleagues in order to continually refine or improve her practices. The school had a firmly established culture where the more experienced teachers modelled discussion about assessment policies and practices. Assessment was neither a burden nor a chore for Andrea because she had established strong links between her initial planning, assessment activities, and ongoing teaching. For example, in sharing samples of children's written work in story writing, Andrea could identify the learning intentions, success criteria, and the extent to which the children had satisfied these.

At School B, none of the teachers had developed specific strengths in assessment and it seemed that the temporary status of many of the staff was also impacting on the quality of assessment practices in the school. Some staff had not found it possible to remain up-to-date with recent developments in assessment. The principal was attempting to rectify this by providing a programme of whole-school assessment. He believed this was one way to ensure more consistency of assessment approach and understanding amongst the teachers. The teachers were required to moderate their assessments as a syndicate and justify their decisions. One staff member, having recently returned to classroom teaching after a break away, found this approach helpful for adapting to new ways of classroom assessment. Others who had relieving positions were also appreciative of the opportunity for collegial support for assessments. This new learning was described as nerve-wracking by the tutor teacher who, at the same time, was conscious that a beginning teacher would be feeling even more vulnerable.

If wider systems for examining children's work and using the insights gained to inform learning had been more firmly in place in Danny's school, he would have been better supported to develop his assessment knowledge. As it was, he was less able than Andrea to identify the learning intentions, success criteria, and the extent to which the children had satisfied these. The "examples" he showed us were ones that others had provided him from the school-wide assessments rather than examples of his work with his own class. Had Danny been clearer about what he wanted the children to learn, and the standards they might achieve, he may have found the whole assessment responsibility so much more rewarding and useful. It would then not have been perceived as a management of time issue but an integral part of teaching. Working on one's own theories of learning in relation to assessment is an ongoing challenge for all teachers, and a stronger school culture in this regard would doubtless have been rewarding for other teachers too.

Opportunities for classroom observations were available to Andrea as requested and she had visited some other classrooms in the school. She had not found it necessary to move beyond the school. The same was not true for Danny who was more limited in his choices. He could only

access three teachers who could relate to his teaching level in the school. While he knew that provision could be made for him to visit other schools, this had not occurred. In the absence of stronger support within the school, it seems highly unlikely that Danny could even have identified a need for support from beyond the school. He lacked the necessary experience to make that judgement.

Leadership and school culture

The transfer of an educational vision to classroom practice is made possible by a number of leadership practices. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1998) advocate eight leadership dimensions that contribute to teachers' learning and sense of connection to their schools:

- identify and articulate a vision;
- foster the acceptance of group goals;
- convey high performance expectations;
- provide appropriate models;
- provide individualised support;
- provide intellectual stimulation;
- build a productive school culture; and
- help structure the school to enhance participation in decisions.

These dimensions emphasise the leader's role in addressing individual and collective learning needs of the staff. Because the learning of other staff impacts so strongly on the beginning teacher, the socialisation of the beginning teacher into an existing school's culture is both directly and indirectly influenced by the leadership of the principal. A strongly unified staff team helps the beginning teacher make a connection and commitment to the school's shared vision, and helps them build a clear sense of direction.

The organisational structure of School A included many of these leadership dimensions. Senior teachers were expected to work alongside other teachers and had been given management units for curriculum and assessment responsibilities and scheduled release time for this work. The teachers we met told us about the ways in which their syndicate groups focused on learning and the ways they had worked with one another to solve curriculum and assessment issues. There were no barriers of age and experience. Continual reflection and questioning of their practice was accepted as the norm. It was because of this prevailing culture of continuous improvement that teachers felt safe to explore their own learning agendas rather than being dependent on others to do the thinking for them. These teachers also articulated their shared vision for effective classroom assessment and discussed the progress they were making on their latest targets. These targets were public knowledge which was another way of communicating a shared vision and direction for learning in the school.

This account stands in contrast to the organisational structure of school B, where progress on some of these aspects of leadership was only just beginning to be made.

Recommendation: support school leaders to build a culture of ongoing professional learning

Barth (1990) advocates building a community of learners from within schools to sustain the teaching profession. He suggests working from the following assumptions:

- Schools/teachers have the capacity to improve themselves if the conditions are right.
- When the conditions are right, adults and students alike learn and each energises and contributes to the learning of the other.
- What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences.

As we have seen, the conditions in which beginning teachers find themselves learning can be very different. There are real questions about equity in their learning opportunities. If we accept Barth's assertion that schools will improve if the conditions are right, the challenge can be seen as one of identifying and providing the necessary support for school leaders.

Final comment

Our case studies of two beginning teachers and the processes they experienced in learning their classroom assessment roles at their employing schools have highlighted a number of factors for consideration. Our main finding is that it is the school's organisational and learning culture that has a strong impact on the beginning teacher's professional growth. Since every school's culture will be different in one or more ways, the socialisation of beginning teachers is difficult to specify. While the endpoint criteria for full teacher registration status are clearly stated, the ways in which schools might work with a beginning teacher to gain that status are less certain.

The socialisation process is further complicated by the interplay between the teacher (as self) and those (others) who influence their professional learning journey in both overt and covert ways. Beginning teachers need to understand themselves as learners and to gain insight into the ways in which others might shape their professional role, so that they can develop their own distinctive personal style. Ideally, professional socialisation should be a reciprocal process in which the newcomer and the existing member negotiate and draw upon one another's strengths, both being learners in the process.

Thus the central question about how to socialise a newcomer into the teaching profession or the classroom assessor role, should not be about what teachers need to know and do and how we get them to know and do it. Rather we need to ask, under what conditions will beginning teachers become serious, committed, sustained, lifelong and co-operative learners and how might we maximise the chances that they experience the conditions that foster such learning? The challenge then is for beginning teachers and those who work with them, to see professional learning within a community of teacher colleagues as a career-long endeavour and "not something like chicken pox, a childhood disease that makes you itch for a while and then leaves you immune for the rest of your life" (Barth, 1990, p. 48).

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule – third year student teacher education students November 2003 – January 2004

Name:

Institution:

The purpose of our questions is to find out the extent to which your teacher education programme has prepared you for the role of classroom assessment. Where possible we'd like you to think of examples to support your views.

- Q1 What do you understand to be the role of assessment in the classroom?
- Q2 What topics, techniques, resources or experiences do you recall from your teacher education programme as being particularly useful preparation for you in learning how to assess children's progress?
- Q3 What would you like to see changed or improved in your teacher education programme to help you feel even more confident in your classroom assessment role?
- Q4 To what extent has the assessment theory presented in your lectures been linked to what you've seen practised in schools?
- Q5 What do you think classroom teachers want to know from assessment activities?
- Q6 What do you think Boards of Trustees, principals and staff as a whole want to know from assessment activities?
- Q7 What do the parents want to know?
- Q8 What does the Ministry of Education want to know?

- Q9 What document would you look for if wanting to know the assessment requirements for schools?
- Q10 Which particular techniques have you observed classroom teachers using when giving feedback to children?
- Q11 In providing feedback to children teachers give messages to children about what is valued and important. These may include presentation (layout, neatness), surface features (punctuation, spelling), quantity, effort, and/or quality. How have you seen these aspects addressed in a teacher's feedback to children?
- Q12 What do you think will be the greatest challenge for you when you assess children's achievement and/or attitudes/progress?
- Q13 How well prepared do you feel at the moment to undertake your responsibilities as a teacher to assess the progress of children?
- Q14 What resources/assistance would you like to see available to you as a beginning teacher to carry out your assessment responsibilities?

Appendix 2: Beginning Teacher Interview Questions [Feb/March, 2004]

Background information

1. What do you understand to be the role of assessment in the classroom?
2. How much did you know about XXX School's assessment policy and practice before you started the teaching year?
3. What has the school/management team told you it expects from you in your classroom assessment role?
4. What do you think you do well in classroom assessment at the moment?
5. What areas of need do you still have?
6. How do you think your TT could best help you to address these needs?

The assessment journey with your TT

7. To what extent is the programme with your Tutor Teacher addressing both your needs and those of the school?
8. What input have you had into your professional development/support programme?
9. What role has the principal/management team had in planning your support programme?
10. What documentation have you been given to explain what is required of you?
11. *[Note: All documents available to BT – school-designed and national]*
12. What additional support have you received to understand your classroom assessment role from outside your school? *[e.g. in-service/advisory service for BTs]*
13. Tell us about the assessment focus in your .2 programme with your TT to date. *[Note: What have you covered? How successful has it been?]*
14. What classroom assessments have you been required to undertake with your own class?

15. What assistance has your TT provided to support you with these tasks?
16. Give an example to illustrate how you are using assessment to inform your teaching?
17. What challenges do you think lie ahead for you in your classroom assessment role?
18. How satisfied are you with the professional development in classroom assessment you have received so far?

Appendix 3: Beginning Teacher Interview Questions [May, 2004]

Background information

1. What have you learnt to help you with your classroom assessment since we last talked?
2. What areas of need do you still have?
3. How do you think your TT could best help you to address these needs?

The assessment journey with your TT

4. To what extent is the programme with your Tutor Teacher addressing both your needs and those of the school?
5. What on-going input have you had into your professional development/support programme?
6. What interest has the principal/management team had in supporting your development?
7. What on-going additional support have you received to understand your classroom assessment role from outside your school? *[e.g. in-service/advisory service for BTs, networking with other BTs, whole school PD]*
8. Tell us about the current assessment focus in your .2 programme with your TT. *[Note: What have you covered? How successful has it been?]*
9. Give an example to illustrate how you are using assessment to inform your **literacy** teaching? *[Note: Bring supporting documentation of task and recording]*
10. How are you using this information?
11. Give an example to illustrate how you are using assessment to inform your **numeracy** teaching? *[Note: Bring supporting documentation of task and recording]*
12. How are you using this information?
13. How confident are you in using assessment in other curriculum areas? Give an example of something that's working well.

14. What assessment tools are you using? [*Note: self-made? packaged?*]
15. What on-going assistance has your TT provided to support you with your assessment responsibilities?
16. What challenges do you think lie ahead for you in your classroom assessment role?
17. How satisfied are you with the professional development in classroom assessment you have received so far?

Appendix 4: Beginning Teacher Interview Questions [June/July, 2004]

Background information

1. Now that you have completed your first 6 months of teaching, describe how you use assessment to inform your teaching?
2. What do you consider are effective classroom assessment practices?
3. How well do your assessment practices match these ideals?
4. What areas of need do you still have?
5. How do you think your TT could best help you to address these needs?

The assessment journey with your TT

6. To what extent is the programme with your Tutor Teacher addressing both your needs and those of the school?
7. What on-going input have you had into your professional development/support programme?
8. What interest has the principal/management team had in supporting your development?
9. What on-going additional support have you received to understand your classroom assessment role from outside your school? *[e.g. in-service/advisory service for BTs, networking with other BTs, whole school PD]*
10. Tell us about the current assessment focus in your .2 programme with your TT. *[Note: What have you covered? How successful has it been?]*
11. In May we asked you to tell us about how you used assessment to inform your literacy teaching. What areas do you typically address when responding to students' written language?
12. Talk about the specific feedback for written language for three students. *[Note: Please bring a sample of work from three students with you to the interview]*

13. Give an example of how you involve students in the assessment of their work.
14. How confident are you in using assessment in other curriculum areas? Give an example of something that's working well.
15. What challenges do you think lie ahead for you in your classroom assessment role?
16. How satisfied are you with the professional development in classroom assessment you have received so far?

The bigger picture of assessment

17. What purposes do your classroom assessments serve beyond your own classroom? [*Note: This question is a link to those asked in Phase One referring to BOT, Principals and other teachers, parents and MOE/ERO*]
18. Give an example where your own practice or prior assessment knowledge has influenced school-wide or individual teacher practices in your school.

Appendix 5: Tutor Teacher Interview Questions Feb/March, 2004

Background information

1. How long have you been in the Tutor Teacher role?
2. Does your experience include being an Associate Teacher?
3. In what ways as an Associate Teacher did you work with student teachers to help them understand and practise effective classroom assessment? *[Note: policy/formats/expectations/feedback]*
4. What in-service training have you attended to help you with your Tutor Teacher role? *[Note: One day courses/regional meetings/qualification course]*
5. What did you find most helpful from this professional development?
6. What improvements could be made to future programmes?
7. Tell us about any documentation explaining the expectations of the Tutor Teacher/beginning teacher relationship in your school? *[Note: Can you supply any relevant documentation]*
8. What support do you receive for this role from the school's management team?
9. Is the Tutor Teacher role included in your performance management?
10. What's missing from the support currently offered to you?
11. Before you met this beginning teacher, what did you expect XXX to be able to do well in undertaking classroom assessment?
12. What areas of need did you expect XXX to have in assessment?

The assessment journey with XXX

13. When did you begin your role as XXX's TT?
14. How did you know what to do to support XXX's journey in assessment?

15. Where did you start?
16. Who decided that starting point?
17. What input to the professional development/support programme has the management team had?
18. What input to the professional development/support programme have you had?
19. How well was this programme received by XXX? By the management team?
20. What input to the professional development/support programme has XXX had?
21. Tell us about the ways you have helped XXX with his/her classroom assessment practices?
22. How have you balanced school expectations with XXX's individual needs?
23. Describe the programme that you and XXX will be working through in the next few months.
[Note: Can you supply relevant documentation]

Appendix 6: Tutor Teacher Interview Questions June/July, 2004

Background information

1. Have you set your performance management goals for the year? What did you include, if anything, about your TT role and responsibilities?
2. What support have you received for this role since we last talked?

The assessment journey with XXX

3. Tell us about the ways you have helped XXX with their classroom assessment practices since we last talked?
4. How have you balanced school expectations with XXX's on-going individual needs?
5. Describe the programme you have been working through in the last few months with XXX.
[Note: Can you supply relevant documentation]
6. Tell us about the impact this programme has had on XXX' s confidence with classroom assessment knowledge and practices.
7. Given the last few months' journeying, to what extent has XXX fulfilled the classroom assessment role?
8. What needs to happen next for XXX to become more confident and independent in meeting classroom assessment responsibilities?
9. What has been particularly challenging for XXX with regard to meeting classroom assessment responsibilities?
10. What would you change about the content or approach you have used with XXX for future experiences with a BT?
11. To what extent have other people/agencies contributed to XXX's professional development/support programme?
12. How could other people/agencies further complement the support you offer as TT?

13. What have you learnt from XXX about the theory and practice of classroom assessment?
14. How has your TT role helped you to reflect on your own knowledge and practice of classroom assessment?
15. What have been your personal highlights in supporting XXX's growing confidence as a classroom assessor?

Appendix 7: Remaining Staff Interview Questions June, 2004

- Q1 How well do you think pre-service teacher education programmes prepare student teachers for their roles as classroom assessors?
- Q2 What do you think pre-service teacher education providers should be doing to prepare student teachers for their later role as classroom assessors?
- Q3 What do you think pre-service teacher education providers could be doing better when introducing classroom assessment?
- Q4 What do you think teacher support agencies are doing to support beginning teachers for their roles as classroom assessors?
- Q5 What could teacher support agencies be doing better in the support they offer beginning teachers?
- Q6 What do you think schools' responsibilities are in extending new graduates' knowledge and practices in classroom assessment?
- Q7 What's the best way to get beginning teachers up to speed with your school's expectations of their classroom assessment responsibility?
- Q8 What have you noticed over the years to be the greatest gaps in beginning teachers' knowledge and practices of classroom assessment?
- Q9 Who from within this school has typically worked with beginning teachers in shaping their development as a classroom assessor?
- Q10 What role have you personally played in the induction and development of XXX's learning journey about classroom assessment practices? *(Note: illustrate with examples and ask how this help has been received)*
- Q11 What is your view of the XXX's knowledge and practice of classroom assessment to date?
- Q12 What would you identify as XXX's strengths in classroom assessment? *(Note: ask for examples)*
- Q13 What do you see as continuing development needs for XXX's journey in assessment?

Q14 What role has XXX played in review and development of your school's assessment practices?

Q15 What have you learnt about classroom assessment from XXX ?