

# EDITORIAL

**Mary Hill**

Welcome to the fourth issue of *Assessment Matters*. You will notice two changes in this issue. The first is that the journal is now online (<http://www.nzcer.org.nz/journals>) and readily accessible everywhere! The second is that I have taken over the role of general editor from Alison Gilmore. As editor, Alison made a sterling contribution to this journal. She took up the invitation to establish *Assessment Matters* at an important time in the New Zealand assessment story and connected what was happening here with both international and domestic audiences. By inviting internationally respected assessment researchers, policy makers and writers to be editorial advisory board members, and inviting contributions that stimulated thinking in assessment research, policy and practice, Alison set the scene for *Assessment Matters* to make an international contribution to the field. Her influence continues to be felt, with invitations to contribute that she initiated providing papers for this fourth issue.

There is a focus in this issue on questions of assessment practice and how assessment practices known to support learning might be facilitated. Chris DeLuca, King Luu, Youyi Sun and Don Klinger address this issue by asking: “What would it take to make assessment for learning integration possible and practical within the current context of education?” Their paper re-examines assessment for learning and its promise and then documents the perceived barriers to its implementation. The solution proposed by these authors is the development of teachers’ capacities for integrating assessment for learning in the classroom. Their paper identifies effective contemporary models for professional learning from the adult learning literature to provide a baseline for future assessment professional development initiatives.

The next two papers have a focus on primary school teacher practices in the National Standards environment in New Zealand. The first, by Rosemary Hipkins and Sally Robertson, uses a case study to highlight the

effort and commitment required to develop and maintain a community of practice around moderation processes that strengthen the professional knowledge teachers bring to their classroom practice. Consistent with other research, Hipkins and Robertson demonstrate how leadership and a strategic alignment between moderation practices and other systems and processes within a school are now critical if teachers want to make reliable judgements.

In the second paper, by Jenny Poskitt and Kerry Mitchell, the focus shifts from teacher moderation to how New Zealand primary teachers make overall teacher judgements (OTJs) in line with the requirements of the National Standards policy introduced in 2010. Drawing on professional development work in 10 schools, this paper examines responses from 30 teachers about making OTJs. The evidence from these interviews is that many of these teachers were uncertain and confused making these judgements and most relied considerably on their knowledge and observations of students in their classrooms. These authors argue that moderation between teachers has an important role to play in assisting teachers such as these to make more consistent and valuable judgements, and that this should perhaps be a priority for supporting teachers during the implementation of National Standards. The authors also suggest that including students themselves in judgement making, although still in its infancy, will assist in strengthening the value of judgement-making processes.

Students' views are central to the paper by Jeff Smith, Alison Gilmore, David Berg, Lisa Smith and Madgerie Jameson. These authors use data from the New Zealand National Education Monitoring Project to investigate what makes low-stakes performance tasks appealing to 8- and 12-year-olds in mathematics, information skills and social studies. The low-stakes, but standardised, environment of national monitoring enabled the collection of data from relatively large numbers of students who had completed the tasks. The findings from this analysis highlighted three characteristics of tasks that students appeared to enjoy and also found gender differences. While these findings will inform large-scale monitoring, they could also be very useful for teachers preparing everyday activities for the classroom.

The fifth paper returns to the theme of how teachers in New Zealand are meeting the challenge of assessing learning for summative and accountability purposes without resorting to national testing. In this paper, Rosemary Hipkins investigates the use of “naturally occurring evidence” for awarding qualifications. The paper documents a system of distributed professional learning, decision making and record keeping that one secondary school has evolved to address the challenges inherent in achieving this goal. After making a case for gathering achievement evidence for literacy and numeracy standards from student performances across the curriculum, Hipkins highlights how difficult this process can be in practice. She then examines the case of Hagley Community College in Christchurch, New Zealand, where competencies have been successfully monitored and unit standards awarded.

Also from Christchurch, New Zealand, the sixth paper in this issue reports on the use of exemplars by teachers to make assessment judgements about learners with special educational needs. National standards systems internationally often overlook, or highlight the challenges of, using standards for learners who cannot make the same progress as other students. Missy Morton, Trish McMenamin, Geoff Moore and Sue Molloy were part of a team who developed and worked with teachers to trial the use of narrative assessment to work to transform the ways we think about teaching, learning, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for the group of students considered most likely to be learning within level 1 of *The New Zealand Curriculum* for most of their time at school. Their paper demonstrates the challenges faced by teachers of such children, but more than this, it highlights how narrative assessments open spaces for hopeful judgements about the capacity for achievement that have the potential to transform deficit discourses to discourses of belonging and of competence.

Finally, the commentary by Lester Flockton returns to issues of building teacher and student assessment capability. Specifically, he fleshes out what it would take, in New Zealand, for the Directions in Assessment in New Zealand (DANZ) policy advice, provided to the Ministry of Education in 2009, and for the Ministry of Education’s own position paper on assessment, released in 2010, to become part of assessment policy in New Zealand. He argues that it is not enough to have professional

## *EDITORIAL*

development programmes and position papers. He believes that to produce assessment-capable students for the 21st century, education policy must embrace the directions in both the DANZ and the position paper and then this policy must be implemented. He challenges us all to work to carry out this task.

It is my pleasure to see this issue launched, not only as a printed journal but as the first issue of *Assessment Matters* to be simultaneously available online. The intention is that this will raise the profile of the journal and the papers within it internationally. Certainly it comes with an invitation to all to submit new papers to inform our work of improving assessment in the service of learning, from wherever you may live and work.

*Mary Hill*  
*General Editor*