

EDITORIAL

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This special issue of *Assessment Matters* presents the findings from an extensive, multi-year, multi-site investigation of how initial teacher education students develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions to become competent assessors of student progress. The project, “Learning to Become ‘Assessment Capable’ Teachers”, was conducted at four universities in New Zealand and looked at the growth of student teachers in assessment capability at both the early childhood and primary levels. As such, this research focused on two critical issues in education today: classroom assessment and teacher development. In this set of articles, we have the opportunity to learn much about each of these issues. This mixed-methods project employed multiple administrations of a questionnaire about assessment beliefs combined with a series of focus groups and analysis of documents produced over the course of the project.

The issue begins with an article from five researchers involved in the project: Mary Hill, Alexandra Gunn, Bronwen Cowie, Lisa Smith, and Alison Gilmore. The article lays out the details of the research programme and sets the stage for the articles to follow. The second article looks at the development of assessment capability in early childhood teachers. Alexandra Gunn and Alison Gilmore look at the knowledge, skills, and dispositions people leave their programmes with, and how the programmes develop those learning outcomes. The next article looks at student development of assessment capability within an embedded approach to delivering assessment expertise. Lisa Smith and Raylene Galvin describe how students move from a summative perspective on assessment using their experience as students as a base, to a more formative perspective coming from a teacher’s orientation. The fourth article presents an in-depth analysis of three student teachers. Bronwen Cowie, Beverley Cooper, and Bill Ussher find a similar shift to that seen in the Smith and Galvin paper from a summative to a formative perspective. They also discuss how student teachers see assessment as a part of their

professional identity as teachers. The final article comes from Mary Hill, Fiona Ell, Lexie Grudnoff, and Libby Limbrick. They report that while student teachers meet many of the assessment goals that teachers in initial teacher education have for them, some are still in development on a number of important aspects including the use of standardised measures and moderation in assessment.

There is much to learn in reading these five articles. First, and perhaps foremost, we see how students in initial teacher education programmes grow and change in their understanding of what assessment is in schools. Fundamentally, we see their perspective change from that of being students to that of being teachers—developing teachers to be sure, but teachers nonetheless. There is real growth here and the growth that we see is informative in a number of fashions. Would we see similar growth in programmes that are shorter than 3 years? Is what we are seeing a result of instruction, or is it more developmental in nature, occurring over a longer time span as students get multiple exposures to classroom life in addition to instruction in courses? It appears to be the case that growth is fairly similar for students who are taking assessment courses and students whose assessment knowledge is infused across an array of courses, but it would be useful to know more about those differences. There are many things students in initial teacher education programmes need to learn. Would the findings we see here generalise to learning about classroom management, reading instruction, working with diverse populations? It is, of course, impossible to say, but what we have here is a powerful model of how such research can be conducted.

This brings us to the next point of learning. This special issue is a reflection of an impressive research study, funded by the government via the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI), administered and supported by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. It was a multi-site investigation involving five primary researchers (Mary Hill, Lisa Smith, Bronwen Cowie, Alex Gunn, and Alison Gilmore) and a host of associated researchers. It was conducted over multiple years at Waikato University, the University of Auckland, the University of Canterbury, and the University of Otago. It is rare that researchers can find the resources to execute a multi-year, multi-site study like this one, but when they can, and have the dedication and commitment that this group has displayed,

the results can truly inform the conversation about how we go about conducting our profession.

And the final point we'd like to make in terms of what can be learned from this special issue is that high quality research is not method-specific. Good research starts by asking important questions and proceeds by using those research methods that are most likely to shed light on the questions. We hope you enjoy this special issue of *Assessment Matters*; it has been our pleasure and our honour to have served as guest editors.

Jeffrey K. Smith and Lyn Shulha, Guest Editors