

Editorial

Mary Hill

For the second year running *Assessment Matters* has published two issues. Earlier this year a special issue on equity, fairness, and inclusion in assessment, ably edited by Professor Valentina Klenowski was published. This second issue for 2015 continues to provide much food for thought about the current thinking in educational assessment. Ranging from the effects of tertiary study to trends in early childhood contexts, these articles delve into the nature of formative assessment, the efficacy of feedback, and the changing nature of assessment modes in examinations.

Jan Eyre's article takes up important issues of validity, reliability, and fairness. She explores the changing nature of the end of secondary school examinations in New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) to demonstrate how the interim measure from 2016 enabling both pencil and paper and digital examinations has the potential to widen the equity gap rather than close it. While for some students technology is part of their lives, for others moving to partial or totally online assessment may disadvantage. Eyre points out how important it is to investigate mode effects before moving to a dual mode approach. Furthermore, such investigation could assist in understanding how full digitization of examinations might continue inequitable assessment for some students.

Also within the New Zealand secondary school context, Megan Peterson and Eleanor Hawe investigated Year 12 students' (16–17 year olds) experiences, understandings, and use of teacher written feedback on their written classical studies assignments for NCEA. Their findings confirm those of others who show how the high-stakes nature of assessment can undermine teachers' intentions of producing expansive learning through their use of feedback. Peterson and Hawe offer helpful examples of the use of feedback that “give students the openings to develop identities as independent, autonomous learners who monitor, evaluate, and regulate their learning, during learning”.

Related to giving feedback on written work, Tony Burner provides us with an informative account of how the introduction of portfolios can stimulate self and peer assessment of writing while at the same time inform teacher professional development. In the context of learning English as a foreign language in a middle school in Norway, this article identifies the need for more investigation into the use of formative assessment and feedback while pointing out the prevalence of summative assessment, and research upon it, in language-learning contexts. Burner's study used questionnaires, interviews, and observations to provide a rich picture of change over time as the students, and the teachers, learned to use the portfolios. Even though positive changes occurred in this intervention, we learn of the challenges to changing students' beliefs and the technology issues that can blight such innovations.

Helen Dixon and Eleanor Hawe's article shifts the focus from school students' learning to teacher learning about assessment for learning (AFL). They explain assessment for learning in New Zealand as not just another name for formative assessment. More than giving feedback, AFL assumes that students will take ownership of their learning goals, monitor progress, and make improvements to work, as they produce it, through engagement in such strategies as peer response and self-monitoring. Consequently, teachers need to assume responsibility for helping students acquire these self-regulatory behaviours. Dixon and Hawe's article reports how teachers' understandings about AFL changed as a result of participating in a for-credit course. This qualitative study reminds us that no matter how robust and grounded in research policy may be, it is always challenging to shift beliefs and teaching practice.

The final article in this issue locates assessment in the early childhood education context. Bradley Hannigan takes up the task of reviewing two schools of thought in early childhood assessment and uses these as a backdrop to propose a third way; what he terms a "middle way" to assessment, linking priorities for learners to learning outcomes. Hannigan argues that, as for other sectors, early childhood assessment practices do not exist in a vacuum. Rather they are shaped by normalising influences such as current policy, agency expectations, popular doctrines, professional texts, and social interactions. The article challenges the

status quo by proposing assessment practices that address the realities of the day while staying within the existing policy.

Although the emphasis in this issue is a New Zealand one, it is hoped that the themes and range of contexts speak more widely to education contexts internationally. *Assessment Matters* is a journal that encourages debate and innovation. With this in mind, please share the articles in this issue with your assessment colleagues globally and invite them to contribute.

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Editor