

# Editorial

<https://doi.org/10.18296/am.0048>

What a year 2020 has been. Full of shocks and surprises. Apart from the obvious ones, a surprise for me was that after retiring from my editorial role in the 2019 issue of *Assessment Matters* I had the honour of again editing this issue as no new editor had come forward. Due to the pandemic, and its effects on peoples' work, this issue is published a little later than normal but we still have a full issue with relevant and interesting articles. This is great, especially given the cancelled conferences and seminars this year and our inability to travel and learn from each other. In this issue, three contributions are from the Aotearoa New Zealand context and three are international articles. Cross cutting geographic zones, four deal with school-based assessment issues, three have a focus on teachers' assessment learning, two unpack the use of tools (an inventory and an observation tool) to understand teacher learning in classroom assessment, and two inquire into aspects of assessment in secondary schools.

The first article, from authors in the US and Canada, explores the roles of coursework and field experiences on teacher candidates' assessment literacy. Nicole Barnes, Christopher Gareis, Christopher DeLuca, Andrew Coombs, and Kay Uchiyama followed teacher candidates through their coursework and field work sampling their approaches to classroom assessment three times and comparing them across time points and with their co-operating teachers' approaches. The findings suggest some important issues to address in teacher education, regarding the possible limitations and potential new roles for teacher educators. Further contributions of this article are the discussion of assessment literacy and how this term is understood and used now in comparison with the fairly limited meanings of just a decade ago; and the description and use of the Approaches to Classroom Assessment Inventory (ACAI). This inventory presents study participants with five classroom assessment scenarios and 12 actions for each from which the teacher candidates could choose which they would likely carry out in that situation. Each of these actions fits within a dimension of assessment and corresponds to an approach within that dimension. Therefore, this article provides a great deal of depth and information about studying teacher candidate (and teacher) approaches to classroom assessment.

The second article also reports on the use of a tool, this time an observation schedule used by classroom teachers to observe each other in order to understand and improve their own classroom assessment practice. Helen Dixon, Mary Hill, and Eleanor Hawe explored the use of an existing formative assessment observation tool—the Developing and Evaluating Measures of Formative Assessment Practices (DEMFAP) (Ruiz-Primo et al., 2016)—to assist the professional learning of primary (elementary) school teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand. The project was supported by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) fund. In contrast with the tool in the first article in this issue, where participants responded to scenarios in the online environment, the use of an observation schedule involved the teachers themselves in observational practices of assessment for learning (AfL) in classrooms. This article brings to the fore the importance of teacher assessment literacy and how this knowledge is critical when using an observation schedule for professional learning.

The next two articles report studies set in the context of secondary schooling; one in Icelandic upper secondary and the other in Aotearoa New Zealand. Ívar Rafn Jónsson and Guðrún Geirsdóttir explored and compared students' experiences of assessment practices in schools with an overt policy of AfL implementation with schools with no AfL policy. Given the rather high-stakes nature of secondary schools, the imbedded cultures of teaching and correspondingly different assessment cultures, this article draws on focus group interviews with students to understand how the prevailing practice of assessment guides students to internalise the mindset that is embedded in AfL. Even though the national policy is for assessment to be formative, and states that there should be guidance for the students on how they most successfully can handle their future education, the article explains that there has been mixed implementation. And how better to understand implementation than through the voices of the recipients, the students themselves?

From Aotearoa New Zealand, another secondary-focused article shifts from the classroom focus of the first three articles to the ways in which schools are using assessment data gathered for school self-evaluation. The schools in this study had introduced a traffic light system—a student assessment tracking and monitoring tool. These “traffic light” systems allowed schools to track students' progress on New Zealand's complicated NCEA assessment system and identify which students might be at risk of not achieving.

Schools used these databases to track students' real-time results on internal assessments and then code them either red, amber, or green (RAG ratings). The study focused on four schools with effective systems and interviews, conducted with 13 participants, revealed that data can be both a powerful force with potential for good, but also raised concerns about the unintended consequences of the use of assessment data.

The final two articles, one from Australia and the other from Aotearoa New Zealand, delve into primary (elementary) teachers' formative and AfL capabilities. Libby Bond, Geoff Woolcott, and Christos Markopoulos argue that despite the critical importance of formative assessment, teachers in Australia and beyond have failed to implement it effectively, and set out to investigate possible reasons for this from the existing literature. The article then proposes a formative assessment framework that might provide a consistent whole-school approach to embedding formative practice owned and developed by teachers. Drawing on the work of earlier scholars in the assessment field, the framework combines three key questions to guide assessment, five strategies to shape formative interactions and a planning, acting, and reflecting cycle of implementation. In this way, the guidance to schools strikes a balance between offering assessment theory and purposes, and providing practical strategies to follow, leaving room for schools and teachers to use the framework as a structure or scaffold from which to build their own assessment programme and approach.

In the sixth article Jenny Poskitt argues for the use of exemplars as a way forward in building Aotearoa New Zealand teachers' AfL capability. Poskitt explains, "(e)xemplars are samples of annotated student work that illustrate important discipline learning or competencies and appeal to teachers because they 'translate' curriculum, learning and assessment knowledge into practice through the accompanying annotations and curriculum frameworks." This case study examined how primary school teachers used exemplars in a professional learning and development programme to deepen their disciplinary, pedagogical, and assessment knowledge—all essential for implementing AfL in ways that can lead to self-regulatory learners.

Thus, this issue is full of interesting articles that bring together assessment issues relevant to this time. There is a great deal happening in the educational assessment space at this time. Digital and online teaching and learning,

forced upon us by circumstances, mean we are learning much about online assessment. The relevance of qualifications, importance of wellbeing, and even the nature of schooling are changing and evolving rapidly while we are learning to live in new ways. No doubt these upheavals will have implications for assessment, and we look forward to publishing scholarly articles referencing these changes in upcoming issues of *Assessment Matters*. Thank you to all the authors, reviewers, editors and readers over the last few years who have supported me in this role. It is great teamwork that has led to these issues, and no doubt will continue to in the future.

*Mary F. Hill*

*General Editor*