

# Editorial

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Kia ora koutou katoa. Welcome to the 2021 issue of *Assessment Matters*.

2021 saw the world moving into the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such we continue to live through a pandemic that has caused major, ongoing disruptions to our daily lives. For those of us working within the education space there have been continual upheavals. Much has been written about the challenges caused by the closure of educational facilities and the back and forth moves from face to face to remote teaching. Although gaining less attention, the disruption to research and research-related activities has also been considerable over the past 2 years. A greater focus on teaching and teaching-related activities has resulted in less time spent on research (Radecki & Schonfeld, 2020), which in turn has affected research productivity in a number of ways. There have been fewer research collaborations established, greater difficulty in sustaining research networks, a reduced number of new projects initiated, as well as increased difficulty in accessing research participants and in utilising a wide range of data collection methods. Such disruptions have affected those at the start of their research careers through to the most senior academics. As a result, *Assessment Matters* like many journals has seen fewer article submissions in 2021. While the quantity of submissions has been affected, quality has not. The articles published in this issue of *Assessment Matters* fulfil the brief “of extending our thinking in relation to assessment”.

Globally, Assessment for learning (AfL) has gained prominence over the last three decades. As such it is considered one of the major educational innovations of the 21st century given its impact (Birenbaum et al., 2015). From a practice perspective AfL embodies and promotes different ways of behaving and interacting. Hence the norms and behaviors associated with the traditional roles and responsibilities of teachers and students in both learning and assessment have been reformulated. The articles in this edition contribute to our understanding of the challenges faced by teachers and students when asked to take on board new roles and responsibilities. Andersson and Erixon tackle issues related to teacher learning about AfL and how best to build capacity and capability. Focusing on the students’ role, both Li, Hawe, and Brown and Niles, Dixon, and Hawe draw specific

attention to the need for students to have both the capacity and willingness to participate in the strategies associated with AfL.

From a teaching perspective, teachers are now expected to provide substantial and authentic opportunities that enable students to acquire the reflective habits of mind necessary to become autonomous and self-regulating learners. However a large body of literature has highlighted issues related to teacher practice. Changes to teachers' instructional practices have proved to be modest and cursory. The first article in this issue (Andersson and Erixon) reports on a project that sought to improve teacher formative assessment practices (AKA AfL). Set in Sweden and focused on a first-year teacher of mathematics, the article draws attention to the need to develop teacher competence in an ongoing manner. Their article provides insights into the types of activities that can potentially build teacher competence and confidence. In doing so Andersson and Erixon place emphasis on the fact that teacher practice must be accompanied by reflective activity if meaningful, sustained change is to occur.

The two remaining articles report on projects that have sought to investigate the role students play in AfL. In each of these articles attention is drawn to the challenges arising when there is an expectation that students become active and pro-active participants in their learning through engagement in such strategies as peer review, self-monitoring, and self-assessment. Although set in different contexts and drawing on participants of differing ages and cultural backgrounds, both articles illustrate that student participation in assessment cannot be seen as a given. Students make deliberate choices as to whether or not to engage. Willingness to engage is critical.

The small-scale, qualitative study by Li, Hawe, and Brown shows us the importance of students valuing any given assessment activity. As the Li et al., study reveals, Higher Education students make deliberate choices in regard to the level of their engagement in making self-assessment judgements. The value associated with the outcomes of self-assessment determines their willingness to engage and thus affects the level of engagement. The honesty and accuracy of students' self-assessment appraisals is also affected by the perceived value of making these appraisals. As the authors argue, the learning value of students engaging in self-assessment will continue to be minimised unless students fully understand the benefits of such engagement.

In a similar vein, the research undertaken by Niles, Dixon, and Hawe within a secondary school context also illustrates the differential engagement of students when asked to take an active role in assessment. Focused on student engagement in peer review processes, this study also illustrates that students' decisions to participate are both conscious and deliberate. As this study highlights, the existence or otherwise of trusting relationships is a key determinant in relation to the nature and scope of students' engagement in peer review. Gaining insight into the differential nature of students' in-school and out-of-school participation in peer review, the authors advocate for schools to take a more proactive approach in supporting students to engage in informal, out-of-school peer review activities.

As the relatively newly appointed General Editor of *Assessment Matters* I encourage you to read and share the articles in this issue with colleagues. I hope you enjoy reading the collection as much as I did. As supporters of the journal I'd also encourage you (and your colleagues and students) to submit an article for the 2022 issue if you have something that would be of interest and relevance to the journal. Finally, I'd like to thank all those who undertook article reviews during 2021. Your input has been invaluable and the time and care taken in providing peer feedback much appreciated.

*Helen Dixon*

*General Editor*

## References

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