Teachers and Curriculum

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

About the Journal

Teachers and Curriculum is an online peer-reviewed publication supported by Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand. It is directed towards a professional audience and focuses on contemporary issues and research relating to curriculum pedagogy and assessment.

Notes for Contributors

Teachers and Curriculum welcomes

- innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords;
- research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords;
- thinkpieces with a maximum of 1500 words; and
- book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

Focus

Teachers and Curriculum provides an avenue for the publication of papers that

- raise important issues to do with the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;
- reports on research in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;
- provides examples of innovative curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practice; and
- review books and other resources that have a curriculum, pedagogy and assessment focus.

Submitting articles for publication

Please consult with colleagues prior to submission so that papers are well presented. Email articles to T&C Administrator, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, wmier@waikato.ac.nz.

Layout and number of copies

All submissions must be submitted online as word documents. Text should be one and a half spaced on one side of A4 paper with 20mm margins on all edges. Font = Times New Roman, 11 point for all text and all headings must be clearly defined. Only the first page of the article should bear the title, the name(s) of the author(s) and the address to which reviews should be sent. In order to enable 'blind' refereeing, please do not include author(s) names on running heads. All illustrations, figures, and tables are placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end.

Foot/End Notes

These should be **avoided where possible**; the journal preference is for footnotes rather than endnotes.

Referencing

References must be useful, targeted and appropriate. The Editorial preference is APA style; see *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (Sixth Edition). Please check all citations in the article are included in your references list, if in reference list they are cited in document, and formatted in the correct APA style. All doi numbers **must** be added to all references where required. Refer: http://www.crossref.org/

Copyright

Acknowledgement of Reviewers

The Editors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the reviewers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THINKPIECE: ASSESSMENT AS A LITERACY

BILL USSHER AND KERRY EARL
Faculty of Education
The University of Waikato

The education sector is continuously experiencing and responding to the impact of political, economic and social change. Specific educational demands challenge teachers and school leaders through their impact on policies, processes and outcomes on teaching and learning. Since Stiggins (1995) promoted the concept of assessment literacy in 1991, various authors (e.g., Hill, Cowie, Gilmore, & Smith, 2010; Lukin, Bandalos, Eckhout, & Mickelson, 2004) have used the term assessment literacy to refer to knowledge, skills and practice in evaluating achievement information. By referring to teachers' assessment literacy there is an implication that one can be assessment literate or illiterate. This dualism is not helpful in developing teachers' confidence in their ability to grow their pedagogical knowledge. This paper suggests that conceptualising assessment as '*a literacy*' will help teachers recognise their agency in becoming more knowledgeable and skilled in their practices and interpretations of assessment.

Referring to assessment as '*a literacy*' teachers can draw on their understanding of aspects of a literacy and how that literacy develops. The concept of literacy is constantly evolving. Literacy as a generic or vernacular term is commonly understood as the ability to understand and use the symbol systems of a particular community in various social and cultural contexts according to need, demand and education. Being savvy in the essential knowledge and skills is critical for effective communication of information and personal expression with an intended audience. Being able to make meaning from information then respond in the same or another format requires competence in both knowledge and skills. A variety of literacies are now referred to including information literacy, scientific literacy, financial literacy and multi-literacy. Each implies for the user to be savvy (or not) in the associated knowledge and skills. We acknowledge that different year levels and age of learners, and different teachers' skill and experience will require different levels of literacy. There is now a greater need for more people, especially teachers and learners but including parents and the wider community, to know and understand assessment.

The literacy of assessment requires an understanding of vocabulary associated with practices, knowledge of different purposes, skills and familiarity with common formats associated with evidence gathering, and analysis and reporting. Teachers need to observe students' interests, motivation and progress, read various types of data, reports, policies, parent's concerns, and contexts. They need to hear questions, responses and other learner information provided as evidence of learning. Teachers need to write feedback, records of achievement, reports, further planning, teacher-made assessments, school policy, documents for the Board of Trustees and the Ministry of Education. They need to be able to speak to learners and their significant others about progress and achievements. Teachers also need to support the students' reading of teacher, self and peer feedback, instructions, questions, the purposes, conditions, risks and consequences, assessment results and reports. They need to be able to guide learners writing for assessment administration (such as names, dates, and in senior years identification numbers), interpreting questions and completing responses using the format indicated within the space, time and conditions required.

Media coverage of outcome data such as National Standards data, NCEA level pass rates and international comparison data make school and group achievement more visible. Government, school and teacher decisions need to be made on valid, reliable data to be fit for the purpose of benefiting students' learning and teachers' teaching, as highlighted in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). Teachers are obligated to ensure they understand the quality of information and are capable of making sense of the results for their own response and decision-making, including talking with colleagues, students and parents. The introduction of NCEA and National Standards in New Zealand has required teachers to be more mindful of the reliability and validity of assessment tasks and information. Moderation and teacher judgements are significant in ensuring schools and teachers

make sound learning and curriculum decisions. Based on her doctoral research Hill (2003) argued that, although such policies and procedures are powerful influences, "Teachers and school leaders need to be confident about assessment so that they can make informed decisions about their classroom practice, so they can prioritise formative strategies over accountability ones and so they can see how summative and standardised assessment can work for rather than against, learning" (p. 14).

If the knowledge, skills and practices of assessment are regarded as 'a literacy' then the implication is that growth and development are possible for every teacher and school leader. At any time, teachers can recognise where they are positioned on a learning progression and have agency in deciding next steps. Agency is more than taking responsibility for developing literacy of assessment, it is feeling the personal drive to take action, to be intentional in professional learning of assessment knowledge, skills and practice to strategically and reflectively grow and develop. Acknowledging this then teachers are able to seek to improve in order to respond confidently to the challenges and demands of new students, policies, practices and research findings. We want to emphasise the active nature of teachers as individuals. Now is not the time for teachers to be too busy for reflection nor passive in feeling subject to influences that largely determine their actions. We expect that improved teacher agency in this literacy would have positive implication for students' assessment capability and achievement, thus benefitting the assessment experiences for all in their classrooms.

References

Hill, M. (2003). *Assessment in the real world—What teachers actually do in the classroom. Research Information for NZEI Te Riu Rua Members: Occasional papers,* 1–16. Wellington, New Zealand: NZEI Te Riu Roa.

Hill, M., Cowie, B., Gilmore, A., & Smith, L. (2010). Preparing assessment-capable teachers: What should preservice teachers know and be able to do? *Assessment Matters, 2,* 43–64. Retrieved from http://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/assessment-matters/articles/preparing-assessment-capable-teachers-what-should-preservice-

Lukin, L., Bandalos, D., Eckhout, T., & Mickelson, K. (2004). Facilitating the development of assessment literacy. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 23*(2), 26–32. doi:10.1111/j.1745-3992.2004.tb00156.x

Ministry of Education. (2007). *New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Stiggins, R. (1995). Assessment literacy for the 21st century. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(3), 238–245. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20405538