

# SABBATICAL INQUIRY

Term 2 2010

## **Review and development of assessment practice towards reporting student achievement against the National Standards.**

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## Acknowledgements

*“To lead change in schools, principals need knowledge and insight into the complex processes of change and the key drivers that make for successful change. In particular they need to keep their focus clearly on the central vision for their school...”* From Leading Change in Kiwi Leadership for Principals.

I acknowledge the many people who have enabled me to keep my focus on the central vision of my school during my sabbatical: leading learning.

I thank the BOT of Makauri School for supporting my sabbatical application, particularly Chairperson Natasha Ashworth who so highly values professional development and learning.

I thank the DP and AP Darylle Lawler and Joanne Mador for so capably leading the school in my absence. Having an outstanding ERO Report shortly after my return is credit to you and our great team.

I thank my colleagues in the Cluster of schools I have been part of for several years: Makaraka, Matawai, Motu, Ormond, Ngatapa, Rere, Tiniroto, Wainui Beach and Waipaoa Station. The collegiality and genuine sharing is the only way we all go forward. We learn so much from each other.

I thank Eileen Robinson, Leading & Managing Adviser with School Support Services Gisborne for being a coaching colleague and mentor.

I particularly thank our EHSAS Assessment Group: Janine Read from Mangapapa School, Cheryl Torrie from Awapuni School and the late Rose Grant from Tolaga Bay Area School. Our assessment meetings challenged us all in realising our own visions.

## Executive Summary

The National Standards were introduced to New Zealand schools with attendant feelings of curiosity, anxiety and fear that any new initiative or change brings. The political ‘hot potato’ National Standards were to become had not emerged when my inquiry proposal was being formulated.

The focus of the inquiry was at that time to be based on the professional learning opportunities the National Standards initiated in reviewing and developing reliable, robust and valid assessment practices. The focus could not then be on the politics of

the standards, although the political landscape posed excellent 'food for thought' into interrogating assessment practice.

As a result of my inquiry I have developed a deeper understanding of assessment practice and pedagogy. I have come to the realisation that the National Standards are a significant professional learning opportunity for all involved in the education sector, the MOE, school boards, leaders and teachers, parents and communities. *See Implications section below.*

## **Purpose**

Within the context of working with an established cluster of rural schools, develop my competence as a school and cluster leader, in developing assessment knowledge and practice for reporting literacy and numeracy achievement against the National Standards.

## **Rationale and Background information**

Makauri School has a history of established and high quality assessment practice.

At the beginning of this inquiry we had an established Assessment Map or Schedule with timeframes for gathering, analysing and reporting student achievement. Student Portfolios, Student Led Conferencing and Goal Setting had been a feature of the school for many years. Students reported their own learning, in their own words.

We had clustered with other schools as part of an EHSAS initiative, with Assessment as a key focus area. We had worked with a Literacy Consultant for many years and had moderation processes in place in levelling and analysing student Writing. We had worked on the development of the revised NZ Curriculum (I am a Sector Leader for this) within an established cluster of schools.

The rationale of this inquiry focused on how to take forward the best in current assessment practice into the National Standard landscape.

Initially, a great deal of what we already did, appeared to be what the standards were asking of us, but the journey we embarked on soon saw us broadening our views of assessment and our own assessment literacy.

## Activities undertaken (methodology)

### REVIEW

A review of assessment literature, principally through [www.tki.org.nz](http://www.tki.org.nz) provided a wealth of information and resources on assessment practice in literacy and numeracy. From readings on assessment theory and practice, questions emerged to initiate the review stage of the inquiry.

A determining paper was *Directions for Assessment in New Zealand, Developing students' assessment capabilities*. by Absolum et al.

The Education Gazette also provided a series of articles and updates that added considerably to my own and teachers understanding of the National Standards. The Ministry of Education Self Review Tools and Posters also contributed to our growing knowledge.

So, wonderings, ponderings, puzzles and questions were formulated.

### What do we already do?

What are our beliefs about assessment?

What assessment practices exist in the school?

How is assessment data collected and collated?

Do teachers analyse student achievement data well to identify teaching and learning needs?

How well do we develop a Needs Analysis from assessment results?

How well do we develop Learning Intentions and Success Criteria?

How do our assessment practices make a difference to student achievement? What evidence do we have of this?

What learning goals are developed from assessment information?

Will the results of our analysis of assessment change our expectations for learners?

Should things always change from our aggregation and analysis of assessment data?

How well is assessment information moderated across the school, or across the cluster of schools we work with?

Does assessment information consider multiple sources of information or a range of practices in reporting student achievement?

How is assessment data or student achievement currently reported?  
What form does a current written report to parents look like?  
Does reported assessment information show progress over time?

### **What do we need to do?**

- What are the key elements of the requirements of the NS?
- What do we need to know or understand?
- What needs to be adapted / adopted to meet the requirements of the NS?

### **How will we get there?**

- What is the first step towards meeting the requirements of the NS?
- What support do we need to do this?
- What opportunities exist to support us?
- What else?

### **More wonderings, ponderings, puzzles and questions!**

- How does assessment impact on the teaching and learning in our classrooms?
- What information do we actually want about student achievement?
- What assessment tools or tasks will give us the information we require?
- How well do we develop an attitude of inquiry following assessment?
- What learning conversations will the collective staff need?
  
- What are the implications of the National Standards on our current practice?
- Where are children at in relation to where they need to be?
- What is the new assessment literacy we need to know and understand?
- What is the practice of **Moderation**?
- How do we learn to moderate assessment information successfully?
- How will we develop the practice of OTJ - **Overall Teacher Judgment**?
- What is OTJ - Overall Teacher Judgment?
- What is hard and soft data?
- What are **learning conversations**? Do I record?
- What are **observations**? Do I record?
- What does '**progress over time**' mean?
- What is **plain language**?
- What will be the outcome of this professional learning?
- What is our 'dreamed' end point?

These questions became the basis of learning conversations with the staff at my own school and with other school leaders. The professional dialogue was necessary to extend and challenge our thinking and make the links between current and possible future assessment practice. The MOE Self Review Tools added another dimension to our own self review.

## **PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

- I attended with two lead teachers from my own school, the School Support Services Seminars which added to the emerging picture towards unpacking the National Standards.
- Staff meetings were planned following these seminars for our own staff. Online Professional Learning Modules at TKI supported this learning.
- As a school we worked throughout 2010 with a School Support Services Mathematics Adviser on a whole school development in Mathematics.
- I was part of a reciprocal exchange group of Gisborne and Hamilton Principals who spent time in each other's regions visiting schools and presenting workshops on leading learning.
- Leaders of the schools' Cluster met for workshops and meetings on various aspects of assessment practice and the requirements of the National Standards.

## **OUTCOMES**

*These outcomes emerged during the sabbatical term and in the following terms.*

- We reviewed the school reporting practices alongside our student Portfolios and Student Led Conferencing processes.
- We made changes to our reporting format, our 'Summary of Learning' to meet the requirements of the National Standards. We focused on what the next steps for parents in their child's learning might look like.
- We developed our knowledge of Moderation practice by working 'within the known'. We already had a well established knowledge and process for moderating children's writing samples in Personal Recount. We continued to meet as a cluster and align our interpretation of leveling Writing. The MOE Posters provided some guidance in genre other than Recount.
- We developed a Cluster Model for Moderation for Overall Teacher Judgment.
- We began the process of widening the range of information sources to make judgments around student achievement. We described 'soft data' - observations and learning conversations and how these can add to 'hard data' in order to determine whether a child has met the National Standards. How to make this a more valid and reliable process is a question for the future.

- Future outcomes include the development of *A Moderation Kit* outlining to present and future staff our assessment beliefs and practice.

## Findings

'What does it look like to meet the National Standard'? The answer to this question is far more complex than any educator ever imagined when the National Standards were introduced.

Over the course of my sabbatical more questions than answers was the major finding! However, the following is a 10 point summary of my findings:

1. The National Standards focus on the partnership between school and home. In the past parents have been passive recipients of information. The Standards place the responsibility for student achievement as a joint responsibility. What will the school do next for the learner AND what will the parent do next for the learner? We have used this premise to work with our parents in learning how to support their children.
2. During my sabbatical term (Term 2) there was huge urgency to develop a 'report' or as we called it, a Summary of Learning that indicated where children were in relation to the standards. The media hype suggested parents demand to know where their children stood. This put a great deal of pressure on us to hastily comply. What we developed at that time we will now modify and improve for 2011.
3. The language of the National Standards has been a challenge. Maths uses the words EARLY and AT, where Reading and Writing use TOWARDS and AT. This has caused a great deal of debate and confusion. Should they both use the same language? Does 'early' and 'towards' mean the same? Early Level 2 and Towards Level 2.....are they the same? Interpretations vary. For assessment to valid and reliable we cannot have various interpretations!
4. The process of developing our understanding of Moderation has been the greatest professional learning opportunity with the introduction of the standards. Online professional learning modules supported this learning.
5. We have had for many years a process in place for leveling and moderating Personal Recount in Writing. We have yet to develop this process for other Writing genre and/or writing across the curriculum. The few examples on the MOE Chart are not enough. We are beginning to use e-asTTle for this purpose.
6. Using the processes of Overall Teacher Judgment is a complex process. Marrying hard and soft data is an enormous challenge. How do we ensure we do this in a way consistent with other schools locally, regionally or nationally? Is this necessary?

7. What does OTJ look like in Reading? Do we all administer Running Records the same way? What are the protocols? Reliable hard data for assessing Reading is available with STAR, PAT, etc. How do we integrate soft data, e.g. use of reading strategies, reading across the curriculum, attitude to reading, etc?
8. The Mathematics Standard has been critiqued as 'too hard'? How do we gather reliable and valid assessment data across the various strands of Maths? How do we moderate Maths data; the quantitative and qualitative data?
9. 2011 will see us develop school Exemplars or Assessment Tasks to add to our store of assessment tools and achievement data. This will be a major task and part of our proposed 'Moderation Kit'. Online resources at TKI will support this task.
10. Our Student Management System, e-Tap will support us in improving our access and management of assessment data. We plan to be able to show 'progress over time' more efficiently than we can at present.

## Implications

The implications of this sabbatical are as complex as the National Standards themselves. Assessment is a complex process and standards alone are not a silver bullet.

The implications as I see them include:

1. The stand out implication of this sabbatical is the need to develop assessment capability in school leaders and teachers. This sabbatical allowed me time out from the day to day management of the school to focus on developing my assessment knowledge and capability and enable me to support classroom teachers in enhancing their assessment pedagogy and practice on my return to school.
2. Schools need to be appropriately resourced in order to develop the assessment capacity of leaders, teachers, BOT, parents and the students themselves. Two or three School Support Services workshops, for three people from each school and not resourced for TRDs, has not been enough in 2010.
3. A comprehensive plan for points 1 & 2 above. For consistency of practice and to make the Standards truly national, equity of access to quality professional learning in assessment practice must be the key focus.

4. The interpretation of assessment data can be an enigma for school leaders and teachers. We have expertise in interpreting 'hard' data, but what does consistent practice in interpreting 'soft' data look like?
5. Schools are trying to do the best they can in implementing the National Standards. However, the quality of assessment in schools is a direct result of the professional learning opportunities leaders and teachers have access to. For example, only a third of primary schools have been able to access the ATOL PD! Variations in interpreting the National Standards exist and are a concern. The implications are far reaching for poor interpretation.
6. I agree with the authors of *Directions for Assessment in New Zealand* who are 'advocates for the development of rich descriptions of progress over time (progressions) and clearly defined indicators of achievement relative to different stages of learning (levels). These will provide the required clarity about what is expected at each level and give teachers a sound basis for learning conversations with students and their parents'.
7. All schools want students who are engaged with learning, set goals, know what they are learning, receive feedback and feedforward and use all this information to report their own learning. Students will develop this capability only if leaders and teachers are assessment capable themselves.

## Conclusions

### National Standards or Assessment Standards!

If we start talking about Assessment Standards or a system of assessment, and embark on genuine inquiry into assessment capability across the education sector, would we achieve the intention of the current National Standards? I believe so.

Professor W. James Popham, at the Third International Assessment Conference in Queenstown, in 2009, said: "If you can prioritise, focus on the really most significant things and measure them in a myriad of ways not just one, then you will have a winning system."

## References

The myriad of information on [www.tki.org.nz](http://www.tki.org.nz) particularly Assessment online.

<http://assessment.tki.org.nz/>

<http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Research>

Absolum, M. Flockton, L. Hattie, J. Hipkins, R. Reid, I. (2009) *Directions for Assessment in New Zealand. Developing students' assessment capabilities.*

<http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom/DANZ-report>

H. Timperley, H. Wilson, A. Barrar, H. and Fung, I. (2007) *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)*

<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341>

### NOTE:

Since the sabbatical the resources on TKI have been extended. Recent additions include a wealth of information for schools in the development of exemplars and illustrations of the standards.

<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/What-s-new>

<http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/>

<http://www.nzmaths.co.nz/national-standards-illustrations>

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