



Using Practice-based Attestation to Develop a Learning Community

Mike Bain

Te Mata School is one of 16 Hawke’s Bay schools that took part in the Practice-based Attestation (PBA) Project, a pilot set up jointly by NZEI, New Zealand School Trustees Association and the Ministry of Education.

At Te Mata nine teachers have been moving through the trial process. Principal Mike Bain explains how the opportunity to participate in the project has supported the implementation of teacher inquiry at the school.

PBA aimed to provide schools with a rigorous system for evaluating the practice of these teachers against a draft set of challenging KSAs (knowledge, skills and attributes) expected of “expert” teachers. Participating teachers had to provide evidence of their expertise against the KSAs.

Project background

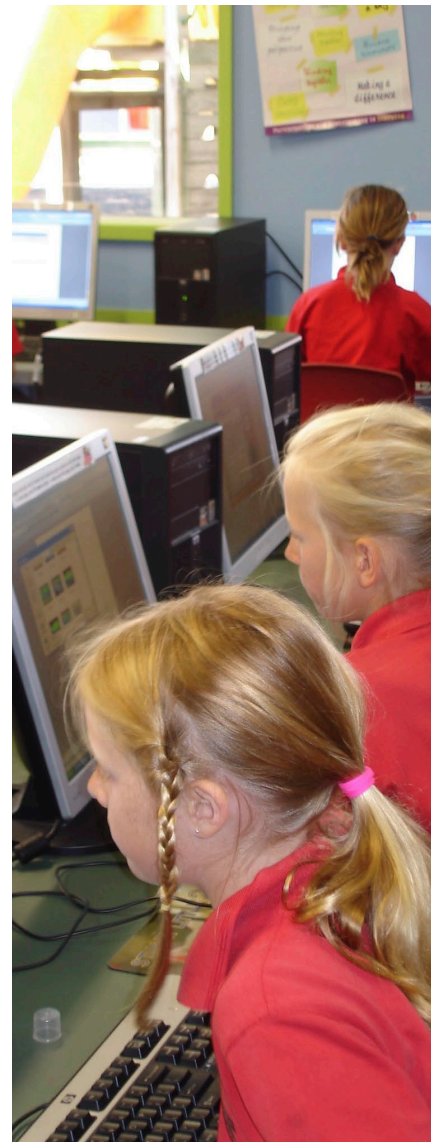
The project involved approximately 90 teachers in our region engaging in new professional learning with their colleagues through teacher inquiry and school-based professional learning communities. *The New Zealand Curriculum*, the new Professional Standards for Primary Principals and *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* underpinned the work.

The PBA trial process required teachers to use evidence, including observations of teaching practice, to demonstrate all the KSAs.

The New Zealand Curriculum	“...effective pedagogy requires teachers to inquire into the impact of their teaching on their students” (p.35).
Primary Principal Professional Standards	Ensure staff members engage in professional learning to establish and sustain effective teacher-learner relationships.
Kiwi Leadership for Principals	“...understand what teachers do and build a professional learning community which supports, challenges and inquires into own professional practice” (p.18).

At the outset the brief looked simple, but as the project unfolded the trial schools were faced with a number of challenges:

- Could we create an attestation system that would work across the board for all current teachers, regardless of their positions?
- Would all schools undertake attestation the same way and did it matter?
- How might we clearly demonstrate depth of knowledge, including that gained through experience, by professional development and by professional reading?
- What impact would teachers’ enhanced professional understanding of their children’s learning levels and their own teaching have on student learning outcomes?



Our approach

At Te Mata we had a diverse group of teachers involved in the pilot: a deputy principal, a syndicate leader, a team leader, five classroom teachers and one part-time teacher. We started out by setting a time frame for meetings in which we could discuss the attestation process. We also needed to ensure that all participants, including the principal as attester, had a clear understanding of all the KSAs and what they meant. The approach we developed during the trial involved:

1. a systematic approach to collecting evidence

KSA 2.2: Use evidence to evaluate and critically reflect on their teaching and on student learning, to provide feedback to students and adapt their teaching practice where necessary.

Everyone needed a clear understanding of both the range and types of evidence to be collected so that all parties knew what was required. For example, we decided that for each KSA we needed evidence that included:

- Observations
- Student outcomes data
- Discussions
- Video
- Presentations
- Student voice
- Related reading
- Facilitated courses
- Photos

Each teacher was to gather their evidence and align it to each KSA as a part of the work they were currently doing.

Participants have seen collecting this evidence as very worthwhile. One noted: "Collecting evidence to show the difference I've made has given me a new sense of purpose and satisfaction. Appraisal will now be a breeze and I feel so much more in control of the process".

The process did not require teachers to collect a mountain of evidence. They just needed enough to show the shifts in students' learning as a result of their thoughtful and skilful teaching, and that demonstrated how they linked professional learning to their practice decisions. For example:

Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes
Facilitated courses	Programmes of work	Student achievement
Readings	Teaching practice	Reflective practice
Discussion groups	Analysis of data	Learning communities
Observations	Observing others	Focused feedback

2. a system that supported teachers to demonstrate the effect of their learning on their practice

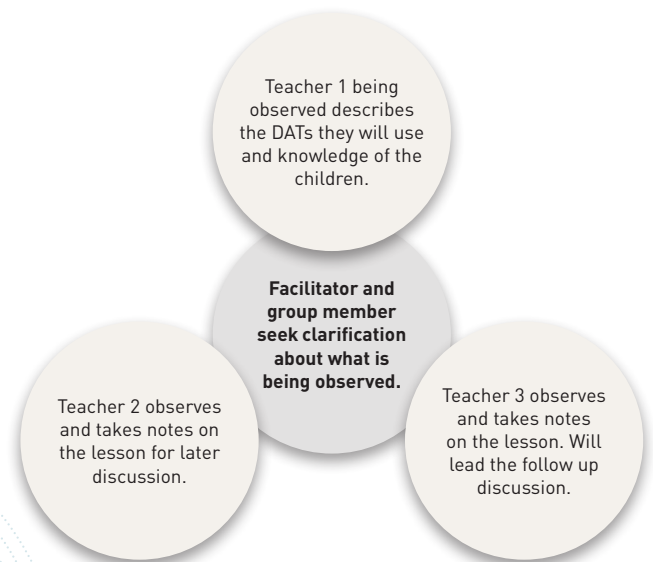
The system we developed to help teachers demonstrate the effects of professional development and current theory on their practice decisions included:

- the chance to observe other teachers and be observed in relation to specific activities within each KSA.
- preparing a presentation or sharing session about their learning journey.
- attestation against the KSAs. This was to be finally concluded by me at the end of the project.

3. participation in Quality Learning Circles

KSA 2.3. Actively contribute to and engage in professional learning communities to enhance their own learning and the learning and teaching of others.

Setting up two small Quality Learning Circles enabled internal and external moderation to occur. Each participant took part in a cycle of both observing and being observed in a focused teaching session where the outcomes for the children were explicitly linked to deliberate acts of teaching (DATs). The diagram below shows how this process worked in practice to achieve triangulated moderation.



This approach to attesting the KSAs required opportunities for teachers to share, observe, reflect and lead discussion on both theory and practice and their effect on student outcomes. It also supported teachers, allowing them to seek clarity and to both show and share examples of good practice. This meant viewing themselves and other teachers in the group in terms of their future potential and not merely their past performance.

Reflections

Being involved in the trial has resulted in a number of positive spin-offs for our school and for me personally as a “Kiwi leader”.

There has been both an opportunity and incentive for a significant and influential section of my staff to engage in a more structured, contextual and authentic sequence of professional learning. It has involved them in:

- Identifying their relevant craft knowledge and discussing their underlying beliefs.
- Exploring relevant research knowledge and considering how this might inform their current and future practice.
- Using student achievement evidence in rich and meaningful ways to inform, guide and evaluate their practice.
- Reflecting on their practice and proactively collecting evidence that demonstrated their learning, the effectiveness of their teaching and the relationship between the two.
- Engaging in robust critical friend dialogue with their colleagues and with me.
- Opening both their practice and classrooms to colleagues.
- Exploring the use of video as a tool to review practice.

This trial has also created a context in which a significant number of my teachers now engage with me more closely as the school’s professional leader in their everyday practice, and I have had a chance to support and recognise the experience and expertise of this group.

The end result has been that I have seen a number of shifts in my teachers’ reflective thinking, their understanding of their role and just as importantly the ownership of their own professional learning.

