

Editorial

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Kia ora and thank you for reading this latest issue of *Assessment Matters*. This issue contains an eclectic selection of articles from around the globe, but all have a focus on using assessment in the service of learning. Thus, most of the studies in this issue highlight the pedagogical processes of assessment built into the teaching and learning process. A recent opinion piece (Brown, 2019) has questioned the legitimacy of treating assessment for learning (AfL) as assessment. Brown argues that, although having some of the elements of assessment, AfL is not assessment because:

the in-the-moment and on-the-fly aspects of effective classroom discussions and providing feedback happen in ephemeral contexts it is not possible to scrutinize the interpretations teachers make of student products and processes. Furthermore, we cannot know if those interpretations were sufficiently accurate to guide classroom interactions. Without social or statistical moderation, stakeholders cannot be assured that valid conclusions are reached. (2019, para 1)

I hope that the articles in this issue challenge us to think deeply about this interpretation of AfL. Does every assessment need to be an event? Do we need moderation, be it social or statistical, in order to make a valid judgment about learning and progress? In the busy world of the classroom, is assessment that informs learning (AfL) only useful if it is an assessment event rather than a process of judgment making and feedback/forward? Can assessment not be made in a moment and used to take the learning on?

The first article in this issue, by Lee Hill and Frances Edwards, “Student Perceptions of their Involvement in Formative Assessment Feedback Practices: ‘I can do it myself’,” certainly challenges us to consider AfL as a process used not so much to make judgments about progress and achievement, but one in which students assess themselves and provide feedback on essay writing. As well as deepening their writing skills, these students reported that being part of the assessment process enhanced their self-regulatory abilities. The point here is that learning occurs through the assessment process itself, rather than from a subsequent teaching event based on an analysis of assessment outcomes. These authors acknowledge that potential problems with peer feedback centre around its social nature, that it can be ad hoc and even overly simplistic. However, within the context

of the New Zealand qualifications framework, this article demonstrates how AfL and feedback worked to scaffold students' essay writing as they worked towards a high-stakes summative assessment. Critically, using AfL in the way described with this small group of students appeared to increase their sense of empowerment and encouraged them to take responsibility for evaluating their work and making changes scaffolded by the exemplars. In this article, AfL is not just an "on-the-fly" process, but a carefully constructed inclusive approach designed to cause learning through student involvement in an assessment process.

Lise Sandvik's article also has a focus on AfL, this time in the Norwegian context. In contrast with the very small scale of Hill & Edwards' focused work, this article draws from a national study that set out to evaluate the implementation of AfL across the country. In this article, the author argues that teachers appear to grow in their understanding and use of AfL and presents a four-stage developmental progression. Sandvik argues that a major challenge in implementing a strong AfL culture is that if teacher knowledge is insufficient, AfL will be misunderstood, and implementation will not succeed. Thus, the nationwide programme focused on increasing teacher understanding of four central AfL principles and the project reported in this article set out to investigate how a community-of-learning approach to AfL professional learning impacted teacher knowledge. The article introduces a model based on these principles to describe AfL communities observed within the Norwegian context. It prompts readers to consider how it could be used in other contexts, and how, in a range of places, AfL professional development is tackled and effective.

Erika Boström and Torulf Palm, from Sweden, also tackle the challenge of developing teachers' AfL practices. Using five key practices of AfL as the underpinnings of formative assessment (William & Thompson, 2008), these authors investigated a particular approach to professional learning in a Year 7 mathematics context. They acknowledge that AfL professional learning programmes have frequently been unsuccessful. Superficial implementation of formative assessment, where students are not fully included in the process, means that the process is teacher directed and AfL cannot thrive to produce self-directed learners. This article explores feedback about the AfL professional development programme these teachers participated in, through interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Observations

of practice demonstrate that, although teachers may be able to talk about AfL, implementation may differ from their explanations, confirming once again how challenging implementation can be. This study adds weight to the literature about the complexity of AfL practice and the difficulties of developing effective AfL practice within professional development programmes.

The fourth article in this issue, also from Scandinavia, leads us to consider Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a lens for understanding the assessment culture within a school environment. Tony Burner uses this approach to demonstrate that “contradictions are the driving force of development” in formative AfL practice and in the process shows how CHAT can inform and enhance AfL. Again, five key practices of AfL form the conceptual framework in this article. We learn how CHAT interventionist research changed student and teacher perceptions and practices of assessment. Burner (this volume) describes the use of “mirroring” in which participants “see their own practice from outside” and argues that it exposed contradictions that teachers tackle, in the process clarifying and changing their assessment conceptions and practices. As Burner writes, AfL is, in itself, change-inducing and thus he challenges us to employ CHAT as a complementary research and development approach to AfL that can work through expansive learning cycles.

The final article in this issue turns to the summative practice of grading. David Slavit and Allison deVincenzi unpack the norms, processes, and implications of a standards-based grading system within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in the United States. However, this article also delves into classroom-based assessment, showing how standards-based assessment (SBA) had the power to change students’ perceptions of the learning process and of themselves as learners. In this sense, this article too sheds light on the impact of involving students in their own assessment in order to inform learning and bring about increased self-regulation. We learn how SBA is implemented within one STEM-focused school that uses project-based learning.

In summary, this issue of *Assessment Matters* is strongly focused on the interrelationships between learning and assessment, including the professional learning required to bring this focus about. As this is the last issue for

which I will act as general editor, I find this gratifying as my academic career has had a clear focus on the relationship between assessment and learning, and I have worked to find ways to support teachers to use assessment as a classroom process, not only a grading or evaluation practice. I, for one, defend the notion of AfL as an assessment process. Yes, it can be in-the-moment and interactive, but as the articles in this issue demonstrate, AfL is more than spur-of-the-moment decisions made by teachers and students; it is a pedagogical process that brings assessment and learning together in an integrated fashion, it is complex, and requires a great deal of teacher expertise and knowledge to bring it to fruition as envisaged.

Finally, in this issue I want to acknowledge the contributions of Emeritus Professor Terry Crooks who passed away on 8 October 2019. Terry took a leading role in building an international understanding of assessment in the service of learning for which he received the Insignia of a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to education.



Terry Crooks receiving the NZOM, 2009

In New Zealand, Terry led the charge to ensure positive effects of assessment on learning. His highly cited review (Crooks, 1988) in many ways spurred the theoretical work of others throughout the world towards studying the potential of formative assessment. For decades Terry led the direction of the international forum on formative assessment, and convened the AfL meeting in Dunedin that revised the definition of AfL to its current form (Klenowski, 2009). He spearheaded the world-leading National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) of student progress and achievement in the New Zealand education system, and this legacy continues in its successor, the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA), and leaves us inspired to continue to develop and use assessment in ways that support learning and learners.

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