

CHANGING TRENDS IN ASSESSMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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IN my role as Moderations Manager for the Qualifications Committee of the New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education, I see literally hundreds of assessments cross my desktop every year. While all, or most of them meet the standards required of assessors for the NZCSE, the assessment methodologies used vary greatly from subject to subject and from country to country¹. The great majority follow the traditional forms of assessment being tests, essays, speeches, research reports etc. Some assessors are becoming more interested in the range of portfolio-based learning outcomes on offer and see them as better ways of assessing learning over an extended time period. Rarer still are those innovative, creative teachers who venture into newer territory and are trying out naturally occurring evidence-based assessments as well as integrated, cross curricular assessment tasks where one piece of student learning or research is used to inform several LOs across different subject areas.

As an external moderator I get more excited working with the latter than the former and it makes my day when I see an assessor trying something new.

My question for this article is, “What are the changing trends in assessment today and how important is it to have a clearly defined, well-articulated curriculum to inform those assessments”.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education in New Zealand released a position paper on assessment that was founded on the following principles:

- Building assessment capability is crucial to achieving improvement.
 - The curriculum underpins assessment.
 - The student is at the centre.
 - An assessment capable system is an accountable system.
 - A range of evidence drawn from multiple sources potentially enables a more accurate response .
 - Effective assessment is reliant on quality interactions and relationships
- (MOE, 2011)

In 2018, Rosemary Hipkins and Marie Cameron from the NZCER (New Zealand Council for Educational Research) were asked to review these principles to see what, if anything had changed and whether the principles are still fit for purpose today, particularly in relation to the rapid evolution of digital technologies. They researched papers published in the last 5 years as well as blog-sites from educational/academic organisations. Their research confirmed that the 2011 MOE principles were still fit for purpose and that there was plenty of recent research from New Zealand and internationally that supports that. They also found that there was no need to add a new principle around the use of digital technologies because they are becoming so pervasive that they impact on every area of assessment practice (Hipkins,Cameron, 2018).

The full paper is available from the NZCER website www.nzcer.org.nz .

¹ NZCSE is currently being offered in NZ, Australia, UK, Austria and Germany

In this article I have attempted to summarize the main findings related to the first two principles which have a greater influence on NZCSE outcomes at present and compare this to our current and potential practices as a result of my observations and data gathered from the last 7 years.

Building Assessment Capability is Crucial to Achieving Improvement

The report concluded that there was little evidence of any widespread improvement in assessment capability since 2011. Where progress was occurring there were some supportive conditions identified:

Strong knowledgeable leadership

Opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively, especially on using achievement data more effectively

Access to supportive curriculum materials including indicators of progress

Amelioration of perceived accountability pressures

Supported introduction of digital assessment resources that generate rich feedback (Hipkins, Cameron, 2018)

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The above section was mainly focused on assessment for learning (AfL) or formative assessment rather than summative, though the authors do state that it is unhelpful to make binary distinctions between (them), and that all assessment can be used either formatively or summatively. (Hipkins, Cameron, 2018)

When my co-workers and I work with groups of teachers new to NZCSE our chief objective is to build assessment capability. In countries where there already exists a high-stakes assessment system (HSA) which leads to a qualification that is based largely on internally assessed standards (like NCEA, IB and NZCSE) the teachers there have generally already built some capability in writing assessment tasks and using data to improve outcomes. This makes our job a lot easier. In other countries where the State provides a summative examination system and everything is provided for the teachers, there is little assessment capability at all. This makes our support role much more challenging and subsequent progress much slower. Apart from showing teachers how to build a set of quality assessment materials and giving them access to lots of exemplars and examples of good practice in various subjects, we also require, or at least encourage the following aspects.

Rich feedback to students is an expectation of all our assessors. It provides students with next steps information and explains clearly why they received the grade they did and not the next higher grade. Most of our assessors are very capable in this respect. The key is to use that feedback to also inform next steps in teaching. Every assessment we do is also partly a self-assessment of our ability to reach the students and meet their needs. As Waldorf teachers we take this seriously and we are always thinking that, “next time I will do it better!”

Involving students in the assessment process is more challenging. Discussing an upcoming learning outcome with a class and getting their input into how the evidence could be generated is a great idea in theory but hard to justify in our time-constrained classrooms. Self and peer assessment could be used in some summative contexts as long as the results were well moderated at teacher and school level. There is nothing in our requirements that prevents this but teachers are reluctant to try it (or at least I have not seen any results from such practices in external moderation).

Using a wider variety of assessment methods- As I stated above, most assessors in NZCSE stick to the known and familiar in terms of assessment methodology. There is a clear international trend away from the single-point-in-time summative assessments like tests, towards reporting on progress over time. (Hipkins, Cameron, 2018) From our work for the Qualifications Committee and on behalf of SEDT², we spend a lot of time supporting and encouraging the use of the following more contemporary assessment methods:

Portfolios: Of course you cannot assess portfolios unless we provide learning outcomes related to this type of evidence and the number of CSE LOs that require portfolios is always increasing. The idea that evidence is gathered over an extended time period and that students are involved in the ranking and selection of evidence to put forward for assessment supports some of the key concepts of AfL mentioned above. Teachers who are starting to use them for subjects like sciences and music find that although the initial design of the materials takes some time, the benefits are many-fold:

- Students can get on with learning without the interruption and stress related to more formal assessments.
- Teachers are more free to choose tasks/content related to the needs of the cohort rather than the specific requirements of smaller LOs.

Naturally Occurring Evidence- This type of assessment seems to be made for Waldorf education even though it was created for something else entirely. The key idea is that evidence is gathered as part of normal classroom learning activities rather than in more formalised situations. It is therefore always authentic and students tend to forget they are being assessed. Teachers who are now using this method, particularly for assessing main lessons³, report that they can also just get on with teaching the class and that the main lesson books become important parts of the evidence gathering process so that students take much more care that their work is clear and presentable. Evidence is taken from the work created as a normal part of the lessons rather than separate, formal assessment activities which gives the students greater opportunities to show their abilities over extended time periods. We can see that there is great potential for this method to become more commonly used for NZCSE LOs and I am constantly challenging teachers of subjects that more commonly use tests (like maths and sciences) to try NOE as a viable alternative.

Integrated assessments- This is where a group of subject teachers gets together and use one student learning event to provide evidence towards several LOs for different subjects. To be successful this requires a lot of cooperation between teachers/departments and some flexibility in the timetable. When well executed the students can see that their education is indeed quite holistic and their teachers work well together, there is less repetition of teaching and learning and less over-assessment. While this method is often used on a small scale, say for providing evidence for 2 LOs from one piece of work, we need to be looking for opportunities to assess 3 or 4 LOs in as many subject areas from one piece of work. Amelia

² The Steiner Education Development Trust manages and develops the NZCSE under license to SEANZ (Steiner Education Aotearoa New Zealand)

³ Main lessons in Waldorf schools are thematic, multi-faceted, cross-curricular units that are taught for the first 1.5 to 2 hours of each day for periods of 3-4 weeks. These are where new content and concepts are first introduced to students and the result is learning that is broad and deep

Minogue, the CSE Coordinator at Raphael House Steiner School in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, is leading the charge with this and so far has successfully assessed 4 LOs in social science, biology, art and English with one event of student research at level 2.

When the Certificate in Assessment Design and Practice (which SEDT offers free to all teachers in NZ CSE schools each year) is run for a cohort of more experienced assessors, we challenge participants to change at least one of their assessments and design something new based on one of the above methodologies as part of the learning process for the course. This has resulted in many teachers moving away from the more traditional approaches to assessment and all are reporting improved outcomes as a result of trying the above-mentioned approaches.

In the above ways we are working hard to improve assessment capabilities in NZCSE assessors but we cannot force these ideas on reluctant participants. When school leaders support the ideas of change and improvement in assessment there is a much greater buy-in from teachers and the students relationship to assessment improves as a result.

The Curriculum Underpins Assessment

Unfortunately in many HSA contexts assessment *becomes* the curriculum. In fact after 10 years of NZCER surveys the majority of NZ teachers still believe that NCEA drives the curriculum (Hipkins, 2013). While the study agrees that the above principle is still relevant today, there is a need to “expand assessment practices to gather evidence of 21st Century outcomes” (Hipkins, Cameron, 2018, p 25). As a result of rapidly evolving digital technologies, globalisation, environmental and social challenges, our students are needing to be more knowledgeable than ever and therefore new competencies are required along with new ways of assessing them. There was also much discussion of the competencies and how these are evolving, the idea of progressions as opposed to summative achievement, where students are rated against their own progress rather than external standards (see Gonski 2 report from Australia) and the growing influence of digital assessment tools. There appear to be a number of further developments relating to assessment out of this principle but they are mainly focussed on AfL rather than summative practices.

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The Waldorf curriculum indications given by Rudolf Steiner have been around since 1919. They have evolved and been given further definition by various individuals since then and several publications have been produced which gather all the indications and ideas into one volume to allow teachers ready access to both the curriculum and the human developmental thinking that lies behind it. While there has been a general reluctance over the years to write down the curriculum and therefore make it prescriptive, organisations in some countries have had the courage to publish curriculum documents which state what the Waldorf curriculum looks like in their particular cultural context. Australia has published a full curriculum document which covers Kindergarten to Class 12; New Zealand has completed a Kindergarten and Lower School document but still needs to complete a high school or upper school document.

It is true to say the Waldorf curriculum underpins the teaching and therefore the assessment of the teaching in schools offering the CSE. Does the NZCSE, as a high

stakes assessment system or HSA, *become* the curriculum? We work very hard to prevent this from happening in schools. We repeat the mantra that each year the first thing that happens is that the curriculum is planned in detail to suit the incoming cohorts, *then*, once this is finalised, teachers look to see what CSE learning outcomes will be appropriate to assess against. Having a clear, substantiated high school curriculum document would support this. As our high schools become more populated with teachers trained only in State education, the vacuum created by a lack of collective understanding and knowledge of the Waldorf high school curriculum means that teachers will continue to fill this void with curriculum ideas from state education.

While curriculum writing is not the core business of SEDT and the NZCSE, the lack of a high school curriculum has and is influencing the learning outcomes we are working with. This is particularly true in the sciences across all 3 levels. The original LO set designed back in 2010 was taken from what was being taught in the contributing NZ schools at the time. Because sciences are taught as specialist subjects in blocks or practice lessons in New Zealand in addition to the traditional main lessons (as opposed to main lessons only as is the practice in Europe), the topics covered in these additional lessons was taken largely from the New Zealand (State) Curriculum document of the time to ensure there was adequate building of skills and knowledge through the high school years. To further develop the NZCSE we now rely on the assistance of experienced teachers in countries like the UK and Europe to help us write new learning outcomes that relate better to a true Waldorf pedagogical context.

Only with clearly written and well understood Waldorf high school curriculums will teachers become more confident in planning and assessing lessons to evidence LOs for the CSE.

Only when school leaders and teachers accept the need to re-think their approach to a more student-centred assessment will our students gain the maximum benefits of a full Waldorf curriculum validated and endorsed by the NZCSE qualification.

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