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Assessment practices in New Zealand year 9 and 10 social studies courses: An exploratory case study.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Education
at Massey University, Manawatu,
NEW ZEALAND

Rosemary Anne Atkins
2010
Abstract

Assessment tasks that acknowledge the diverse social, cultural, and academic needs of learners, and the situated nature of learning, not only have the potential to scaffold effective learning, but can also generate positive outcomes for students in social studies. Assessment from this perspective aligns with sociocultural theories of learning and advances the principles of ‘assessment for learning’. This multiple case study research set out to explore how five experienced teachers in New Zealand [NZ] were formally assessing learning in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses. The intention was to gain some understanding of how the current assessment practices that teachers use in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses align with: (i) contemporary perspectives of ‘assessment for learning’, (ii) findings from the international research literature, and (iii) the NZ Ministry of Education’s assessment policies. The research involved visiting and interviewing each participant teacher on two occasions during the later part of 2009, and reviewing a selection of their school’s assessment documents.

The results from this research suggest that effective NZ secondary school teachers consciously or unconsciously use ‘assessment for learning’ practices consistent with sociocultural principles, to formally assess learning in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses. The research also found that there are often a variety of factors—curriculum, school policy, time constraints, and professional support—that limit teachers’ capacity to implement valid, constructively aligned, and effective programmes of assessment. While teachers were not always consciously aware of the theory that underpinned their practice, or the implications of the decisions they were making, the data suggests that the teachers in this study were committed to ensuring that their students had the opportunity to engage in interesting, manageable, and well constructed assessment tasks that had the potential to foster learning and empower students to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become self motivated lifelong learners.
Acknowledgements

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My study buddies—Penny and Linda: What a privilege it has been to have had the opportunity to share this journey with you. I know I have made two new lifelong friends. Onward and upward we go!

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. i  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii  
List of Figures .................................................................................................................... ix  
Abbreviations and Acronyms .......................................................................................... x  

## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
1.2 Rationale for this study ............................................................................................... 3  
1.3 The research aims ....................................................................................................... 4  
1.4 The nature of this research ....................................................................................... 5  
1.5 The research context ................................................................................................. 5  
1.6 The structure of the thesis ....................................................................................... 6  

## CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 7  
2.2 Conceptions of assessment ....................................................................................... 7  
2.3 Changing views on assessment and learning ......................................................... 9  
2.4 Principles of effective assessment .......................................................................... 12  
   ‘Assessment for learning’ ....................................................................................... 14  
2.5 Formal assessment tasks ........................................................................................... 16  
2.6 Feedback systems ...................................................................................................... 20  
   2.6.1 Grading paradigms ......................................................................................... 21  
   2.6.2 Teachers’ Comments .................................................................................... 22  
2.7 Factors that influence assessment practices ....................................................... 24  
2.8 Education policy in NZ ............................................................................................. 27  
   2.8.1 The NEGS and the NAGS .......................................................................... 27  
   2.8.2 National curriculum statements .................................................................... 28  
   2.8.3 Ministry of Education [MOE] support materials ........................................ 30  
2.9 Assessment in NZ ..................................................................................................... 32  
   Assessment in years 9 and 10 .................................................................................. 34  
2.10 Summary .................................................................................................................. 38
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 41
3.2 Formulating a research approach ........................................................................ 41
3.3 Case study methodology ..................................................................................... 43
3.4 A multiple case study approach ........................................................................... 44
3.5 Data collection tools ............................................................................................ 46
  3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews ........................................................................... 46
  3.5.2 Document analysis ......................................................................................... 48
3.6 Data analysis framework ....................................................................................... 48
3.7 Trustworthy and Ethical Research ....................................................................... 50
  3.7.1 Threats to validity ......................................................................................... 50
  3.7.2 Triangulating data ......................................................................................... 51
  3.7.3 Ethical practice .............................................................................................. 51
3.8 Summary ............................................................................................................... 52

CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology in Action

4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 53
4.2 Framing the research focus ................................................................................... 53
4.3 Selecting the cases ............................................................................................... 54
4.4 Data collection ...................................................................................................... 58
  4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews ........................................................................... 59
  4.4.2 School documents ......................................................................................... 59
  4.4.3 Official documents and support material for social studies teachers .......... 60
4.5 Analysing the data ............................................................................................... 60
4.6 Coding the data .................................................................................................... 61
4.7 Engaging in ethical practice ............................................................................... 62
4.8 Summary ............................................................................................................... 63

CHAPTER FIVE: Results

5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 65
5.2 Approaches used to assess learning ..................................................................... 66
  5.2.1 Programmes of formal assessment ................................................................ 66
  5.2.2 Assessment tasks .......................................................................................... 70
  5.2.3 Grading and feedback .................................................................................. 72
  5.2.4 Teacher judgements .................................................................................... 74
5.3 What teachers formally assess ................................................................. 76
  5.3.1 Knowledge ..................................................................................... 76
  5.3.2 Skills and Key Competencies ....................................................... 78
  5.3.3 Values .......................................................................................... 80

5.4 Factors that influence assessment practice .............................................. 82
  5.4.1 Personal philosophy ....................................................................... 82
  5.4.2 School-based policies and procedures ........................................... 82
  5.4.3 National curriculum ...................................................................... 86
  5.4.4 Experiences in years 11-13 ('trickle down' effects) ......................... 87
  5.4.5 Professional support networks ...................................................... 89

5.5 Issues for teachers ............................................................................... 90
  5.5.1 Consistency between teachers ...................................................... 90
  5.5.2 Transparent reporting systems .................................................... 91
  5.5.3 Implementing change ................................................................... 91

5.6 Summary ............................................................................................. 93

CHAPTER SIX: Discussion ........................................................................ 94

6.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 94

6.2 Approaches used to formally assess learning ........................................ 95
  6.2.1 Transparent and collaborative assessment processes ....................... 96
  6.2.2 Aligning assessment with important outcomes and experiences .......... 97
  6.2.3 Multiple assessment events ........................................................... 98
  6.2.4 Catering for student diversity ......................................................... 99

6.3 Assessing different aspects of learning .................................................. 100
  6.3.1 Social studies knowledge and skills .............................................. 100
  6.3.2 Key Competencies ...................................................................... 102

6.4 ‘Assessment for learning’ ..................................................................... 103
  6.4.1 An integral part of teaching and learning ....................................... 104
  6.4.2 Future focussed ............................................................................ 104
  6.4.3 Success oriented .......................................................................... 105
  6.4.4 An open and reflective process ...................................................... 105
  6.4.5 Aligns with sociocultural principles ............................................. 106

6.5 Factors that influence teachers’ abilities to engage in effective assessment practices ............................................................. 106
  6.5.1 Curriculum constraints .................................................................. 107
6.5.2 School policy constraints 109
6.5.3 Time factors and professional support 110

6.6 Summary .............................................................................................................. 111

CHAPTER SEVEN: Final thoughts 113

7.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 113
7.2 Purpose and design ............................................................................................... 113
7.3 Conclusions ........................................................................................................... 115
7.4 Recommendations for future research ............................................................... 116
7.5 Limitations ........................................................................................................... 117
7.6 Final thoughts ....................................................................................................... 118

References 119

Appendices 131

Massey University Human Ethics Approval Letter ..................................................... 133
Participant School Information Letter ...................................................................... 134
Participant School Consent Form ............................................................................. 136
Participant teacher information sheet ...................................................................... 137
Participant teacher consent form ............................................................................ 139
Emails sent to participants before visits 1 & 2 ......................................................... 140
Interview Questions .................................................................................................. 142
Authority for the release of transcripts .................................................................... 144
A formal assessment task and marking schedule from school C. ............................. 145
List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Characteristics of effective assessment
Figure 2.2: The Assessment Reform Group’s ‘assessment for learning’ principles
Figure 2.3: Using assessment to improve learning
Figure 2.4: Level of subjectivity of a range of assessment tasks
Figure 2.5: A model of feedback to enhance learning
Figure 2.6: Factors that influence teachers’ assessment practices
Figure 2.7: New Zealand’s National Education Guidelines
Figure 3.1: A qualitative process of data analysis in case study research
Figure 4.1: Characteristics of the case study schools
Figure 4.2: Characteristics of the participant teachers
Figure 4.3: Participant teachers’ pseudonyms and school context
Figure 4.4: Preliminary thoughts and coding
Figure 4.5: A matrix for generating theme-based assertions from merged case findings
Figure 5.1: A multi-levelled assessment from school A
Figure 5.2: Types of formal assessment tasks used by the participant schools in 2009
Figure 5.3: Feedback comments written on a student’s formal assessment task by Alex
Figure 5.4: Feedback on a student’s formal assessment task at school D
Figure 5.5: Assessing knowledge related to a specific social studies AO at school A
Figure 5.6: A formal assessment task to assess students’ ability to explore and analyse values at school B
Figure 5.7: Teachers’ views on the main purposes of their year 9 and 10 formal assessment programme
Figure 5.8: How the social studies CAT grades at school A align with the school’s nine-tiered assessment system
Figure 5.9: Progress reported in 2009 towards aligning year 9 and 10 social studies programmes with the NZC.
## Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>Achievement Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARG</td>
<td>Assessment Reform Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Achievement Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCUSS</td>
<td>Building Conceptual Understandings in Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BES</td>
<td>Effective pedagogy in social sciences / Tikanga a iwi. Best evidence synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Achieved with Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERO</td>
<td>Education Review Office</td>
</tr>
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<td>Exemplars</td>
<td>NZ Curriculum Exemplars for Social Studies</td>
</tr>
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<td>HoD</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>KMOFAP</td>
<td>King’s-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Achieved with Merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Not Achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAGs</td>
<td>National Administration Guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCEA</td>
<td>National Certificate in Educational Achievement</td>
</tr>
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<td>NEGs</td>
<td>National Education Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEMP</td>
<td>National Education Monitoring Project</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>NZC</td>
<td>New Zealand Curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>Portable Document Files</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>Standards-based assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMART</td>
<td>Smart, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-related</td>
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<td>SocCon</td>
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<td>TKI</td>
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