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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

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## **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.



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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

A	Achieved
AO	Achievement Objective
ARG	Assessment Reform Group
AS	Achievement Standard
<i>BCUSS</i>	<i>Building Conceptual Understandings in Social Studies</i>
<i>BES</i>	<i>Effective pedagogy in social sciences / Tikanga a iwi. Best evidence synthesis</i>
E	Achieved with Excellence
ERO	Education Review Office
<i>Exemplars</i>	<i>NZ Curriculum Exemplars for Social Studies</i>
<i>Handbook</i>	<i>Social studies forms 3 and 4: A handbook for teachers.</i>
HoD	Head of Department
KMOFAP	King's-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project
M	Achieved with Merit
MOE	Ministry of Education
NA	Not Achieved
NAGs	National Administration Guidelines
NCEA	National Certificate in Educational Achievement
NEGs	National Education Goals
NEMP	National Education Monitoring Project
NZ	New Zealand
<i>NZC</i>	<i>New Zealand Curriculum</i>
PD	Professional Development
PDF	Portable Document Files
SBA	Standards-based assessment
SMART	Smart, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-related
SocCon	Biennial combined Social Sciences Conference
<i>SSiNZC</i>	<i>Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum</i>
TKI	Te Kete Ipurangi
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

*"Assessment that is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool we have for raising standards and empowering lifelong learning"*  
(Assessment Reform Group [ARG] 1999, p. 2).

### 1.1 Introduction

Assessment that acknowledges the diverse social, cultural, and academic needs of learners, as well as the situated nature of learning, has enormous potential to not only scaffold effective learning, but also to generate positive outcomes for students in social studies (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Gipps, 2002; Moss, 2008). This type of assessment often leads to better outcomes for students because formal assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the teaching and learning programme. This means that the assessment information that is generated by these tasks is used by teachers and students to inform subsequent teaching and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Crooks, 1988; Harlen, 2007). The active, dynamic, and socially responsive nature of these assessment processes are, not only thought to align with sociocultural principles of learning, but have also been shown to be central to raising student achievement (Gipps, 1999; James, 2006). Assessment, from this perspective, is therefore said to be 'assessment for learning' (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

In the past, assessment was considered to be a summative endpoint to learning that was often disconnected from the teaching programme. The contemporary views of assessment outlined above, give some indication of the changes in conceptions of the interplay between learning and assessment that have occurred over the last 30 years. Contemporary perspectives of assessment now consider assessment to be a critical and integral part of effective learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Harlen, 2007; James, 2006).

New Zealand's [NZ] outcomes-based curriculum stipulates that "the primary purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching" (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 39). If teachers are to embrace this national policy they need to engage in a range of robust learning-oriented assessment practices that can accurately capture students' achievements and inform the next steps in their learning. Teachers at all levels of schooling therefore need to understand how to foster an 'assessment for learning' philosophy, in both their formal and informal assessment practices.

While it is mandatory in NZ to teach social studies to the end of year 10, there is a paucity of research into teachers' pedagogy and assessment practices in this subject, particularly in years 9 and 10. This lack of NZ-based empirical research on teaching and assessment practices in secondary school social studies has consequently meant that most of the judgements and decisions that have been made about the social sciences learning area have been based on: (i) research conducted in pre-secondary school contexts, and (ii) general research on teaching, learning, and assessment. While this may not initially appear to be of concern, social studies in a pre-secondary context is often taught in an integrated manner by generalist teachers. Assessment practices and students' outcomes in this context might therefore be very different to those in years 9 and 10 where social studies is generally taught as a stand-alone subject by specialist teachers (Crooks, 2002; ERO, 2007b; McGee et al., 2003).

This thesis, therefore, seeks to provide some descriptive data on assessment practices in a range of NZ year 9 and 10 social studies courses by investigating how five classroom teachers were formally assessing learning in social studies in 2009<sup>1</sup>. This chapter outlines the rationale, aims, and context of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis formal assessment relates to assessment tasks that are used to measure students' learning at particular points in time where the results are recorded and used to report students' achievements.

## 1.2 Rationale for this study

My interest in looking at assessment practices in social studies stems initially from many years of teaching social studies related courses, first as a secondary school teacher and more recently as a tertiary educator in a University College of Education. It was, however, my facilitation and professional leadership roles during the Ministry of Education's [MOE] Social Studies Exemplar Project in 2003 and the Beacon Schools' Project in 2004 that really ignited my interest in assessment in social studies. Through these projects I began to realise the strong influence that assessment can have on both teaching and learning. Consequently, I started to investigate what was really known about: (i) student achievement in social studies in years 9 and 10, (ii) professional guidance that teachers of year 9 and 10 students have received since the introduction of the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum [SSiNZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997), and (iii) how learning in social studies at this level is formally assessed.

As stated previously, social studies in NZ is usually taught as an integrated subject<sup>2</sup> to the end of year 8. From year 9 onwards, it is more often taught as a stand-alone subject by teachers who have usually completed some tertiary level social sciences papers. The National Education Monitoring Project [NEMP] and the Education Review Office [ERO] provide detailed information to the education community about student achievement and teachers' practice in social studies at years 4 and 8 (ERO, 2006; Flockton & Crooks, 2002). However, apart from brief mentions in the *Curriculum Stocktake: National School Sampling Study* (McGee et al., 2003) and in ten *NZ Curriculum Exemplars for Social Studies [Exemplars]* (Ministry of Education, 2004), there has been limited specific research into, or evidenced-based information about, teaching and assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10. Given the differences between pre-secondary and secondary school contexts in NZ, and the

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<sup>2</sup> Social studies is often combined with learning areas like sciences, technology, the arts, and health in pre-secondary contexts and called 'topic'.

types of qualifications traditionally held by teachers in these sectors<sup>3</sup>, it could reasonably be assumed that there might be some variability between these two schooling contexts in how social studies is taught and assessed.

So, even though there is a body of NZ-based research on assessment in social studies in the pre-secondary school context, there is a paucity of research on assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10. A key motivation for this study is to collect rich descriptive data on current assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10, to provide some evidenced-based insight into contemporary assessment practices in social studies at this level. The aim being to generate some legitimate, and theoretically grounded, propositions about whether assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10 align with: (i) contemporary perspectives of 'assessment for learning', (ii) NZ's national assessment policies, and (iii) findings from the international research literature and previous pre-secondary level social studies research in NZ.

### **1.3 The research aims**

This research aims to explore how secondary school teachers formally measure learning in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses and what they do with the assessment information they collect. The questions that have guided the inquiry are:

- *What approaches do teachers use to formally assess learning in year 9 and 10 social studies?*
- *What aspects of social studies and the wider New Zealand curriculum do teachers formally assess?*
- *How do teachers' formal assessment practices in social studies align with the principles of 'assessment for learning'?*
- *What factors influence teachers' abilities to engage in effective assessment practices?*

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<sup>3</sup> NZ trained pre-secondary teachers have traditionally held general education degrees like a Bachelor of Education while most secondary school teachers tend to hold a graduate diploma in teaching in addition to a bachelors degree with a major in a schooling related subject.

As stated in section 1.2, the intention is that this research will advance the education community's knowledge of assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10, and that it might potentially reveal assessment philosophies and practices that can facilitate effective learning in social studies. This research also seeks to provide some insight into how current assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10 align with contemporary theories on assessment, the Ministry of Education's (MOE) 'assessment for learning' philosophy, and the conclusions drawn from previous social studies research.

#### **1.4 The nature of this research**

An exploratory multiple case study approach was selected as it provides a way of gathering rich descriptive data of authentic practice in a range of secondary schools. As the focus of the research is to gain insight into assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies courses, rather than practice at a particular school, a multiple case approach allows for potential variability in practice between schools and some inter-school comparisons. Careful analysis of multiple teachers' perspectives on assessment and their assessment practices enhances the potential for gaining an in-depth understanding of the focus phenomenon. It also highlights some of the challenges that teachers face in constructing and implementing effective programmes of assessment in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009).

#### **1.5 The research context**

Using the principles of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), five state integrated secondary schools in NZ were confirmed as research sites. Each of these schools indicated via a consent form that they had an experienced social studies teacher on their staff, who was willing to be interviewed on at least two occasions about their assessment practices in years 9 and 10. The interview data was triangulated by analysing each school's: (i) formal assessment programme for year 9 and 10 social studies, (ii) recording and reporting systems, and (iii) general assessment policies and procedures. It must be noted that at the time of this research, teachers in NZ were in the process of reviewing and updating their teaching and assessment programmes

to meet the requirements outlined in a new national curriculum document, the *New Zealand Curriculum [NZC]* (Ministry of Education, 2007b). The *NZC* which was due to be mandated in 2010.

## **1.6 The structure of the thesis**

Chapter one has provided an overview of the research. Chapter two reviews the literature on assessment and learning, with particular attention given to research on assessment in social studies in a NZ context. Chapter three outlines the case study methodology that has underpinned the research process, while chapter four describes the actual methods that were used to collect the data. Key findings from the research are presented in chapter five, and a discussion of these results in relation to key features of effective assessment is found in chapter six. The thesis ends with some final conclusions, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research in chapter seven.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

*"Some assessment practices are very much less effective than others in promoting the kinds of learning outcomes that are needed by young people today and in the future."  
(James, 2006, p. 49)*

### 2.1 Introduction

Extensive research has shown that assessment is a critical component of effective teaching and learning that when implemented well can lead to better outcomes for students by improving teachers' teaching and students' learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, 1998b; Crooks, 1988; Killen, 2003; Wragg, 2001). Assessment has not always been so highly regarded (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Sadler, 1989), as it has at times been described as "a Cinderella aspect of teaching - neglected, poorly understood and often despised by teachers" (Brooks, 2001, p. 2). This chapter seeks to examine what assessment in an educational context relates to, what teachers' perceptions of its purpose are, and how views towards assessment have changed over the last 30 years. It outlines some agreed characteristics of effective assessment and discusses ways that teachers can use assessment to aid learning. It then looks at factors that influence teachers' assessment practices and the guidance that New Zealand [NZ] teachers have received about how to construct and implement effective programmes of formal assessment, particularly in social studies. It ends by examining what is already known about teachers' assessment practices in social studies in NZ with a particular focus on years 9 and 10.

### 2.2 Conceptions of assessment

Assessment in education relates to the formal and informal processes that teachers use to compile information about students' learning and achievements to make

informed judgements about what students think, know, and can do (Earl, 2003; Harlen, 2006a, 2007). Assessment involves formal assessment tasks that are used to judge students' learning at a particular point in time, such as tests and research projects, through to informal assessment processes, like teacher observations (Harlen, 2005; Miller, Linn, & Gronlund, 2009). There is international agreement that assessment tasks that are constructively aligned with the curriculum and teaching and learning programmes generate the best outcomes for students. This is because alignment has been proven to scaffold rich and meaningful learning (Biggs, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Brooks, 2001).

An extensive body of research has found that teachers, in general, believe that formal assessment tasks can serve three key purposes in education: (i) to improve learning and teaching, (ii) to make students accountable, and (iii) to make schools and teachers accountable (Brown, 2004; Brown, Irving, & Keegan, 2008; Crooks, 2002; Education Review Office [ERO] 2007b; Harlen, 2007; Harris et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2009). Brown's survey of teachers' conceptions of assessment (2004), however, reported that some teachers hold a fourth conception which is that assessment is irrelevant to students' learning.

Assessment that takes place for accountability purposes has often been considered to be summative in nature as it generally takes place at the end of a sequence of learning. It usually involves students completing a test or some form of non-test activity to measure and report their achievements at that particular point in time (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chapman & King, 2005; Harlen, 2006b, 2007; Sadler, 1989). This type of formal summative assessment is therefore considered to be an assessment of learning (Assessment Reform Group [ARG], 1999; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Harlen, 2007). In contrast, observations or judgements that teachers make at any point in their interactions with students, whether based on a formal assessment event or an in-class observation, are considered to be formative in nature—especially when teachers and students use the information to inform the next steps in the learning sequence. While there has been some debate over the exact definition of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998b), in this thesis it is defined as any

assessment—formal or informal—that is used by teachers and students to improve learning [henceforth called ‘assessment for learning’] (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Earl, 2003; Gipps, 1994; James, 2006).

Historically summative and formative assessment have often been considered diametrically opposite forms of assessment, however there is a rapidly expanding body of research that suggests that teachers and students are now beginning to use school-based summative assessment points to formatively guide learning and teaching (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Harlen, 2006a). Black *et al.* (2003), for example, found that several of the mathematics, science, and English teachers from six schools in the King’s-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project [KMOFAP]—who were being supported (by assessment experts) to develop assessment innovations that would foster learning—began to use summative assessment points to scaffold learning through: (i) teaching students about the assessment process by co-constructing test questions and marking criteria together, and (ii) promoting peer-assessment through getting students to mark and analyse each other’s work using clearly defined marking criteria (Harlen, 2005; Harrison, 2005; Lee & Wiliam, 2005). Research like KMOFAP puts forward a strong case that it is the purpose of the assessment task and what teachers do with the information they gather, that makes the assessment summative or formative, rather than the task itself (Absolum et al., 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Harlen, 2006a). The next section discusses how people’s perspectives on the purpose of assessment have evolved and changed.

### **2.3 Changing views on assessment and learning**

Summative assessment was originally aligned with the behaviourist view of learning that dominated education until the 1980s. Under the behaviourist paradigm the purpose of any summative assessment task was to ascertain how much knowledge the expert teacher had transmitted to the ‘empty vessel’ of a student (James, 2006). Students had to sit ‘recall of knowledge’ tests under strictly controlled conditions to

demonstrate the knowledge and skills they had retained (Earl, 2003; Harlen, 2005, 2007; Zevin, 2007). Passing or failing percentage marks were then awarded through privately administered marking systems. Students' accountability for poor results was maximised, and teachers' accountability was minimised, as students and parents were usually not given access to the marked transcripts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 1996; Delandshere, 2002; James, 2006). Success was viewed as attaining a high grade, rather than acknowledging any specific knowledge that had been developed (Black 2000). While summative 'recall of knowledge' testing dominated teachers' assessment practices during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changing views on how people learn and a growing awareness of how assessment could influence students' motivation, self efficacy and performance, saw a shift in how learning was formally assessed in the later part of the century (Alexander, 2006; James, 2006; Mayer, 1998, 2003).

Classroom-based research on learning during the 1980s and 1990s indicated that learning was an active process that was influenced by the social contexts in which it was operating. Learning was found to be more effective when students actively co-constructed knowledge in supportive communities of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mayer, 1998, 2003; Schunk, 2004). The constructivist and sociocultural theories that evolved out of this research and the extensive reviews of research on classroom-based assessment practices by Natriello<sup>4</sup> (1987), Crooks (1988), and Black and Wiliam (1998), also changed the way that people viewed assessment and its role in learning (Harlen, 2007; James, 2006). Sadler (1989), Crooks, Natriello, and Black and Wiliam all suggested that students' learning could be positively influenced by assessment if teachers and students acted on the information that was gathered. These researchers also reported that the personal reflections and social interactions involved in self- and peer-assessment were particularly effective in scaffolding deeper levels of understanding and higher levels of achievement. The results of this research

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<sup>4</sup> Natriello, like many other American researchers, uses the term evaluation rather than assessment when referring to the process of measuring student achievement. Evaluation can also mean the reflective appraisal that educators and learners do about their assessment tasks, processes, results, and programmes (Blaz, 2008; Harlen, 2007; Miller et al., 2009). It is this second definition of evaluation that will be used in this report as educators in a NZ context would normally consider the formal reviews of teaching, assessment and administration that schools, and groups like the Education Review Office [ERO] do for the Ministry of Education [MOE], to be evaluations.

were disseminated to teachers through research projects like the aforementioned KMOFAP, and a series of 'black box' pamphlets (ARG, 1999; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2000; Black & Wiliam, 1998c). This information has seen many teachers begin to integrate formative assessment practices into their everyday practice, such as, giving students comment only feedback on assessed tasks, (Black & Wiliam, 2006; 2006b; Harlen, 2007; Harrison, 2005; James, 2006; Lee & Wiliam, 2005; OECD, 2005).

Perceptions of assessment and its role in learning have therefore changed considerably over the last 30 years. Teachers have gone from perceiving assessment as a private endpoint action used to determine how much knowledge students have retained, to considering assessment as also having a learning-oriented function where assessment information is openly reported and used to inform subsequent learning and teaching (Absolum et al., 2009; Harlen, 2007; James, 2006). It is therefore now increasingly being recognised that assessment tasks that are used to formally assess learning [henceforth called formal assessment tasks] can serve a dual purpose. Information that is used for accountability purposes is considered summative, while information that is used to inform the next steps in the learning sequence is considered formative (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Gipps, 1994; Harlen, 2005, 2006b, 2007; Harris et al., 2008; James, 2006). Teachers' personal conceptions of learning therefore influence their conceptions of, and approaches to, assessment.

Gipps (2002) has proposed that educators who hold a sociocultural view of learning view assessment as both a process and a product. There appears to be general support for Gipps' proposal as a body of contemporary literature purports that assessment that aligns with sociocultural theories of learning is a multifaceted dynamic process that accounts for the social and cultural contexts in which it is implemented (Delandshere, 2002; Gipps, 1999, 2002; Moss, 2008).

## 2.4 Principles of effective assessment

A significant amount of research has focused on ascertaining what effective assessment practice involves. The research has suggested that there are four key principles which underpin effective assessment. They are that assessment is: (i) constructively aligned with the curriculum, teaching and learning, (ii) methodologically varied and valid, (iii) learning-oriented, and (iv) supported by clearly articulated criteria for success (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Biggs, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Brown et al., 2008; Earl, 2003; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Harlen, 2007; James, 2006; Miller et al., 2009). These philosophical principles are often exhibited in teachers' assessment practices through the eight characteristics of effective assessment shown in Figure 2.1. The descriptions in column two describe the practical manifestations of these characteristics and column three outlines some of the reflective questions that teachers have been found to ask when constructing effective programmes of assessment.

The characteristics of, and the principles which underpin, effective assessment need to be viewed as an interconnected whole. Clearly defined and measurable learning outcomes that are constructively aligned with curriculum goals and teaching and learning programmes mean teachers can potentially design assessment tasks that: (i) are relevant, (ii) assess things of value, (iii) challenge students' thinking, and (iv) reinforce what they have learnt (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Brown et al., 2008; Earl, 2003; Grant & Salinas, 2008). This constructive alignment helps to improve the validity of any assessment and increases the chances of students viewing assessment as a non-threatening, integral part of their learning programme (Earl, 2003; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009). Assessment that is manageable for students and teachers, varied in application and type, and reliable more accurately captures and conveys students' achievements (ARG, 1999; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Harlen, 2007). Feedback that is task- or process-oriented enhances learning, as it "empowers students to ask reflective questions and consider a range of strategies for learning" (Earl, 2003, p. 25). Further, robust portfolios provide evidence of progress throughout the year by reporting students' strengths, weaknesses, achievements, and personal reflections, as well as their next step learning goals (Earl, 2003).

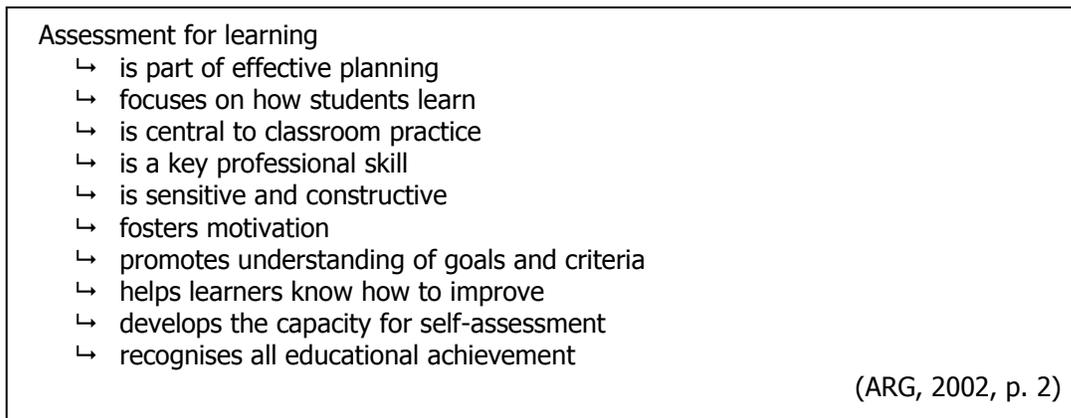
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Reflective planning questions for teachers</b>
Clearly defined outcomes of learning	Simple and more complex intended outcomes of the learning expressed in measurable statements of expected performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of knowledge, understanding, skills or performance do I expect my students to demonstrate?</li> <li>• How will I measure these?</li> </ul>
Constructively aligned	Assessment tasks reflect what has been taught and align with learning outcomes that have been derived from the curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there clear alignment between this assessment task and what <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I taught my students?</li> <li>○ I wanted them to learn?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Varied	A variety of assessment procedures are used to assess learning like tests, essays, investigations and problem solving tasks. Multiple assessment opportunities are the rule rather than the exception.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type(s) of assessment task(s) could I use to assess this learning?</li> <li>• Have I given students multiple opportunities to demonstrate this learning?</li> <li>• Have I catered for the specific needs of students in my class?</li> </ul>
Valid and Fair	The sample of learning that is selected to be assessed provides accurate information about students' mastery of the intended learning. The assessment programme caters for students' diverse learning needs and minimises bias.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will this assessment task allow me to make accurate judgements about what I wanted my students to learn?</li> <li>• Have I considered the specific needs of students in my class in designing this task?</li> </ul>
Clearly defined success criteria	Clearly defined performance criteria are constructed for each intended learning outcome so teachers and students have a good sense of the expected level of performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there clear demarcation between the various levels of achievement in my marking rubric?</li> <li>• Will students understand what I expect them to do?</li> </ul>
Reliable	Assessment tasks aimed at assessing the same learning generate very similar results. There is consistency between the judgements of all teachers who administer the same assessment task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has this assessment task generated the types of results I expected?</li> <li>• Are my judgements the same as my colleagues?</li> </ul>
Task-oriented feedback	Feedback includes specific comments about the quality of the work, directions on how students can improve future performances, and sets next step learning goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have I clearly communicated the strengths and weaknesses of this work and given specific advice on how this student can improve their future performances?</li> </ul>
Transparent recording and reporting systems	Assessment records, such as portfolios and reports transparently communicate student achievement in relation to the intended learning outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I transparently communicate information about my students' achievements? Does a letter grade provide the level of detail that I need?</li> </ul>

(adapted from Brown et al., 2008; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Miller et al., 2009)

**Figure 2.1: Characteristics of effective assessment.**

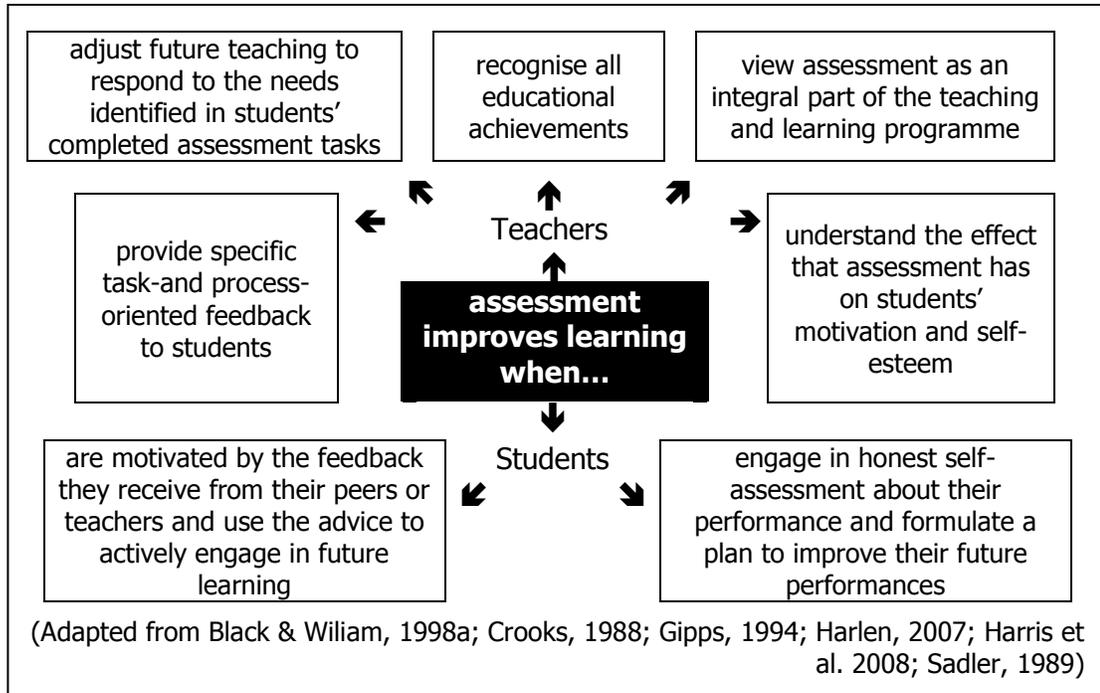
## 'Assessment for learning'

One of the key principles of effective assessment described above is that it should be learning-oriented. The Assessment Reform Group [ARG] (2002) has suggested that as "assessment for learning is one of the most powerful ways of improving learning and raising standards" (p. 3), educators need to establish some 'assessment for learning' principles that can be translated into practice. The ARG has formulated ten 'assessment for learning' principles which are outlined in Figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2: The Assessment Reform Group's 'assessment for learning' principles.**

The ARG's 'assessment for learning' principles clearly embody the aforementioned characteristics and principles of effective assessment. They also align with sociocultural theories of learning as they acknowledge: (i) the dynamic and interactive nature of the relationship between assessment and learning, (ii) a variety of social and cultural influences, and (iii) the active role that teachers and students play in constructing knowledge (Gipps, 1999, 2002; Moss, 2008). When the ARG's principles are reviewed in relation to assessment in a schooling context, the research identifies several factors that are deemed critical in creating conditions where assessment will improve learning. These factors are shown in Figure 2.3.



**Figure 2.3: Using assessment to improve learning.**

A case study of assessment practices with a class of fifth-graders in the USA (Lampert, 2001) illustrates how teachers can use socioculturally aligned 'assessment for learning' principles to inform their practice. One of the many examples that Lampert (2001) gives is how she used a common error that students had made in a test to create "an opportunity for all students to study the mathematical reasoning" (p. 358) through peer reflections. She placed students into groups and told them to share the reasoning behind the answers they had originally produced. The resulting collaborative social construction led to students resolving misconceptions and developing a greater appreciation for the steps needed to generate the correct answer. Lampert's research and the ideas in Figure 2.3 are consistent with previous research in demonstrating that for assessment to have a positive influence on learning it not only needs to be well planned and seamlessly integrated into the learning process but it also needs to be dynamic, forward looking, and actively driven by teachers and students (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Brooks, 2001; Harrison, 2005; OECD, 2005; Sadler, 1989).

Many assessment practices do, however, have the potential to hinder learning. Teaching to the test, emphasizing grades over learning, comparing students with one another, giving superficial ego-oriented feedback and failing to understand students' specific needs have all been shown to negatively affect students' motivation, self-efficacy and performance (ARG, 1999; Black & Wiliam, 2006; Brookhart & Durkin, 2003; Harlen, 2005; James, 2006). Harlen (2006b) goes as far as stating that poor assessment practices have more power to destroy motivation than any other tool.

The research reported in this section indicates that for assessment to be effective it has to be constructively aligned, methodologically valid, clearly defined, reliable, learning-oriented, and transparently administered. It also suggests that teachers who: (i) assess learning in a conscious and well planned manner that caters for students' diverse learning needs, (ii) clearly communicate the criteria for success, and (iii) empower students to become actively engaged in their learning, tend to develop assessment programmes that not only align with sociocultural theories of learning, but aid learning too.

## **2.5 Formal assessment tasks**

Many researchers have found that students' diverse social, cultural, and individual learning needs can be catered for by using a varied range of formal assessment tasks (Brooks, 2001; Earl, 2003; Harlen, 2006b, 2007; James, 2006). The research also reports that allowing students multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways helps to increase the validity and reliability of teachers' judgements (Black & Wiliam, 2006; ERO, 2007b; Ministry of Education, 1994; Zevin, 2007). Moss (2008) suggests that teachers, who base their formal judgements about students' learning on a combination of their ongoing informal judgements, and process- and product-based evidence gained from multiple formal assessment events, are engaged in assessment practices that align with sociocultural theory. Delandshere (2002) supports this view by additionally suggesting that inquiry-based approaches to assessment espouse sociocultural theory.

The type of assessment tasks that teachers select to use, and the way they present and treat tasks, not only affect how students approach the task, but are critical in determining what information teachers discover about their students' learning (Earl, 2003; Eley & Caygill, 2001; Harlen, 2007). For example, an extensive year long experimental study of two grade 9 social studies classes in Canada compared a 'culturally responsive' teaching approach used in one class [experimental class] with 'traditional' teaching used in another class [control class] (Kanu, 2002). The teacher of the experimental class used a diverse set of culturally inclusive teaching strategies—sharing circles, Native American guest speakers, and group tasks—as well as a range of assessment tools (journals, portfolios, performance-based presentations, artifacts, and traditional-style tests). The research found that students in the experimental class demonstrated higher levels of thinking and better conceptual understanding than the control class. The focus on acknowledging the diverse social and cultural needs of students in the experimental class, in both the way the material was taught and assessed, led to better outcomes for students.

Research such as Kanu's (2002) study also suggest that robust and effective assessment programmes contain a mixture of information-based, perception-based and performance-based tasks and tests, as they each have the potential to examine different aspects of students' learning. Traditional 'recall of knowledge' questions give teachers insight into students' ability to recall facts (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; James, 2006; Wragg, 2001). Perception- and resource-based questions provide more detailed information about students' reflective and affective<sup>5</sup> attitudes towards controversial issues, and their reasoning and critical thinking skills too. Performance-based tasks help students to demonstrate mastery of important skills and their ability to create significant products over extended periods of time (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Zevin, 2007). A study of an American teacher's assessment practices in four high school social studies courses, for example, describes how using performance-based assessment tasks in social studies positively influenced students' motivation (Brookhart & Durkin, 2003). Performance-based, problem-solving and analysis tasks have also been found to test higher levels of understanding than 'recall of knowledge'

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<sup>5</sup> Values-based

or memory tasks, because teachers can include questions which require students to demonstrate conditional<sup>6</sup> and procedural<sup>7</sup> knowledge, in addition to the declarative<sup>8</sup> knowledge that they have traditionally been required to reveal. Incorporating stems from the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy in assessment instructions has proven to be an effective way of enabling students to demonstrate deeper levels of understanding, as well as their conditional and procedural knowledge (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Alexander, 2006; Alton-Lee, 2003; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Chapman & King, 2005; Harlen, 2005; James, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2004; Nitko & Brookhart, 2011; Schunk, 2004; Wragg, 2001; Zevin, 2007).

There has, however, been some debate in countries like the USA over the validity, reliability, and manageability of formal assessment tasks that have been constructed by classroom teachers to make formal judgements about students' learning [henceforth called teacher-made assessment tasks] (Gronlund & Waugh, 2009). The validity of these types of assessment tasks has been questioned as supporters of externally imposed and nationally controlled assessment<sup>9</sup> feel that there is more risk of misalignment between the curriculum, the learning intentions and the assessment activities when teachers create their own assessment tasks (James, 2006; Moss, 2008). Concerns have also been raised over the consistency of the judgements that different schools and teachers make about students' achievements when the judgements are based on different assessment activities. Results from teacher-made assessment tasks are therefore often considered to be more subjective and open to bias than nationally administered tests (with multi-choice type questions), especially when they involve essays or research projects as illustrated in Yildirim's (2004) study and Figure 2.4.

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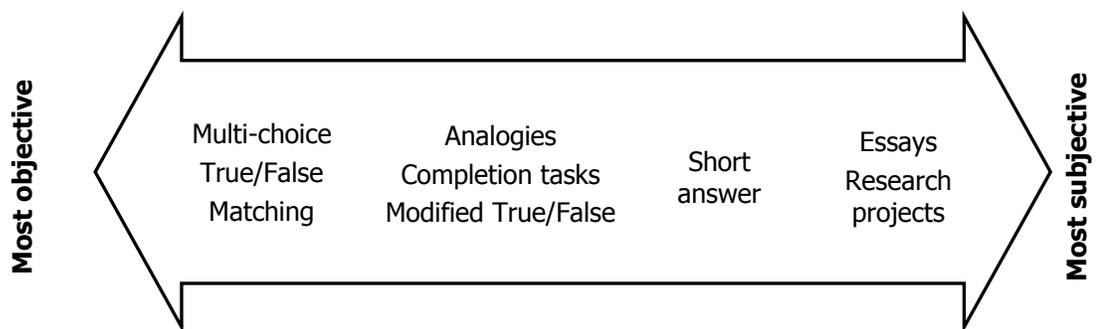
<sup>6</sup> Conditional knowledge (sometimes known as metacognitive knowledge) is where learners know when, how, and where to use stored knowledge (Alexander, 2006; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Procedural knowledge is where learners know how to perform a task (Alexander, 2006; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Schunk, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Declarative knowledge is where learners know specific facts, details, or definitions (Alexander, 2006; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Schunk, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Standard Achievement Tests in the USA and Key Stage tests in the UK (Crooks, 2002; Harlen, 2007).

Yildirim (2004) studied assessment practices in 81 Turkish schools. She found that although teachers were using a variety of different tasks to assess learning in social studies, there was a tendency for most teachers to use short answer tests more often than any other type of assessment task. This was because the Turkish school inspectors constantly advised teachers to use quantifiable forms of assessment that they considered to be more reliable. Yildirim (2004) stated that this requirement caused teachers whose practice was informed by sociocultural principles of learning and who therefore valued more subjective forms of assessment, a lot of personal angst.



(Adapted from Alexander, 2006, p. 327)

**Figure 2.4: Level of subjectivity of a range of assessment tasks**

Concerns have also been raised about the manageability of marking more subjective forms of assessment tasks, like essays, as marking can be more time consuming and difficult than marking more objective multi-choice assessment tasks. Proponents of using multiple modes of assessment counter these arguments by stating that relying solely on state-wide multi-choice testing reduces the reliability of the judgements made about students' learning as only a narrow part of the delivered curriculum can be examined in this way (James, 2006). There is also evidence that state-wide testing can lead to teachers delivering a limited teaching programme that focuses on trivial content which may fail to reflect the true intent of the curriculum (Grant & Salinas, 2008; Harlen, 2007; James, 2006). Delandshere (2002) argues that many state-wide assessment systems in the USA appear to be more aligned with behaviourist theories of learning (rather than sociocultural theories) because they aim to sort and rank students rather than fostering the 'assessment for learning' philosophies that are now widely accepted as scaffolding higher levels of achievement.

The research that has been reviewed in this section suggests that teachers who use a variety of assessment tasks over an extended period of time, with questions that assess more complex levels of knowledge and skills, will potentially gain a more accurate picture of their students' true capabilities. The next section outlines the processes that teachers use to judge and report back on students' learning and levels of achievement.

## **2.6 Feedback systems**

Feedback refers to marks, grades, and the written and verbal comments that students receive. Extensive research has found that feedback has one of the most powerful effects on students' learning, motivation, self-efficacy, and achievement. This effect can be both positive and negative (Alexander, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Harris et al., 2008; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Peterson & Irving, 2007; Torrance, 2007). For example, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's LEARN project conducted interviews with a wide range of students from early primary to sixth form in the UK in 1999 and found that:

- students receive feedback in a variety of forms,
- students are more likely to action feedback that gives them specific guidance,
- students like verbal feedback because they feel they learn more,
- unexplained grading systems and 'tick and flick' marking often confuse students,
- feedback does affect students' motivation and self-esteem.

(Weeden, Winter, & Broadfoot, 2002).

These findings are consistent with previously cited research conducted by Sadler (1989) and Black and Wiliam (1998a), and some recent NZ-based research (Harris et al., 2008; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Peterson & Irving, 2007).

### 2.6.1 Grading paradigms

During much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century countries like England, Wales, the USA, and NZ used norm-referenced grading which involved assigning each student's work a percentage grade and then ranking their performance against a wider student cohort (Crooks, 2002). Students' grades and their positions within the cohort were recorded and formally reported to parents. Often in high-stakes situations, only a certain percentage of students could be awarded the top grades. In this situation scaling was used to control the number of students in each grade category. Many educational researchers have criticized the value of norm-referenced grading, as grading for ranking purposes has been found to have no relevance to learning and unexplained grades can leave students feeling helpless (Crooks, 2002; Earl, 2003; Harlen, 2007; Sadler, 1989).

During the 1980s and 1990s curriculum reforms in England, Wales, and NZ, combined with the growing awareness of the impact that assessment has on learning, resulted in these countries adopting outcomes-based curricula and standards-based grading. Standards-based grading judges students' work against pre-determined criteria which outline various levels of performance that students are expected to reach. Standards-based assessment [SBA] is thought to provide clearer information about students' skills and abilities as grade descriptors such as: Not Achieved [NA], Achieved [A], Achieved with Merit [M], and Achieved with Excellence [E], which are used in NZ's national credentialing system—the National Certificate of Educational Achievement [NCEA]—communicate the degree to which a student has met the specified criteria. SBA is also said to support a sociocultural perspective of learning as criteria can be developed to include judgements about social and cultural aspects of learning (Gipps, 2002; Moss, 2008). For example, the *NZ Curriculum Exemplars for Social Studies [Exemplars]* (Ministry of Education, 2004) suggest that the 'personal and social significance' of learning can be assessed. It is, however, important to note that while there are many positive benefits for learning in using SBA, writing clear and unambiguous descriptions of a range of achievement levels can be difficult and time consuming (Alison, 2007; Peddie, 1992). James also cautions that using 'scoring rubrics' to assign students' record of learning portfolios percentage grades is "out of

alignment with a socio-cultural perspective” (2006, p. 58) when the purpose is to rank students against their peers.

In NZ, SBA was first introduced into some internally assessed year 12 courses, (e.g., Geography) in the late 1980s. The release of *Social Studies Forms 3 and 4: A Handbook for Teachers [Handbook]* (Ministry of Education, 1991) saw many schools move to using SBA in years 9 and 10<sup>10</sup> social studies. The introduction of a new national credentialing system—the National Certificate of Educational Achievement [NCEA]—in 2002 then led to all learning areas adopting SBA for credentialing purposes. Most of the learning in years 11-13 is now measured against nationally prescribed standards where students’ achievements are formally reported against a four-tiered scale of criteria as NA, A, M or E (Aitken, 2005a; Crooks, 2002; Rawlins, 2010; Taylor, 2008).

While assigning grades is a contentious aspect of measurement theory, SBA can be a useful, valid, and reliable way of grading students’ work. If the people who write SBA criteria have a clear understanding of the intended outcomes of the learning, and if teachers holistically apply the criteria when judging students’ work, and if students understand why they have achieved a certain grade, then SBA has the potential to not only accurately capture students’ achievements but also aid their learning and motivation (Biggs, 2003; Earl, 2003; Harlen, 2006a).

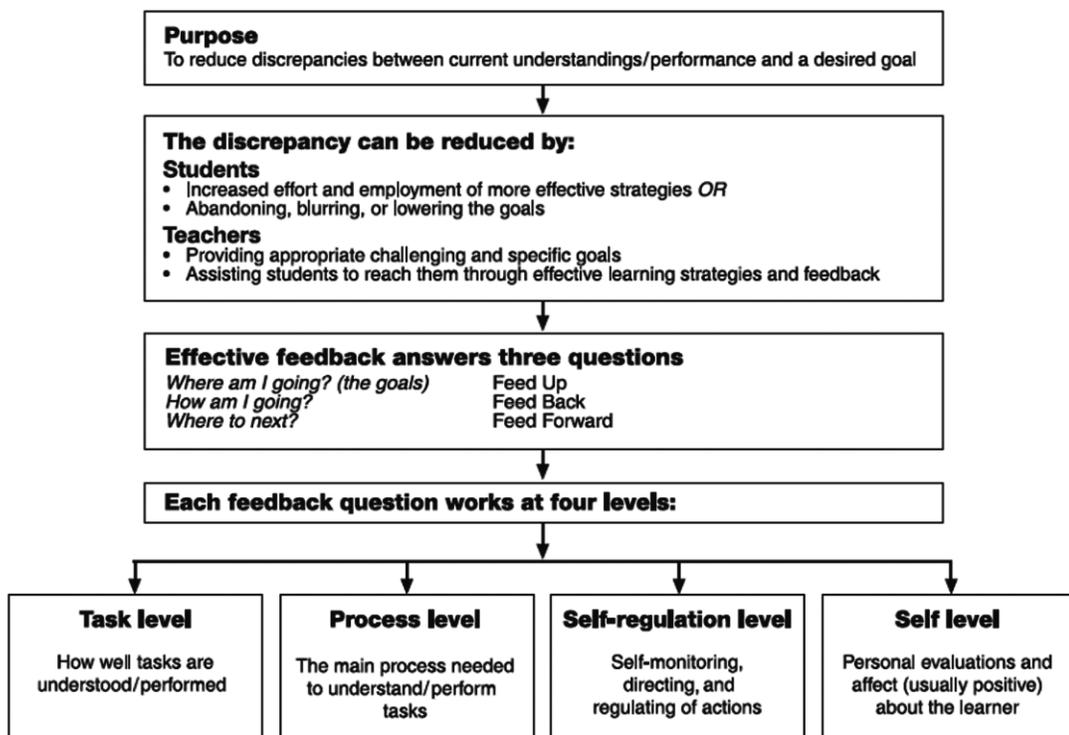
## 2.6.2 Teachers’ Comments

An increasing body of research on the influence that assessment has on learning and an increasing awareness of the power of feedback, has also led to a rise in research into the nature and effectiveness of written and oral feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Torrance, 2007). Hattie and Timperley (2007) have devised a model, Figure 2.5, to show how feedback can enhance learning. They have suggested that “the main purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings/performance and a desired goal” (p. 87). Consistent with the

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<sup>10</sup> Form 3 = Year 9 and Form 4 = Year 10

'assessment for learning' principles reported in section 2.4, Hattie & Timperley (2007) also reported that non-specific ego-oriented comments like "good try" and "well done" actually have limited impact on students' future learning. Of the other types of feedback comments that students receive, there is general agreement that clear specific self-regulatory<sup>11</sup> and task-oriented comments have the greatest potential to positively influence future learning (Alexander, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Torrance, 2007). The second box in Hattie & Timperley's model signals that no matter what type of feedback is given, it is only effective when students and teachers actually act on the information that is generated.



(Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 87)

**Figure2.5: A model of feedback to enhance learning**

The research reported in this section indicates that if feedback is to have a positive influence on learning then it needs to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-related) (Weeden et al., 2002). Assessment objectives and marking criteria need to be clearly communicated to students in language that is

<sup>11</sup> Self-regulatory comments relate to how to monitor, direct, or control actions towards a learning goal. The aim being to foster student autonomy, self-control, self-direction, and self-discipline.

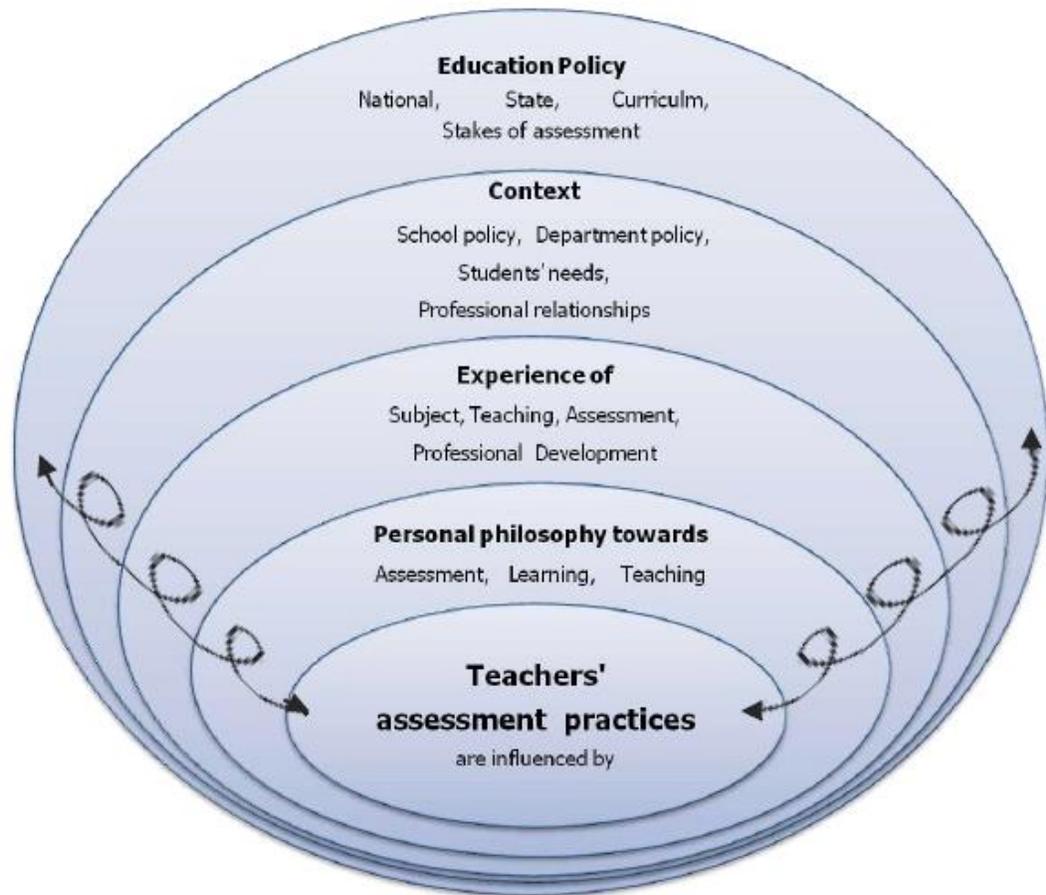
easily understood. Marking needs to be made manageable by spreading deadlines out. 'Tick and flick' marking should only be used for checking the completion of routine work and students should not be constantly overloaded with reminders about things like spelling. Teachers need to identify students' misconceptions and make time to provide constructive self-regulatory, task- and process-oriented feedback so students understand what they need to work on. This information should then be used by teachers to inform ongoing planning and teaching, and by students to set next step learning goals (Clarke, 2005; Weeden et al., 2002).

## **2.7 Factors that influence assessment practices**

While people's perspectives on the purposes of assessment and the theories about what makes assessment effective are important, they are just two components of a much bigger pool of factors that have been shown to influence teachers' assessment practices. Figure 2.6 outlines a range of factors that many educational researchers have found to influence teachers' formal assessment practices (Alison, 2007; Bailey, 2000; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Crooks, 1988; Earl & Katz, 2000; Harlen, 2006b, 2007; Harrison, 2005; James, 2006).

The nested format and spiraling arrows illustrate the interplay that occurs between education policy, the teaching context, teachers' professional experiences and their personal philosophies towards teaching, assessment, and learning. The factors shown in Figure 2.6 can combine in various ways to positively and negatively influence teachers' assessment practices. For example:

- Teachers' epistemological beliefs about how knowledge is constructed can determine whether they see assessment as a process for measuring intelligence or a tool for learning (Harlen, 2007; James, 2006);
- Teachers who are assessment literate, understand how people learn, and have good content knowledge, are more able to constructively align assessment with learning (Alison, 2007; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Earl & Katz, 2000; James, 2006);



**Figure 2.6 Factors that influence teachers' assessment practices**

- Teachers who assume that externally-created assessment tasks represent good assessment practice and use these tasks without critically appraising the construction, or the theory they have been based on, may at times engage in invalid assessment practices. There may also be occasions when tension arises between a teacher's personal teaching philosophy and their actual assessment practice (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Crooks, 1988; Harlen, 2006a);
- The alignment between the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices can be easily upset by a change in an assessment policy (Alison, 2007; Biggs, 2003; Crooks, 1988; Harlen, 2006a). This was evident in a longitudinal study of teachers' experiences during educational reforms in Canada (Earl & Katz, 2000) which found that changes to provincial curriculum and assessment policies caused teachers a lot of angst as they struggled to identify which parts of their teaching and assessment programmes they needed to change,

and how to make these changes, “without compromising their personal and professional integrity” (p. 108).

- A new curriculum can lead to a change in school policy but a teacher’s assessment practices might not alter unless they receive some sustained professional development about how to update their current programme (Alison, 2007; Bailey, 2000; Black, 2003; Black et al., 2003; Harrison, 2005). For example, Black and Wiliam (1998b) found that:

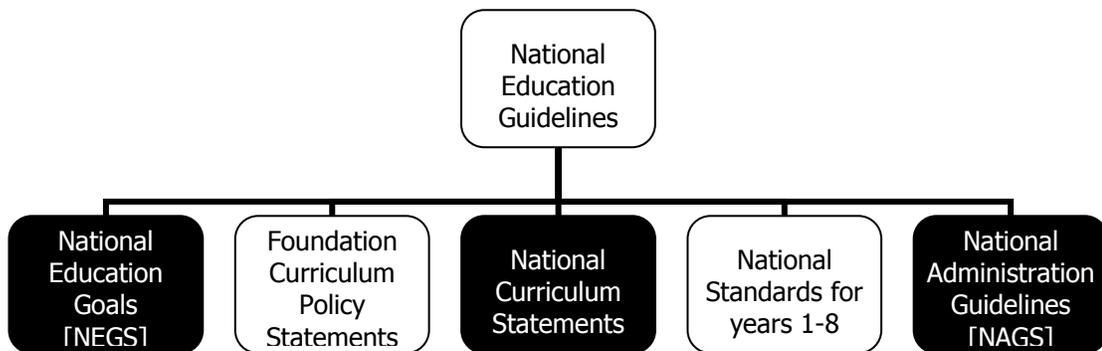
Teachers will not take up ideas that sound attractive, no matter how extensive the research base, if the ideas are presented as general principles that leave the task of translating them into everyday practice entirely up to teachers. Their classroom lives are too busy and too fragile for all but an outstanding few to undertake such work. What teachers need is a variety of living examples of implementation, as practiced by teachers with whom they can identify. (p. 146)

- High-stakes externally controlled assessment programmes can negatively affect classroom learning resulting in teachers feeling obliged to teach to the test. Extensive research in both the UK and the USA has found that when teachers think their performance will be judged by the results their students achieve in a national or state-wide test they often resort to coaching students to pass that particular test, rather than focusing on scaffolding rich and meaningful learning (Biggs, 2003; Black, 2001, 2003; Black & Atkin, 1997; Grant & Salinas, 2008; Harlen, 2005; Hume & Coll, 2009; James, 2006; Torrance, 2007). This causes a negative ‘backwash’ effect (Biggs, 2003) as the high-stakes assessment requirements dictate what teachers teach (Brooks, 2001; Crooks, 1988). Biggs (2003) has, however, suggested that high-stakes assessment also has the potential to have a positive ‘backwash effect’ if the assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the learning programme and if teachers and students can gain access to marked assessment tasks and use them to inform future teaching and learning.

The research indicates that the interplay between the factors in Figure 2.6 is therefore dynamic, as a change in one sector of the diagram can affect other sectors. The influence that these factors have on assessment practices in a subject like social studies will now be discussed in a NZ schooling context.

## 2.8 Education policy in NZ

As teachers' assessment practices are influenced by the contexts in which they work, it is important to start by ascertaining what policies and contextual controls NZ teachers have to operate within. In years 1-10 NZ currently operates a school-based assessment system where most teachers' assessment practices are directly or indirectly influenced by the National Education Guidelines that all state funded schools are required by law to abide by (Carr et al., 2005; Harrison, 2005). These guidelines outline the government's educational priorities which are conveyed to teachers through the five communication channels shown in Figure 2.7.



**Figure 2.7: New Zealand's National Education Guidelines**

The NEGS, the NAGS, and the national curriculum statement boxes are shaded as they most directly influence assessment practices in social studies.

### 2.8.1 The NEGS and the NAGS

Three of the NEGS require schools to engage in some sort of assessment. NEG 6 tells schools to monitor students' performance against clear learning objectives; NEG 7 asks schools to identify students' specific learning needs, while NEG 8 states that students need to be given "access to a nationally and internationally recognised qualifications system". Three of the NAGS also include specific reference to assessment. Clauses a-e of NAG 1 direct schools to use "a range of assessment practices" to gather "good quality assessment information" to identify and address the learning needs of students. NAG 2 requires schools to formally report information about students' achievement and NAG 2A relates to measuring (and reporting)

students' achievements against a set of National Standards in years 1-8 (Brown et al., 2008; Ministry of Education, n.d.).

## 2.8.2 National curriculum statements

National curriculum statements describe levels of knowledge, understanding, and skills that the government wants students to achieve during their schooling years. From 1993-2009 teaching and assessment programmes in NZ were informed by the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework [NZCF]* (Ministry of Education, 1993), the *Assessment Policy to Practice* handbook (Ministry of Education, 1994) and seven national curriculum statements which included the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum [SSINZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997). From 2010 schools have moved to implementing programmes that align with the new *New Zealand Curriculum [NZC]* (Ministry of Education, 2007b). All of these documents have provided guidance on how to assess learning.

The *NZCF* stipulated that NZ schools were to ensure that assessment was an integral part of their teaching and learning programmes by using assessment "to improve students' learning and the quality of the learning programme" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 24). Teachers were advised to use a wide range of assessment procedures and tools (e.g., portfolios), within a SBA model, to gather detailed information about students' learning. Students' personal levels of achievement were to be reported and assessment information used to formulate plans to address specific learning and cultural needs. This policy document also signaled the introduction of national monitoring of year 4 and 8 students to "build up a national picture of students' achievement over time" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 26). This monitoring is now conducted through the National Education Monitoring Project [NEMP] (Flockton & Crooks, 2002).

The 52 paged *Assessment Policy to Practice* handbook (Ministry of Education, 1994) not only reiterated the messages contained in the *NZCF* (Ministry of Education, 1993) but it also provided some comprehensive information about assessment. It defined

key assessment terms, made explicit references to the NEGS and the NAGS, and gave teachers and school administrators specific guidance on how to develop robust assessment policies, which would generate fair, reliable, and valid assessment programmes. This document contained a lot of detail about how assessment could serve different purposes and provided substantial advice on different assessment procedures that teachers could use to assess learning, such as, observations, self- and peer-assessment, conferencing, portfolios, exemplars and tests. It also strongly advised teachers to take a flexible approach to assessment so they could actively cater for the diverse needs of their students.

The statements about assessment in the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) demonstrate clear alignment with the messages in the *NZCF* (Ministry of Education, 1993) and the *Assessment Policy to Practice* handbook (Ministry of Education, 1994). The main purpose of assessment is again stated as being to improve learning, and there is a clear message that teachers need to treat assessment as a dynamic, integrated, and active process. There is also guidance that summative judgements are to be seen as 'of the moment', that "not all aspects of the curriculum need to be formally assessed" (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 41). This document also contains a section on characteristics of effective assessment that strongly align with the characteristics in Figure 2.1.

With regards to assessment in social studies, the only policy document that has provided specific guidance on what teachers need to assess is the *SSiNZC* (Ministry of Education, 1997). This document directed teachers to monitor students' progress in relation to Achievement Objectives [AOs] from five knowledge strands—Social Organisation, Culture and Heritage, Place and Environment, Time, Continuity and Change, and Resources and Economic Activities—and three processes—Inquiry, Values Exploration, and Social Decision Making. It also encouraged teachers to use their professional judgement when deciding which AOs to assess and to include a wide range of assessment activities in their assessment programmes. The *NZC*, which has superseded the *SSiNZC*, does not provide the same level of direction about what aspects of the curriculum to assess, or how teachers should assess learning in

social studies. Several social studies researchers have criticised the hastily constructed and non-prescriptive nature of the *SSiNZC* (Aitken, 2005a, 2005b; Barr, 2005; Cubitt, 2005; Openshaw, 1999; Openshaw, Clark, Hamer, & Waitere-Ang, 2005). They have pointed out that the lack of an agreed purpose for learning in social studies, and the limited guidance on how to assess learning in social studies, have not only created variability in teachers' assessment practices, but can also be blamed for lowering the status of social studies in the NZ curriculum. Concerns have also been raised about the lack of aligned incremental progression from the AOs at one level to the next within the same knowledge strand (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Sewell et al., 2005; Wood & Milligan, 2010). While these criticisms were aimed at *SSiNZC*, the fact that the *NZC* contains even less detail about what to assess and teach in social studies (Ministry of Education, 2010) means that these concerns may still be relevant today.

### 2.8.3 Ministry of Education [MOE] support materials

Since 1990, the MOE has produced a range of documents and electronic resources to support teachers with developing teaching and assessment programmes that align with NZ's education policies. In social studies, these resources have included the *Handbook* (Ministry of Education, 1991), *SSiNZC: Getting Started* (Ministry of Education, 1998), online teaching resources, units, and NCEA assessment exemplars on TKI<sup>12</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2006a, 2007a, 2008c, nd), the *Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004), the *Effective Pedagogy in Social Sciences / Tikanga a iwi. Best Evidence Synthesis [BES]* (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008), and the *Building Conceptual Understandings in the Social Sciences [BCUSS]* series (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b, 2009).

Of these resources, the *Handbook* (Ministry of Education, 1991) provided the most detailed guidance for teachers on how to: (i) constructively align assessment with teaching objectives, and (ii) set up a grading system within a SBA paradigm. The *Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004) and *BES* (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008) did, however, also contain some research-based advice for teachers on how to assess

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<sup>12</sup> Te Kete Ipurangi [TKI] [www.tki.org.nz](http://www.tki.org.nz) is a MOE funded website for NZ teachers.

learning in social studies. The *Exemplars* demonstrated what quality learning in relation to the AOs in the *SSiNZC* looked like through annotated examples of students' work. The annotations were linked to three key aspects of learning<sup>13</sup>, and an interconnected process of inquiry, that the *Exemplar* facilitators considered to be the essence of effective learning in social studies within a sociocultural framework (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2006b; Sewell et al., 2005). While the *Exemplars* contain some useful information on how assessment can scaffold learning, and how teachers can use the concepts within the AOs to measure incremental progression; there has been limited academic research on how, and whether, teachers are using the *Exemplars* to inform their current assessment practices (M. Taylor<sup>14</sup>, personal communication, September 5, 2010).

The recently released *BES* (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008) also includes some empirically-founded guidance for teachers on how to implement effective assessment in social studies. This meta-analysis of 383 NZ and international empirical studies related to teaching, learning, and/or assessment in the social sciences, resulted in Aitken and Sinnema proposing four interrelated mechanisms of effective pedagogy—connection, alignment, community, and interest. Their report states that effective social studies teachers will ensure that assessment is an integral and constructively aligned component of their teaching and learning programmes. It also claims that effective social studies teachers embrace sociocultural and cognitive theories of learning by demonstrating an awareness of, and planning for, social and cultural aspects of learning. Teachers will do this by creating supportive learning environments and giving students the opportunity to develop and demonstrate: (i) conceptual knowledge of key social studies ideas, (ii) awareness of personal and cultural identity, (iii) social inquiry related skills, (iv) contributory and participatory attributes, and (v) affective empathetic dispositions. M. Taylor (personal communication, September 5, 2010) is currently investigating the impact that the *BES* is having on teachers' practice.

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<sup>13</sup> (i) Developing ideas about society; (ii) participating in society as an individual or as part of a group; and (iii) understanding the personal or social significance of the learning.

<sup>14</sup> Mike Taylor is a lecturer in the College of Education at Victoria University who is actively involved in social studies related research.

The documents discussed in this section, in general, exhibit good alignment with the principles of using assessment to enhance learning. It should, however, be noted that there has been limited qualitative research in NZ into how teachers interpret official policy documents or how they assess learning in social studies in years 9 and 10 (Harris et al., 2008, R. Hipkins<sup>15</sup>, personal communication, August 13, 2010). The next section moves from reviewing the policies that inform NZ teachers' assessment practices, to taking a more in-depth look into what is already known about assessment practices in NZ especially in relation to assessing learning in social studies during years 9 and 10.

## **2.9 Assessment in NZ**

As established earlier in this chapter, the NZ government charges schools with the responsibility of deciding how they will assess students' learning. While the National Education Guidelines signal the government's expectations that assessment is to be used to improve teaching and learning, a question that needs to be asked is: Do NZ teachers' assessment practices exhibit an 'assessment for learning' philosophy?

Examining NZ-based research for specific mentions of assessment reveals that a large proportion of the contemporary research has focused on assessment practices and student achievement in pre-secondary contexts (e.g., Alton-Lee, 2003; Browne & Hawe, n.d.; Crooks, Flockton, & Meaney, 2005; ERO, 2006; Flockton & Crooks, 2002; Hill, 2000) and in years 11-13 (e.g., Hipkins, Conner, & Neill, 2006; Hipkins, Wylie, & Hodgen, 2007; Rawlins, 2007; Taylor, 2008). A significant amount of this research has centred on assessment practices in English, Maths, and Science (e.g., Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Rawlins, 2007) and/or student achievement in years 4 and 8 (e.g., Crooks et al., 2005; ERO, 2006; Flockton & Crooks, 2002). Those studies that do include data related to assessment during years 9 and 10 tend to be large scale surveys (e.g., Brown, 2004; McGee et al., 2003) or reports where the information about teachers' assessment practices in years 9 and 10 is embedded in wider

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<sup>15</sup> Dr Rosemary Hipkins is chief researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research [NZCER]

discussions of curriculum developments, pedagogy, and/or assessment (e.g., ERO, 2007a; Harris et al., 2008; McGee et al., 2004). This NZ-based research does, however, provide some important insights into assessment practices in a NZ context.

The first point to note is that findings from NZ-based research on the links between assessment and learning, and the factors that influence teachers' assessment practices, are generally consistent with the findings reported in sections 2.4 and 2.7 of this literature review. For example, several NZ researchers have found that the effectiveness of NZ secondary school teachers' assessment practices is dependent on their personal teaching philosophies and experiences being positively aligned with external contextual factors (Aitken, 2005a; Brown, 2004; Brown et al., 2008; Harris et al., 2008). Significantly, these researchers have also reported that there is often a dissonance between the intended curriculum and the curriculum that is delivered to students when teachers' conceptions of assessment and learning differ to the writers of the national curriculum statements.

Several of ERO's recent reviews have found that many NZ teachers are using effective assessment practices (ERO, 2001, 2006, 2007a). Some ERO reports have, however, also contained concerns about teachers' lack of subject knowledge in social studies and the variability and superficial nature of some of the assessment practices they have found. Significantly, ERO's survey of 153 schools in 2005 (2006) found that teachers of year 4 and 8 students were only collecting a limited amount of assessment data on students' learning in social studies. This survey also highlighted the fact that most of the assessment tasks that were being used appeared to focus on assessing students' ability to recall facts rather than on their ability to apply knowledge and skills to new contexts.

Students' results in recent social studies NEMP tasks<sup>16</sup> appear to support ERO's observations as, although the NEMP researchers have been happy with some aspects of students' learning in social studies, they have also voiced concerns about students' general lack of knowledge of current issues and their superficial understanding of key

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<sup>16</sup> The NEMP monitors student achievement in each learning area of the NZ curriculum on a four year cycle.

social studies concepts. While the NEMP researchers have stated that some aspects of *SSiNZC* (Ministry of Education, 1997) were not easy to assess, they have also voiced some concerns about general teaching and assessment practices in years 4 and 8 as their longitudinal research has shown that there was limited improvement in student achievement between 1997 and 2005—particularly in year 8.

While ERO and NEMP provide some insight into student achievement and learning in social studies at a national level, it must be noted that social studies from years 1-8 is generally taught in an integrated manner by generalist teachers (Browne & Hawe, n.d.; Crooks, 2002; Crooks et al., 2005; Flockton & Crooks, 2002). From year 9, however, the national curriculum is generally delivered as separate subjects taught by specialist teachers. Consequently this is often when NZ students first experience social studies as a stand-alone subject taught by teachers who have completed some tertiary level social sciences papers or a full social sciences degree (Crooks, 2002; McGee et al., 2003; Taylor, 2008). It is therefore important to ascertain what is known about teachers' assessment practices in years 9 and 10.

### Assessment in years 9 and 10

As mentioned in section 2.8, NZ operates a school-based assessment system where teachers are guided by a national curriculum that clearly states that "the primary purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching" (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 39). Schools are therefore charged with the responsibility of deciding how to assess students' learning. Most formal assessment tasks that students complete in social studies during years 9 and 10 are teacher-made, and do not have any official credentialing function, as there are no National Standards or high-stakes compulsory tests for students to sit. This means that most of the assessment tasks that are administered to formally assess learning during years 9 and 10 are generally used to: (i) gauge students' knowledge and skills at a particular point in time, (ii) report achievement to parents, and (iii) gather information that can be used to inform the next steps in the learning programme (Crooks, 2002).

While many year 9 and 10 assessment programmes still involve traditional tests and examinations, recent educational research suggests that many teachers are now assessing a broader range of skills and knowledge through using a wider range of non-test performance-based, reflective, and affective tasks in their assessment programmes (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Crooks, 2002; ERO, 2007a; Harlen, 2005; McGee et al., 2003). A large scale postal survey and case study of curriculum implementation in all types of NZ schools (McGee et al., 2004; McGee et al., 2003) has provided some good insight into teaching and assessment practices across all levels of schooling in NZ. This study also contains some specific data on teachers' approaches to assessment in social studies at years 9 and 10. Teachers of these year groups, who responded to this survey, indicated that they were using a variety of assessment activities to formally assess learning. Their responses revealed a strong preference towards using a mix of research inquiries and individual assessment tasks and tests. These teachers reported that they were aligning their assessment programmes with the AOs in the *SSiNZC* by measuring student achievement against criteria derived from the AOs. The teachers did, however, indicate that they were concerned about their assessment workloads, the consistency of practice between teachers, and the transparency of the information that was included on students' reports. While this national survey was followed up by a case study of 23 schools, only one case study report contained any descriptive data related to assessment in year 9 and 10 social studies and this information did not really provide any additional insight into specific assessment practices at this level. Although this national sampling research collected some extensive quantitative data on teaching and assessment practices in social studies, it also raised questions that warrant further investigation such as: (i) how do teachers align their assessment tasks to the social studies AOs, (ii) what knowledge and skills do teachers assess, (iii) how effective are the methods that teachers choose to use to assess learning, (iv) how is student achievement recorded and reported, and (v) how do teachers use the assessment information they gather?

An ERO review of assessment information from 61 secondary schools in NZ (2007a) includes some useful information about NZ teachers' assessment practices. This report stated that teachers who were well organised, had good knowledge of

students' learning needs, used a wide range of assessment resources, and clearly communicated the standards that they expected students to reach, were engaging in effective assessment practice. Significantly ERO (2007a; 2007b) again voiced some concerns about assessment practices as they found that a lot of the assessment information that teachers were gathering during years 9 and 10 failed to fully capture students' achievement or progress at this level.

Recent research in NZ on NCEA-related assessment practices also provide some important information that relates to assessment in years 9 and 10. Several researchers have found evidence of positive and negative 'trickle down' effects where the knowledge and capabilities that teachers have developed through teaching social studies in years 11-13 has been used to inform and improve their assessment practices in years 9 and 10 (Alison, 2007; Hipkins et al., 2007; Rawlins, 2010; Taylor, 2008; Wood, 2004). Taylor's (2008) recent research into teachers' experiences of implementing social studies in years 11-13, and the milestone reports from the MOE's Beacon Schools' Project [Beacon] (Atkins, 2004; Wood, 2004, 2005), for example, report some positive 'trickle down' effects. These studies found that many teachers involved in teaching year 11-13 social studies had developed robust pedagogical practices and in-depth knowledge of how to teach and assess for conceptual understanding in social studies. Taylor (2009) also points out that guidance from specialist social studies educators, NCEA support documents on how to assess concepts, values, and perspectives (Ministry of Education, 2006a, 2007a, 2008c), and the explanatory notes in the Social Studies Achievement Standards (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, n.d.); have all played a role in improving teachers' assessment practices. While Taylor (2008) points out that there has been some criticism of the MOE for not publishing work that the Beacon's teachers produced, some of the knowledge that was gained through this project has been quietly disseminated to the wider teaching community through a revamp of the NCEA internal exemplars on TKI, the aforementioned NCEA support documents and most recently, the *BCUSS* series. Interestingly, Taylor also found that, of the 20% of the NZ schools that signaled that they taught NCEA social studies courses, half used level 1 Achievement Standards [AS] to extend year 10 students (2008). Many of these

schools stated that they were only using the internally assessed AS with year 10 students as they said they had more confidence in teachers being able to scaffold students to successfully achieving the expected standard. Teachers also indicated that they had more control over the design of, and time allocation for, internal assessment tasks.

Although Taylor's (2008) research provides some insight into the impact that the introduction of NCEA social studies has had on teachers' assessment practice in years 9 and 10, little is known about whether the knowledge that has been developed through the introduction of NCEA social studies is actively informing assessment practices in years 9 and 10 of teachers who have not been involved in teaching social studies in years 11-13.

A recent article by Wood and Milligan (2010) claims that there has been limited support for teachers on how to summatively assess learning in social studies. They argue that "a one-off test is unlikely to capture the richness of what students know and can do [so] assessment schemes need to acknowledge that learning takes place at multiple points during the course of a unit" (p. 21)—a sentiment shared by Moss (2008). Wood and Milligan state that teachers desperately need guidance on how to gauge students' progress in social studies as there is a lack of transparent conceptual progression in the social studies AOs in the *NZC*<sup>17</sup>. Although they do add that recent social studies support documents<sup>18</sup> include some valuable guidance for teachers on how to assess conceptual understandings in social studies (e.g., stating that the *Exemplars* advise teachers to measure students' learning against three 'key aspects of learning'), they contend that "the value of these documents in shaping assessment practice has thus far been overlooked" (p.19). Wood and Milligan believe that the *NZC* and the resources mentioned in section 2.8.3 indicate that assessment in social studies should measure students' conceptual understandings, "reflective and critical social inquiry skills" and "citizenship dispositions" (p. 20). They suggest that teachers could measure these aspects by incorporating three questions: (i) "what do we know"

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<sup>17</sup> There were the same issue with the AOs in the *SSi/NZC* (Aitken, 2005a; Sewell et al., 2005).

<sup>18</sup> See documents listed in section 2.8.3

(ii) “how do we know”, and (iii) “so what”, into creative “integrated, cumulative and participatory” assessment tasks (p. 21). The authors trialed their ideas with two teachers, with some positive outcomes. They are now challenging the NZ social studies community to use the ideas in their article as a springboard for informing their future assessment practices.

Many NZ researchers continue to claim that there is still a distinct lack of descriptive research on assessment practices, particularly in a secondary school context. Accordingly, there have been constant calls for more empirical research into: (i) teachers’ in-class assessment practices, (ii) the relationship between the progression in the curriculum and progression in the classroom, and (iii) the link between curriculum, assessment and student achievement (Aitken, 2005; Carr, 2005; ERO, 2007; L. Flockton, personal communication, September 22, 2010).

## **2.10 Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has illustrated how peoples’ perceptions of the purpose and nature of assessment appear to have changed as their knowledge of the link between assessment and learning has increased. It has revealed that effective assessment involves a variety of valid and reliable performance-based, reflective, and affective assessment tasks that assess students’ knowledge, skills, and values. A significant body of research has suggested that teachers who assess students’ learning in multiple ways, on multiple occasions, over an extended period of time, not only gain a robust picture of students’ knowledge and skills, but also embody an ‘assessment for learning’ philosophy consistent with sociocultural theories of learning.

The review of the literature has also identified factors that influence NZ teachers’ assessment practices, particularly in social studies. The examination of contemporary research on teachers’ assessment practices in social studies has revealed some interesting facts (e.g., that the judgements made about teaching, learning, and assessment in social studies have generally been based on research that has been conducted in pre-secondary contexts with generalist teachers). Given that social

studies at this level is usually taught as a stand-alone subject by specialist teachers, it has also raised some important questions that need further investigation, such as, are assessment practices and student outcomes in years 9 and 10 different to those reported in the pre-secondary school research?

In light of these findings, there definitely appears to be a need for some descriptive research to gain a picture of: (i) how teachers formally assess learning in social studies in years 9 and 10, (ii) what aspects of social studies and the wider NZ curriculum teachers assess (iii) what informs teachers' assessment practices, (iii) how teachers record and report student achievement in social studies, and (iv) how teachers use the assessment information they gather. Answering these questions will reveal how effective NZ teachers' assessment practices during years 9 and 10 are and whether their assessment practices align with sociocultural theories of learning and the MOE's 'assessment for learning' philosophy.



# CHAPTER THREE

## Methodology

*"If you want to understand people in real life you have to study them in their context and the way they operate" (Gillham, 2000, p. 11).*

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that guided the research. It explains the rationale behind adopting a multiple case study approach over a single case approach. It discusses data collection methods and an analytical framework that have been shown to help case study researchers collect, process and analyse data. It finishes by outlining some limitations of using a case study methodology as well as some ethical considerations that case study researchers need to consider and plan for.

### 3.2 Formulating a research approach

While there is not one research methodology in educational research that is thought to be superior to any other (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), there are times when certain approaches are more suited to particular research contexts than others (Denscombe, 2003; Martin, 2008; Scott & Usher, 1999). Historically a substantial amount of educational research was conducted in an objective and quantifiable manner. Many researchers embraced positivist ontologies where they viewed themselves as neutral and objective observers of the phenomena they were observing (Scott & Usher, 1999; Swann & Pratt, 2003). Consequently, prior to the 1990s, survey research played quite a dominant role in all forms of social research (Fontana & Frey, 2005), as it helped researchers collect huge samples of easily quantifiable data. While this type of research helped determine patterns and relationships between phenomena, it didn't

really help to explain why particular patterns or relationships occurred (Swann & Pratt, 2003).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, several educational researchers began to question whether quantitative based methodologies fully acknowledged the ideographic<sup>19</sup> nature of educational research and the many social and environmental factors that were believed to influence most educational settings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Patton, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999; Stake, 1980). These researchers began to move away from a positivist ontology to adopt an alternative view of reality known as interpretivism. This interpretivist ontological framework was thought to more fully acknowledge the subjective nature of education through recognizing that people's actions and views are integral aspects of research contexts and findings (Patton, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999; Swann & Pratt, 2003). Educational researchers who held this ontological view began to embrace more humanistic interpretivist qualitative research methodologies such as case study. Such methodologies more fully acknowledge the collaborative and situated nature of learning and the important role that people play in the research process (Babbie, 2007; Denscombe, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Scott & Usher, 1999).

The use of qualitative interpretivist research methodologies also increased with the development of a sociocultural view of learning. This view emerged during the early 1980s when the research that Lev Vygotsky had conducted in the early part of the twentieth century was translated into English and became part of the wider academic debate on learning theories. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory asserts that learning is an active process where knowledge is socially constructed through interactions between the participants in the learning process. Learning from this philosophical perspective is seen as being inextricably linked to the context in which it occurs so it is influenced by the social and cultural factors that are present (Good & Brophy, 2002; Mayer, 2003; Schunk, 2004). Researchers who embrace this

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<sup>19</sup> The ideographic nature of research purports a view that research findings are more context bound so they may not be able to be generalised (Bennett, 2003; Mertens, 2005; Scott & Usher, 1999).

sociocultural view of learning tend to be drawn towards using research methodologies which allow them to capture data in its authentic context.

The development of interpretivist and sociocultural epistemologies has therefore meant that a significant proportion of educational research is now conducted in genuine school settings where social and environmental influences can be directly observed in an authentic manner at a specific point in time (Babbie, 2007; Bassey, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003; Denscombe, 2003; Gall et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2000; Scott & Usher, 1999; Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003). The use of case study methodology in educational research has consequently grown (Mitchell, 2000) especially when investigating or evaluating educational programmes (House, 2005; Yin, 2009).

### **3.3 Case study methodology**

A case study research methodology is often used when investigating contemporary phenomena in real life contexts, especially when researching “how” and “why” type questions. This methodological approach is particularly useful as it helps researchers intricately examine the complex and dynamic social and cultural factors that can influence selected cases. Case study methodology is regularly used in educational research as the interplay between school policies and practices, teachers’ beliefs and practices, the curriculum, and assessment policies and procedures is complex, dynamic and often inextricably linked (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009).

The purpose of an investigation often dictates what type of case study methodology is used. When the focus is on describing the constructs and themes of a particular case the case study is *descriptive*. If the focus is on gaining insight into a phenomenon rather than the specifics of a particular site then the case study is *exploratory*. If the aim is to identify causal or relational patterns between phenomena or sites then the case study will be *explanatory*. However, if the focus is on assessing the effectiveness or value of a particular phenomenon then the case study is *evaluative* (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). The purpose of this research is to explore

assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies courses so the case study is exploratory in nature.

### **3.4 A multiple case study approach**

Whether the purpose of the case study research is descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, or evaluative, the next decision that a researcher needs to make is whether to focus on a single case or multiple cases. This decision will usually be based on whether the researcher is more interested in understanding how a phenomenon operates at a particular site or how it operates in a number of sites. Focusing on a single case generally allows a researcher to gain quite a detailed understanding of their focus site, or phenomenon, as they can conduct quite an in-depth study, and produce a comprehensive and focused report. A limitation of this approach is that it can be difficult to generalize the results to other cases, sites or contexts (Babbie, 2007; Stake, 2006, 2008; Yin, 2009).

One advantage of taking a multiple case study approach is that it helps researchers to explore multiple perspectives and varied practices in the same project. Stake (2006) suggests that multiple case research should involve between four and ten cases for maximum benefit. This number of cases helps researchers to, not only gather enough data to provide a rich description of each case, but careful analysis of the similarities and differences between the cases can also help them gain an in-depth understanding of their focus phenomenon. Selecting multiple cases or sites to study therefore allows for potential variability in practice, as well as enhancing the possibility of altering organising concepts during the research, and developing theory through multiple case comparisons (Bassegy, 2003; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009).

One criticism of using a multiple case study approach is that researchers do not generally gain as much in-depth understanding of each case as they might in a single case project. The benefits, however, of being able to verify findings through the

triangulation<sup>20</sup> of data from multiple cases, and the ability to generate conclusions based on multiple instances and unique occurrences, means that a multiple case study approach is often used in educational research today (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006, 2008). The decision to use a multiple case study approach for this project was based on the premise that NZ secondary schools are self managing so they have distinct policies and practices, teachers with diverse skills, knowledge, and experiences; and individualised teaching and assessment programmes<sup>21</sup>. The decision was also informed by anecdotal evidence gained during previous interactions with secondary school teachers which suggested that assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10 are varied (see section 1.2).

Multiple case study research generally starts with what Stake (2006) calls a *Quintain*. He defines a *Quintain* as “an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied - a target but not a bull’s eye” (Stake, 2006, p. 6). Stake’s theory is that researchers study a range of cases, sites, or manifestations to better understand the *Quintain* they are interested in. The focus being what each case can contribute to the understanding of the *Quintain* rather than what the specifics of each individual case, site or manifestation are. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) can be a useful approach when selecting cases because a list of criteria that cases need to meet can be generated and used to identify cases that have the potential to provide the most insight into the *Quintain*. Cases that meet the specified criteria can then be approached and invited to be part of the research (Babbie, 2007; Denscombe, 2003).

One challenge when conducting multiple case study research is to ensure that the research report not only conveys the unique character of each case but that any cross-case inferences about the *Quintain* are also grounded in the data that has been collected (Stake, 2006). The *Quintain* in this project is *assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies courses*.

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<sup>20</sup> Triangulation is when data is gathered from a range of sources, or by a range of people, so the information can be cross checked (Denscombe, 2003; Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> At the time of the research schools were being encouraged to use the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) to construct school-based programmes which suited the needs of their students and community.

### **3.5 Data collection tools**

Case study researchers collect data from a variety of sources. The most common being interviews, electronic or paper documents, archival records, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009). Several data collection tools are frequently used during a case study investigation as this can increase the trustworthiness of the data through triangulation, enhancing the potential generalizability of the research findings, and improving the robustness of the final report (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002). The main data collection tools used in this research were semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

#### **3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are a valuable data collection tool as they allow researchers to facilitate a guided non-threatening conversation through the use of a flexible set of topic-specific questions (Yin, 2009). Most of the questions used in this situation tend to be open-ended in nature so that interviewees are left to decide how they will answer questions, both in relation to the words they use and the length of response they give (Babbie, 2007; Denscombe, 2003; Scott & Usher, 1999). Asking open-ended questions tends to result in less structured responses being collected than when closed questions are used. While this can make analysis more difficult and time consuming, open-ended questions generally elicit richer and more insightful responses (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002). Researchers therefore gain a more in-depth understanding of their participants' thoughts and feelings, and their focus case or phenomenon, than when closed questions or a highly structured interview are used (Bell, 2005; Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews also allows researchers to respond to important, but unanticipated, points or issues that arise during an interview or the wider research process itself (Cohen et al., 2003).

The types of questions used in semi-structured interviews need to be linked to the focus of the research, well supported by suitable prompts and probes, and worded in a way that encourage respondents to articulate rich and meaningful ideas.

Researchers need to guard against using vague, ambiguous, or 'doublebarrelled' questions, as these types of questions can diminish the quality of the data. Researchers also need to consider what type of analysis they are going to do to ensure that their questions and all other aspects of their inquiry are constructively aligned. Creating good open-ended interview questions therefore takes time, creativity, knowledge, insight, and practice (Bassey, 2003; Bell, 2005; Denscombe, 2003; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Effective semi-structured interviews therefore require:

- getting interviewees' permission to tape interviews to increase the accuracy and analysis of the data that is being collected;
- well crafted open-ended questions that ensure that discussions remain focused;
- a location where an interviewee will feel comfortable and where there will be minimal interruptions;
- ice-breaker type questions that help participants become comfortable with the interview situation;
- scaffolding a conversational tone through actively listening to the participants' responses and providing verbal prompts and probes when necessary to gain further insight or clarity;
- flexible, reactive and sensitive responses to the information that is being shared;
- an awareness of bias, as the very presence of a researcher can potentially skew answers through *interviewer effect*<sup>22</sup> as what interviewees say they do versus what they actually do can differ (Denscombe, 2003; Gall et al., 2007; Kvale, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009).

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<sup>22</sup> Interviewer effect is where respondents make assumptions about what they think the interviewer wants to hear and alter their answers accordingly or fail to answer questions honestly because the question is too sensitive or they are afraid that their response might be used against them (Gall et al., 2007).

### 3.5.2 Document analysis

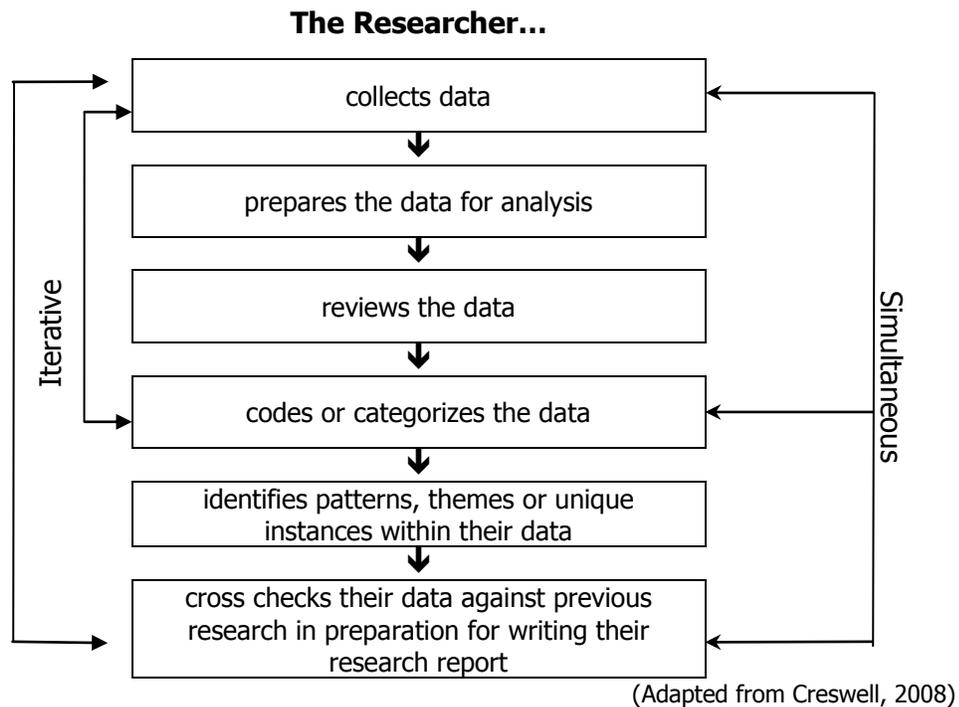
Gathering a range of documents during the data collection phase of case study research can aid research validity through triangulation, as documentary evidence can corroborate and enhance evidence that researchers have collected from other sources. Written reports, policy documents, unit plans, institutional records, and assessment documents are stable forms of data that can be repeatedly reviewed. These sorts of documents will have often been constructed outside of the research so they should not be biased by the research itself. Researchers must, however, be aware that documents may contain errors or be influenced by the author's perspective. Sometimes, it can be difficult for researchers to gain a clear understanding of the contextual factors that may have influenced the way in which a document was created. There may also be times when participants have reasons for either openly or surreptitiously denying researchers access to certain documents. The important thing for researchers to remember is that when documentary evidence contradicts information gained from other sources, or introduces new ideas; it should prompt further investigation to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the research data (Babbie, 2007; Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2009).

Ultimately, the decisions that researchers make about the data collection tools they use have the potential to affect the validity of their data. It is therefore vital that researchers actively reflect on the potential consequences of the decisions they make about the type of case study approach they are using, the cases they have selected, the data collection tools they are using, and the analysis they are doing (Denscombe, 2003). The next section looks at data analysis.

## 3.6 Data analysis framework

Regardless of which analysis tools case study researchers use, there is a well established analysis pathway that is generally used to interpret qualitative data. The first step involves organising data into formats that aid analysis. Interviews and fieldnotes may be transcribed, written documents scanned to create portable document files (PDFs), and artefacts photographed. The next step is to read through

this data to gain a general sense of the material that has been gathered. The third step involves coding or categorising the data. Whether this is done manually or with the aid of some sort of software data analysis programme, the purpose is the same. The purpose is to draw out patterns or unique instances and find keys themes that are contained within the data. At this point researchers will generally pause and reflect on what they have found to consider how their findings mirror, or differ from, previous research that has been reported in the literature review. A decision is then made as to whether there is a need to go back and conduct further data collection or analysis, or whether the evidence is robust enough to move on to constructing the final research report (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2008). Figure 3.1 illustrates the non-linear iterative nature of this process.



**Figure 3.1: A qualitative process of data analysis in case study research**

While most multiple case study researchers work within this framework, they also need to decide how to synthesize the data they have collected from their multiple sites/cases to make cross case assertions. Stake (2006) suggests three possible approaches:

- Track I: Emphasize Case Findings - Assertions emphasize the situational factors of individual cases;
- Track II: Merge Case Findings - Assertions are more closely related to the research questions (themes) through merging individual case findings;
- Track III: Provide Factors for Analysis - Assertions are based on conceptual factors that are derived from individual cases. The situationality of cases is more blurred.

Regardless of which track researchers select they must consider the “Case-Quintain dilemma” when writing up their reports by asking: “Does the Quintain need to be thought about more in terms of what is happening in the individual Cases, or more in terms of what is common across the Cases?” (Stake, 2006, p. 71). The response to this question will undoubtedly be influenced by the purpose and scope of the study. As the focus of this research was to investigate a phenomenon—*assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies courses*—the analysis phase has been aligned to Stake’s Track II approach.

### **3.7 Trustworthy and Ethical Research**

While all research has flaws, the trustworthiness of case study research can be increased by acknowledging threats to validity, triangulating data and engaging in ethical practice (Bassegy, 2003; Denscombe, 2003; Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002).

#### **3.7.1 Threats to validity**

As previously stated, the decisions that researchers make undoubtedly influence the accuracy, credibility, transferability, and value of their research (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2008; Denscombe, 2003; Martin, 2008; Patton, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999). As outlined in section 3.5.1, case study researchers must always be aware that their very presence has the potential to bias their data through such things as interviewer effect. Researchers can minimize this sort of bias by spending time on-site, making participants feel comfortable in interview situations, and working hard to establish an open and honest dialogue (Denscombe, 2003).

It has been suggested that a multiple case study approach can fail to capture the 'thick description' of a single case approach (Stake, 2008). Multiple case study research has, however, been shown to aid trustworthiness as the patterns that emerge from the data can be triangulated and used to make *fuzzy generalisations*<sup>23</sup> (Bassegy, 2003; Mitchell, 2000; Stake, 2006). While fuzzy generalizations allow readers to make judgements about how applicable the research findings are to their own particular practice, there is still a school of thought that case study data is case specific so it should not be generalized (Babbie, 2008; Denscombe, 2003; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005; Patton, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999; Yin, 2009). Triangulation therefore plays a vital role in increasing the potential to generalise and produce trustworthy research.

### 3.7.2 Triangulating data

Triangulation helps researchers to detect bias and anomalies, verify the repeatability of an observation, improve clarity, and validate the quality of the research findings (Anderson, 1998; Gall et al., 2005). Triangulation can involve using: (i) multiple methods to collect data on the same topic, (ii) multiple data sources, (iii) multiple observers and analysts, and (iv) multiple theories, to corroborate the evidence that is emerging from the research. It must, however, be pointed out that triangulation is not about looking for a single truth. The focus should be on looking for overlaps in the data which indicate patterns or increase the trustworthiness of the research (Denscombe, 2003; Mills, 2003; Patton, 2002; Pratt & Swann, 2003; Stake, 2008). Trustworthiness can also be aided by ethical practice.

### 3.7.3 Ethical practice

Ethical practice increases trust in any research because it is about being honest and acting with integrity (Denscombe, 2003; Stronach & MacLure, 1997). Researchers can engage in ethical practice by protecting their participants from harm through gaining informed consent and constantly reiterating that participants have the right to

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<sup>23</sup> Fuzzy generalizations are inferential statements based on qualitative data that have the potential to be related to a wider parent population or other cases.

withdraw their consent at any time (Bassey, 2003; Mills, 2003; Pratt & Swann, 2003). Although this is ethically correct practice, it can mean that researchers are sometimes unable to complete their investigations (Denscombe, 2003). Ethical researchers will also work hard to safeguard their participants' identities. While anonymity can be easily achieved in large scale surveys through coding systems, it can be more challenging to protect case identities in small communities like NZ. There is therefore often a real tension for case study researchers between providing enough detail about a particular case yet at the same time ensuring that participants do not become identifiable. Ethical researchers also work hard to ensure that their research reports do not embarrass their respondents or misrepresent their cases. They will do this by ensuring that data is as accurate and as up to date as possible, that it is kept in a secure password protected or coded fashion, and that data that is collected for one purpose is not used for another. Ultimately ethical researchers are honest about the aims and limitations of their research (Bassey, 2003; Denscombe, 2003; Mills, 2003; Swann & Pratt, 2003).

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter has outlined some of the benefits and limitations of using a case study methodology and has established that this methodology holds an important place in educational research today. The discussion has shown that every decision that a researcher makes determines how the methodology is implemented, what type of data is produced, and whether the research is trustworthy and ethically sound. It has determined that careful planning, prolonged engagement with data sources, triangulation, critical reflection, and a transparent and robust analysis process, can all ensure the quality of the research (Bassey, 2003; Creswell, 2008; Pratt & Swann, 2003).

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Methodology in Action

*"Rigorous forms of case study inquiry have the potential to provide illuminating and fruitful insights into classroom-based teaching and learning" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, pp. 11-12).*

### 4.1 Introduction

When considering how to go about investigating assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies courses, an exploratory multiple case study approach appeared to be an effective way of gaining rich insight into New Zealand [NZ] teachers' assessment practices. This methodological approach is also consistent with my personal interpretivist research epistemology and sociocultural view of learning. This chapter outlines how an exploratory multiple case study approach was used to investigate assessment practices in social studies at five NZ secondary schools. It does this by explaining how the cases were selected and how the data was collected, processed and analysed in a careful and ethical manner; to aid the trustworthiness of the research findings and protect the identity of the participant teachers and schools.

### 4.2 Framing the research focus

A decision was made to focus on exploring the formal component of teachers' assessment practices in social studies as this not only allowed me to interview teachers about their assessment practices, but also enabled me to cross check and enrich the interview data by requesting access to policy documents (e.g. school assessment policies, students reports, social studies assessment tasks, and the formal year 9 and 10 assessment programme). This approach allowed me to gain some comprehensive knowledge of how teachers were formally assessing learning in social studies without adversely interrupting students' in-class learning.

The questions that were formulated to guide this inquiry were:

- *What approaches do teachers use to formally assess learning in year 9 and 10 social studies?*
- *What aspects of social studies and the wider New Zealand curriculum do teachers formally assess?*
- *How do teachers' formal assessment practices in social studies align with the principles of 'assessment for learning'?*
- *What factors influence teachers' abilities to engage in effective assessment practices?*

### **4.3 Selecting the cases**

A purposeful sampling approach (Babbie, 2007; Patton, 2002) was taken to formulate a list of potential research schools. The list was limited to state integrated secondary schools in NZ with teaching programmes that were informed by the *New Zealand Curriculum [NZC]* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) or the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework [NZCF]* (Ministry of Education, 1993) and the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum [SSiNZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997)<sup>24</sup>, as multiple case study research relies on cases being similar in some way (Stake, 2006). Schools also needed to be offering social studies as a stand-alone subject at years 9 and 10 and they had to have an experienced social studies teacher who was willing to be part of the research project (Appendices B and D). The rationale for having such specific selection criteria for participant teachers was that previous research has shown that experienced teachers with good subject specific knowledge are more likely to engage in effective assessment practices (Alexander, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 2006; Good & Brophy, 2002; Harlen, 2007).

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<sup>24</sup> At the time of the research schools were in the process of revising their teaching and assessment programmes to align with the *NZC* so some of their policies and practices were still based on the *NZCF* and the *SSiNZC*.

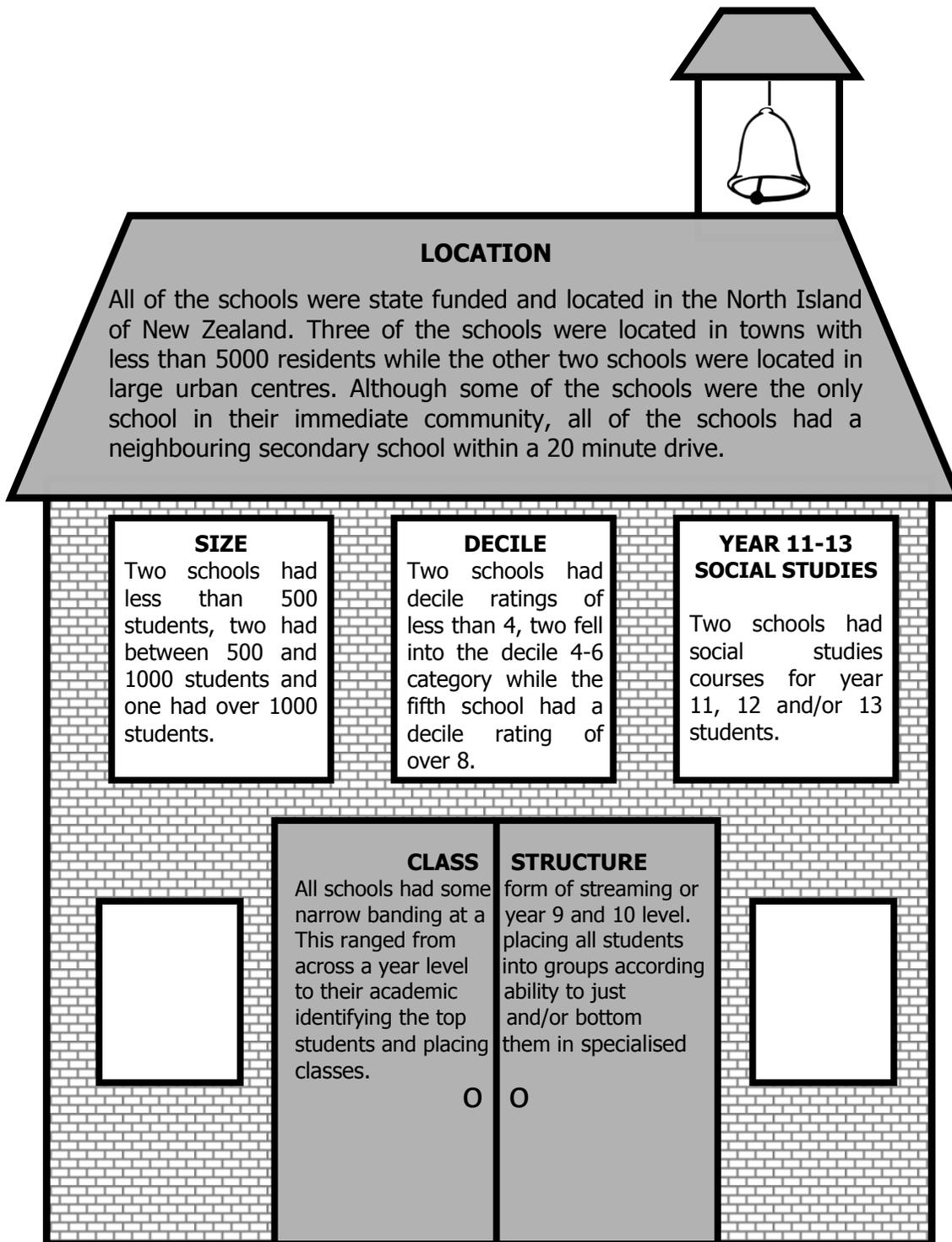
There was also a deliberate effort to ensure that a variety of school typologies was included on the potential participant list in terms of size, gender, decile<sup>25</sup> rating, and location, as “one of the most important tasks for the multicase researcher is to show how the phenomenon appears in different contexts” (Stake, 2006, p. 27). The list was also checked to see if it contained schools that offered social studies in years 11, 12, and/or 13, as previous research has suggested that having NCEA social studies courses might influence practice in years 9 and 10 (Taylor, 2008, 2009).

Information letters and consent forms (Appendices B - E) were sent out to the principals of 18 secondary schools with the aim of finding four schools that were prepared to take part in the research. Five of the seven schools that replied, accepted the invitation to participate in the research project and had nominated a teacher on their consent form (Appendix E), who met the criteria specified in the *Participant Teacher Information Sheet* (Appendix D). A decision was made to expand the study to include all five schools as each school had a different combination of contextual characteristics, and the teachers who had been nominated appeared to have a diverse range of experiences and knowledge that had the potential to positively contribute to the research.

The characteristics of the case study schools and the participant teachers follow in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

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<sup>25</sup> A school's decile rating is based on the socio-economic status of its contributing community. A decile 1 rating means that a high proportion of students at the school come from low socio-economic families while a decile 10 rating means that a low proportion of students at the school come from low socio-economic families (see [www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation))



**Figure 4.1: Characteristics of the case study schools**

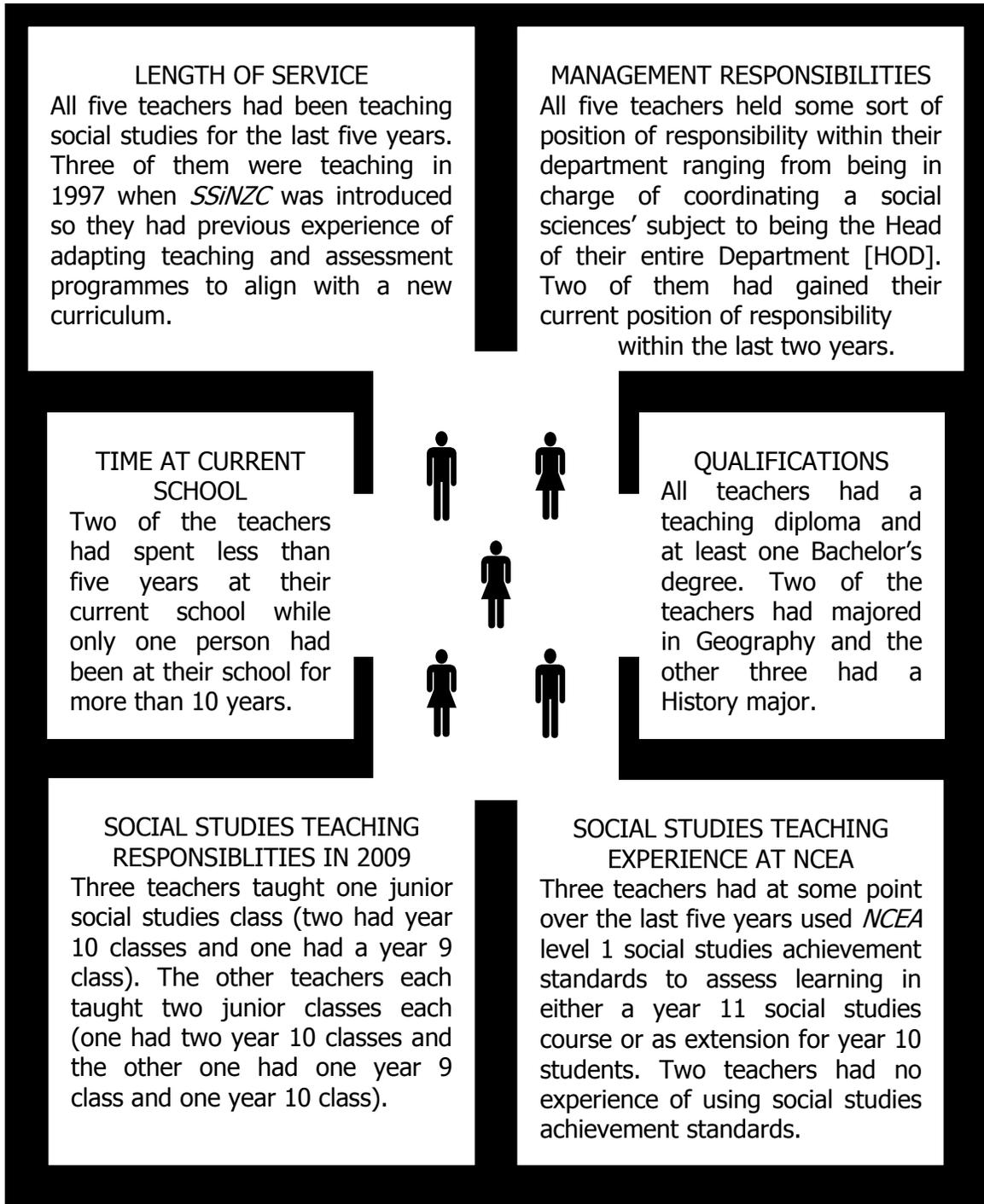


Figure 4.2: Characteristics of the participant teachers

Each teacher was assigned a gender neutral pseudonym to protect their identity. Their pseudonyms and some basic information about each school are shown in Figure 4.3.

<b>School</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>School size</b>	<b>Decile</b>
A	Alex	Medium	Medium
B	Brook	Medium	Low
C	Chris	Small	Low
D	Darryl	Large	High
E	Erin	Small	Medium

**Figure 4.3: Participant teachers' pseudonyms and school context**

Readers may find it useful when reading Chapters Five and Six to remember that each pseudonym has been matched to the school letter code.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

Two rounds of visits to each of the five schools were conducted between September and December of 2009. Each participant was sent an email at least one week prior to each visit outlining: (i) what the focus of the visit would be, (ii) the interview questions, and (iii) a request to view and discuss particular documents (Appendix F). These emails gave participants the opportunity to prepare for the visit by collecting their paperwork together and having time to think about some of the questions that they were going to be asked. Previous research has shown that the quality and depth of interview responses can be improved when participants have been given time to think about their answers and when they feel comfortable in an interview situation (Gall et al., 2007; Kvale, 2007). During each school visit the participant teacher was interviewed and documents related to the school's formal assessment programme in social studies were collected (Project Procedures in Appendix D).

Although the initial research design provided for a third round of visits, it was not deemed necessary to carry these visits out as the positive rapport that had developed during the first two rounds of visits meant that participants were happy to answer brief follow-up questions and check preliminary reports via email. The co-operative nature of this researcher-participant partnership actually saw some participants

choosing to send in additional unsolicited information that in some cases provided further insight into their teaching and assessment practices.

#### 4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

The use of a semi-structured interview format meant that the interviews with the participant teachers had quite a conversational tone as participants were given the freedom to share their thoughts in as much detail as they wanted. I was able to ensure that our conversations remained focused by using the set of predetermined questions (Appendix F), and additional prompts (Appendix G), to gain clarity and elicit more detailed information when necessary. All participants agreed to allow me to digitally record the interviews (Appendix E) which helped to ensure that our conversations were accurately captured. Recording the interviews also allowed me to focus on participants' responses and ask follow up questions when required. I was also able to listen to the interviews on numerous occasions during the analysis phase which helped me to remember the emotional emphasis and context of participants' statements that were not as easily documented in the interview transcripts.

All interviews were conducted in workrooms or office spaces during non-teaching times to minimise interruptions and avoid any disruption to students' learning. In the end only 10% of the interviews were actually completed without any interruption from other teachers entering rooms, or phones and bells ringing. Fortunately most interruptions were minor so the flow of most interviews was generally able to be maintained.

#### 4.4.2 School documents

A significant collection of documents was gathered during the visits to each school. These documents included copies of school assessment policies, year 9 and 10 teaching and assessment programmes, social studies assessment tasks, unit plans, assessment feedback sheets, students' reports, and teachers' mark book records. Many of these documents were collected in electronic form as they had been computer generated and participant teachers were happy to download their files on

to a password protected pen-drive. Documents that were not available in electronic form were photocopied and securely stored.

#### 4.4.3 Official documents and support material for social studies teachers

As discussed in section 2.8, a range of national policy documents and support materials have been published to guide teaching and learning in year 9 and 10 social studies. These documents were reviewed alongside the interview and documentary data that had been collected from schools, to provide 'triangulation of sources of information' (Creswell, 2008; Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Patton, 2002).

### 4.5 Analysing the data

While the analysis of the data followed the process outlined in Figure 3.1, this section describes how this process was actually implemented. The challenge here is to convey the dynamic and iterative nature of this analysis process in a clear and succinct manner (Silverman, 2004). The sorting and coding of the data was completed in two stages. Stage one occurred after the first round of visits in October and November of 2009 and stage two occurred early in 2010 after the second round of visits had been completed. Preliminary findings that emerged during the first round of visits were cross-checked, and updated, during the second round of visits and new lines of inquiry investigated, as described below.

After every in-school visit, key observations and thoughts were written in a research diary or recorded on a digital voice recorder as soon after the visit as possible. Recorded interviews were then transcribed and the interview transcripts, research notes, and any documents that had been collected from the schools were then organised into five separate folders (one for each school). The information in each folder was reviewed, coded, and analysed. It was also used to inform subsequent discussions with the participant teachers.

## 4.6 Coding the data

Preliminary coding and analysis started after the very first in-school visit. This involved reviewing all the documentary evidence that had been collected, reading through the interview transcript(s), and listening to the recorded interview(s) again. Initial thoughts and codes were recorded in a research journal and in the margins of the interview transcripts, as illustrated in Figure 4.4.

<b>Chris:</b> (61.42)	<i>... Keeping the activities varied for the assessments. So that they're not having to do the same thing over and over...</i>	varied approaches to assessment
<b>Alex:</b> (62.03)	<i>There's the traditional sense of why do we assess and that is measurement of progress and I think personally for students to gain self efficacy to feel confident in what they do, they need to be able to see where they have made really good progress and what things are stopping them from making progress in that feedback...So I certainly see assessment as providing data for both students and teachers.</i>	Purpose of assessment
<b>Brook:</b> (29.08)	<i>Assessment is to improve students' learning for social studies... to ensure that in our senior school we have history, geography and social studies students who can achieve in their subjects.</i>	Purpose of assessment
<b>Brook:</b> (32.21)	<i>I have a marking sheet that has [the assessment criteria] in it and then my marking. They look at why they got that mark and what they need to do next time there's an assessment. So they get my feedback, they get to write their own feedback and then they get to write their own feedforward.</i>	Assessment for learning

Figure 4.4: Preliminary thoughts and coding

An open coding process (Babbie, 2007) was used to break the interview transcripts into discrete sections so that the data from each interview could be compared to identify similarities, differences, and unique features. The first set of codes was derived from the literature and research questions, however new codes (e.g. multi-levelled assessment) were added as new themes emerged from the data. Annotations and coding were therefore continuously updated and revised as more visits were completed and the pool of data grew.

Once all the data had been collected and coded it was re-examined closely on a school by school basis. Some additional codes were added to some of the earlier

transcripts and some recoding was done as cross-case comparisons were made. A summary record of the patterns, themes, and unique practices that had been found at each school was generated. Stake’s (2006) Worksheet 5B (p.59) was then used to merge the findings from each of the five schools together and identify unique instances, as illustrated in Figure 4.5.

Merged Findings	From Which Cases?	Research Questions			
		1	2	3	4
Assessing knowledge, skills and values	A,B,C,D,E		✓	✓	
Assessment for learning	A,B,C,D,E			✓	
Assessing Key Competencies	A,B,C,		✓	✓	
Multi-levelled assessment tasks	A, E	✓		✓	
Standards-based grading system	A,B,C,D,E	✓			✓
School policies	A,B,C,D,E				✓
Nine-tiered assessment profile	A				✓

(Based on Worksheet 5B, Stake, 2006, p. 59)

**Figure 4.5: A matrix for generating theme-based assertions from merged case findings**

This matrix provided an organisational structure for reporting the results of the research in relation to the research questions. These merged case findings were then analysed in relation to the key themes in the literature to generate the researched-based assertions reported in Chapter Six. At every stage of the data collection, analysis and reporting process great care was taken to maintain the integrity of the data and the participants. This was done by engaging in ethical practices.

## 4.7 Engaging in ethical practice

As this research involved human participants, a full human ethics application was prepared and submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Preparing the ethics applications meant that a range of ethical matters, such as how the identities and professional reputations of schools and participant teachers were going to be protected, and how the data was going to be stored, were considered and planned for before the data collection phase commenced. Ethics approval was granted in June 2009 (Appendix A). A culture of confidentiality was established at the first meeting with each participant and then maintained throughout the entire

research process. Each participant was told that their identity would be protected and they were asked not to discuss their involvement in the research with other people. During the data collection and analysis phases participants were treated with professional integrity, as they were given clear information about the project. Each participant was informed of their rights and had to complete a consent form before their participation in the research was confirmed (Appendices B - E). Each participant was also given the opportunity to read through the transcripts of their interviews and had to give their consent before this data could be used (Appendix H). Participants were continually reminded that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they had the right to correct information specific to their case, if they felt they had been misunderstood or misrepresented in anyway. There was therefore a genuine effort to minimise any harm to the participant teachers and their schools at all points in the research.

## **4.8 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the practical steps that were performed in this exploratory multiple case study research. It has described how the research questions were developed, how the case study schools and participants were selected, and how the data was collected, processed, analysed, and written up. The processes that have been discussed demonstrate that the research was conducted in a considered and ethical manner to ensure that the integrity of the data and the participants was maintained. The next chapter presents the results that emerged from this research process.



# CHAPTER FIVE

## Results

*"Writing up a case study report is a skill of high order: a reduction to sufficiently detailed essentials for the reader to follow the reasoning-from-evidence process. This empirical stance can result in an accessible account, where logic and meaning are transparent" (Gillham, 2000, p. 94).*

### 5.1 Introduction

The results reported in this chapter focus on the programmes of **formal** assessment that teachers<sup>26</sup> at five New Zealand [NZ] secondary schools implemented in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses in 2009. The information that the five participant teachers provided during interviews, together with the documentary evidence that was collected from each school, have revealed some detailed information about assessment and feedback practices at this level.

To keep the focus of this report on the phenomenon—*assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies courses*—rather than the individual cases (schools), the structure for the chapter has been informed by the research questions that underpinned the data collection phase of this research, the cross-case themes that emerged from the data, and some of the unique features that were discovered. The chapter is divided into four sections:

- 5.2 Approaches used to assess learning
- 5.3 What teachers formally assess
- 5.4 Factors that influence assessment practices
- 5.5 Issues for teachers

To provide a more comprehensive account of the assessment practices that the five participant teachers were using means not only conveying common features across the five case study schools, but also communicating some of the unique practices that

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<sup>26</sup> In this chapter, the term 'teachers' relates to the five teachers who participated in the research.

occurred under certain case specific conditions (Stake, 2006). The discussion in this chapter therefore outlines some common cross-case assessment philosophies and practices, as well as some unique approaches to assessment that various participant teachers were taking. The report starts by looking at how the participant teachers were formally assessing learning in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses.

## **5.2 Approaches used to assess learning**

This section focuses on the characteristics of each teachers' assessment practices by explaining how they were constructing and administering their programmes of formal assessment in social studies. It does this by describing the structure of each school's formal assessment programme, the types of assessment tasks that teachers were using, and how teachers were grading students' work and reporting their achievements. It also discusses how teachers' informal judgements about students' abilities, motivation, and effort influenced the way they formally assessed learning.

### **5.2.1 Programmes of formal assessment**

Each of the five secondary schools in this research had a structured programme of assessment for their year 9 and 10 students made up of between four and eight formal assessment points per year. A significant difference between the schools was the variation in the structure of their assessment programmes. The largest school, school D, had a totally prescribed programme of formal assessment where each of the teachers in the social studies department had to administer the same number of Common Assessment Tasks [CATs]<sup>27</sup>. The school had more than 10 classes at each year level and numerous teachers with vastly different levels of subject expertise, working in their social studies department. In Darryl's view these factors necessitated a high level of prescription.

***Darryl:** "Social studies here is seen as the department if you've got too many teachers in PE then one of them can come and do some social studies or someone in senior*

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<sup>27</sup> In this thesis CATs relate to teacher-made assessment tasks that had been created with the intention that all teachers working with a specified group of students (e.g., the entire year level or a specific stream) would use them when teaching the unit of learning they were aligned to.

management needs to actually teach a class well they can come do social studies. So that's why we have to be quite careful that we've got it all really organised coz people are really busy... [so] everything's got to be really self explanatory... We print all [the assessment tasks] off in class sets and have them bagged up and they're just in the corner of the resource room. So when people come to do the assessment they just go and pick up their bag of assessment [tasks]... We've got 12 teachers in our department so [the assessment programme] needs to be quite systematic so that everybody knows what to do. It can't be just ad hoc."

School A also had a reasonably prescriptive programme of formal assessment in that it had CATs that every teacher had to administer. A key point of difference at this school was that there were three different versions of each CAT—foundation, core and extension—as illustrated in Figure 5.1, that teachers used with students of differing academic abilities.

Systems of Government		
<b>Social studies Achievement Objectives [AOs]: 4.1<sup>a</sup></b> ( <i>Concepts = How leadership is acquired and exercised</i> ) and <b>5.1<sup>b</sup></b> ( <i>Concepts = Systems of Government</i> ) (Ministry of Education, 2007b).		
<b>Task Instructions<sup>c</sup></b>		
FOUNDATION	CORE	EXTENSION
Choose <b>ONE</b> ...	Choose <b>THREE</b> ...	Choose <b>FOUR</b> ...
<b>...system(s) of government from the list below:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Democracy</li> <li>- Monarchy</li> <li>- Anarchy</li> <li>- Autocracy</li> <li>- Republic</li> <li>- Communism</li> <li>- Dictatorship</li> <li>- Tyranny</li> <li>- Military Junta</li> <li>- Despotism</li> </ul>		
<b>Complete a booklet based around the following points<sup>d</sup>:</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plan</li> <li>2. Describe form of Government</li> <li>3. Mapping</li> <li>4. Leaders of the political system</li> <li>5. <b>List</b> the Pros and Cons of the government system</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plan of attack</li> <li>2. Describe forms of Government</li> <li>3. Mapping</li> <li>4. Leaders of the political systems</li> <li>5. List the Pros and Cons of the government systems</li> <li>6. Explain which of the systems of government you would like to live under. Justify your choice</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. } Same as core</li> <li>2. }</li> <li>3. }</li> <li>4. }</li> <li>5. }</li> <li>6. }</li> <li>7. Choose TWO of the four government systems to <b>compare</b> and <b>contrast</b>. <b>Explain, in detail</b>, how each system is both similar and dissimilar to the other systems.</li> </ol>
<p><sup>a</sup> 4.1 = The first AO on the level 4 social studies fold out page in the New Zealand Curriculum [NZC].</p> <p><sup>b</sup> 5.1 = The first AO on the level 5 social studies fold out page in the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007b).</p> <p><sup>c</sup> These instructions are a combination of the instructions that appear on the three versions of this CAT.</p> <p><sup>d</sup> The full versions of these assessment tasks contained detailed explanations with each point.</p>		

Figure 5.1: A multi-levelled assessment from school A.

Alex explained that while the foundation, core, and extension versions of a CAT required students to engage in the same type of activity the complexity of the tasks, the quantity of work, the depth of analysis, and/or the level of scaffolding were different.

**Alex:** *"This one [Figure 5.1] the foundation level choose one system of government to research... [The core students] we give them a lot more. They have to do three different systems of government, the leaders, pros and cons and your choice. What system of government would you rather live in... [The extension students] have to do 4 systems and a nicely presented research booklet. This class you would, do your teaching and learning sequence about... different systems of government and what qualities good leaders [have] and how to do justifications and... processing and then send them away. They are able to do it at home on their own. Whereas [the foundation task is] all done in class... These [extension] kids are given the autonomy to show their creativity. To choose what they want to do. Really go out and extend themselves. For our bottom class, the research component, I know the teacher that takes that class gets a lot of books in from the national library. They're in the classroom and it's set up so there is no equity problems with going home and using the internet. Whereas most of the kids in the extension class have [internet access]."*

Alex's comments and the task instructions in Figure 5.1 show that he expected extension students to have more advanced literacy skills, and to be more intrinsically motivated to do more work, than foundation students. The instructions for tasks 5 and 7 also demonstrate that extension students were required to engage in higher levels of thinking because comparing and contrasting activities demand greater levels of cognitive processing than listing activities (Killen, 2003; Schunk, 2004). Alex explained that this multi-levelled assessment structure had been developed by his department to comply with a new school assessment policy aimed at addressing students' diverse learning needs and more accurately conveying their different levels of achievement (discussed further in section 5.4.2).

School E also had multi-levelled CATs incorporated into its formal assessment programme. There were two versions of every inquiry-based CAT that had been constructed using Achievement Indicators from two different levels of the Inquiry Process in the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum [SSiNZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997). Teachers at this school appeared to have more flexibility than the teachers at schools A and D in deciding how to implement their formal assessment programme. Erin stated that he not only had the freedom to let students choose

which level of an inquiry CAT to attempt, but he could also use his professional judgement to decide whether it was necessary for his students to complete all four inquiry CATs.

**Erin:** *"Some of us might not do every single inquiry so if our students are already working... at that merit/excellence level. You don't have to keep reassessing that inquiry if they're already up quite high... My class... they're doing the local history [inquiry]... They've seen their [past grades]... so they can choose whether they want to continue at level 4 and try and get [an excellence] or start on the level 5 and see where they fit on the level 5 [scale]."*

Erin was also allowed to create his own assessment tasks to assess students' knowledge. He said that this level of flexibility was possible because his school's reporting system outlined students' achievement in relation to holistic aspects of learning (knowledge and skills) rather than against individual assessment tasks. Despite this flexibility, Erin said that in 2009 everyone in his department was actually using the same assessment tasks to assess knowledge, as the high proportion of new and inexperienced teachers meant that he and the other experienced teacher were sharing their resources and expertise with their newer colleagues.

School B's assessment structure was very similar to school E's as CATs were used to assess skills and teachers were allowed to design their own tasks to assess knowledge.

**Brook:** *"I've brought in two forms of assessment. One is achievement objective assessment which I've this year renamed conceptual understanding and then the process assessments the CATs... The achievement objective and conceptual understanding (assessments) are sort of left up to individual teachers."*

The difference at this school was that it did not officially have multi-levelled CATs. Brook did, however, say that the teacher of the remedial class could alter the task instructions in a CAT if the literacy requirements were too difficult for her students.

School C's formal assessment programme also involved CATs that assessed both knowledge and skills. In theory all students completed the same number of CATs but Chris said that a class of their less able students often received more time and verbal scaffolding than their peers, which meant that they might not have time to complete all CATs.

*Chris: "...Some of our [year 9] kids just can't meet [level 5 of the NZC]... so they end up possibly only doing 4 of the topics and they just spend a lot longer on them."*

The evidence in this section has shown the the programmes of formal assessment at all five schools were similar in that all schools had CATs, but different in that the structure of each school's programme and number of CATs varied. Significantly two of the schools had developed multi-levelled assessment tasks to cater for students' diverse academic abilities and all schools except school D allowed teachers a degree of flexibility to administer the CATs within their programmes in a way that they thought best met the diverse learning needs of their students. While it could be argued that tasks are no longer CATs if they are altered in any way, teachers referred to these tasks as CATs as the tasks had been created to be the main piece(s) of assessment for a particular units of learning. The next section outlines how teachers also catered for student diversity through using different types of assessment tasks.

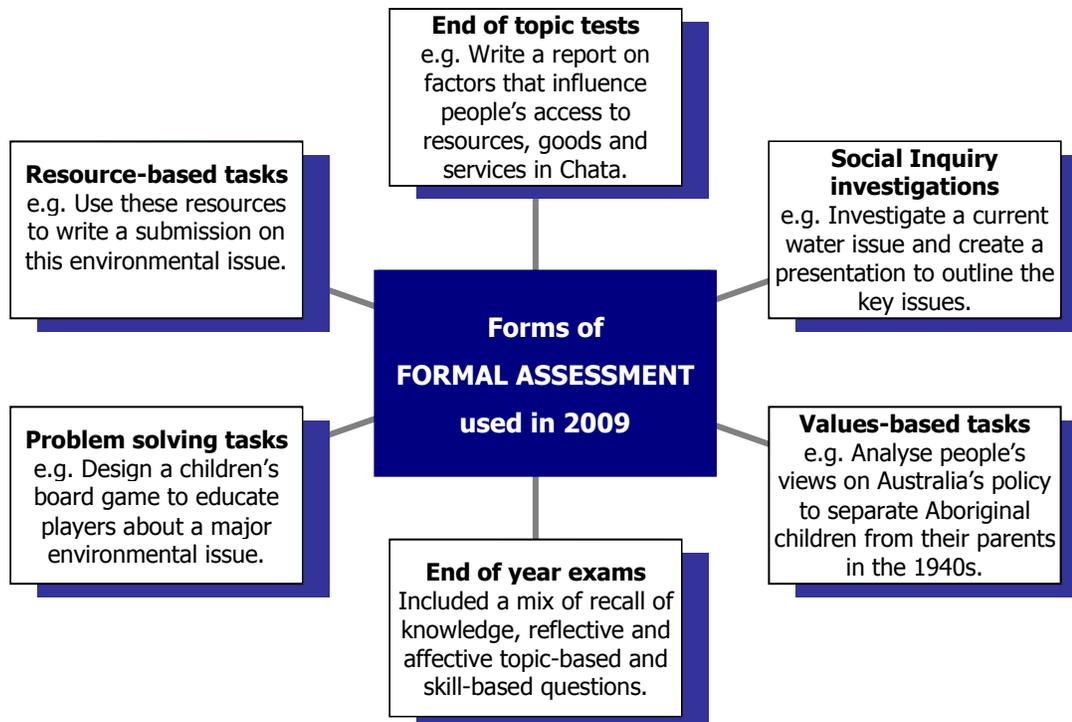
### 5.2.2 Assessment tasks

All five schools had moved away from a traditionally accepted practice of relying solely on end of topic recall of knowledge tests to formally assess learning, to using a variety of teacher-made tasks. The nature of every assessment task that was being used to formally assess learning in 2009 was identified and grouped to create the six categories shown in Figure 5.2<sup>28</sup>. Four of the categories (resource-based, social inquiry, values-based and problem solving) relate to reflective, affective and performance-based tasks, while the other two categories involve formal testing<sup>29</sup>. A selection of formal assessment tasks used by the participant teachers are shown in Figure 5.2.

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<sup>28</sup> Some tasks did span more than one category, for example, some problem solving tasks involved social inquiry and some exam questions involved resource interpretation or problem solving.

<sup>29</sup> While most tests and exams did include reflective and affective type tasks, a key aspect of testing is that students do not receive the same degree of verbal scaffolding as they do in non-test situations. Time pressures and the delay between when learning occurs and when testing is done have been shown to influence student achievement (Harlen, 2007). It is for these reason that tests and exams were categorised separately.



**Figure 5.2: Types of formal assessment tasks used by the participant schools in 2009**

Four of the five schools had end of year exams for year 9 and/or 10 students and all schools had at least one end of topic test in each year's programme. There was, however, a definite trend in all schools towards relying more heavily on non-test assessment tasks. More than 70% of each school's formal assessment programme was made up of non-test assessment tasks and over 90% of all assessment tasks assessed students' reflective, affective, and/or performance abilities, rather than their ability to remember facts.

The teachers were united in their opinion that varying the way they assessed students' learning not only enabled them to meet the diverse needs of their learners, but it also increased their students' motivation and engagement.

**Brook:** *"You've got to make learning fun. You've got to make them want to engage... My thinking was informed by the class that I teach. They're a very bright [and] creative class. I wanted to assess that conceptual understanding in a particular case study and if I'd just given them a resource sheet to read and write answers they would have finished it within a period and they would have been absolutely bored, so that was the thinking for [getting students to create a children's book on how being a camel jockey*

*impacts on children's rights]. It's a high interest topic and I will always pick a topic that I know will interest the students. If they're interested they will always work."*

Like Brook, all the other teachers were committed to developing a range of varied and interesting assessment tasks as they hoped that students at this level would consider assessment to be an integral and beneficial part of their learning.

### 5.2.3 Grading and feedback

When it came to grading students' work, all five social studies departments had adopted a standards-based assessment philosophy and were using marking rubrics consisting of teacher-made criteria (see marking schedule in Appendix I). Four of the schools used the same *Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit and Excellence* grade descriptors used within the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement [NCEA]*, while the other school used a four-tiered numeric scale (see Erin's comments in Figure 5.7).

All teachers reported that giving students the marking criteria before they started an assessment task helped students understand what the expected standard was and made marking easier.

**Brook:** *"[Having clear criteria] probably made the marking process quicker for me because there's the criteria that you're looking for."*

All teachers also reported that having clearly defined marking criteria helped to increase marking reliability and consistency between the teachers in their departments (see Darryl's comments in section 5.2.1). The criteria in the marking schedule in Appendix I also demonstrates that teachers were using verb stems with increasing degrees of complexity, from identify → explain, as well as quantitative measures, to differentiate students' levels of achievement.

Looking at the feedback that students received on their achievements, the evidence found on marked assessment tasks indicated that teachers generally ticked or highlighted the criteria that students had met and then added some sort of ego-oriented comments like "good try" or "well done". There was, however, evidence of

an emerging trend towards including more task-oriented feedback and advice for future learning.

**Grade: E**

**Teacher comment:** [Tim] you have carefully executed the requirements for a magazine article and made sure you followed the marking criteria – well done. There are areas of strengths in this assessment – particularly the set up of what NZ was like prior to European settlement and the reasons for the Treaty, as well as thinking / researching well on why [the Treaty] is important for us today. Perhaps the weakest aspect was [your response on] what the Treaty actually said – I would have liked it in your own words... Your problems were a tad thin – what misinterpretations? Why would this be an issue? You need to develop your skills by asking the searching questions more... Great extra features! Overall a very pleasing effort!

**Figure 5.3: Feedback comments written on a student’s formal assessment task by Alex.**

Alex has given the student in Figure 5.3 some specific feedback on the strengths of his work, as well as guidance on how to improve his performance in future research projects and general written work. Figure 5.4 illustrates how Darryl was also providing specific task-oriented feedback and how she also recognised the formative feedforward potential of the feedback she was providing.

**Grade: M**

**Teacher comment:** You do include relevant understanding and details succinctly to give an overall impression that you now comprehend the effects of cultural interaction in detail.

**Next steps:** Depth of explanation and all questions answered fully. More examples

**Darryl’s oral reflection on her written feedback**

**Darryl:** *"She needed more examples. That's why I use the words next steps coz it's often the next thing [to do]."*

**Figure 5.4: Feedback on a student’s formal assessment task at school D.**

Darryl actually went one step further than Alex as she required students to formally reflect on her feedback comments. Students had to identify what they had done well and then write some self-reflective comments, and next step learning goals, in a box under her formative feedback comments. This emerging practice was a result of knowledge that she had developed through a professional development programme on how assessment can be used to aid students’ learning. Darryl, Erin, and Brook did however all report that it was sometimes difficult to find time to write detailed

comments on students' work so there were times when they gave their classes this type of feedback orally.

Four of the teachers stored their students' marked assessment tasks with their self-assessment sheets, if used, in portfolios at school. Chris, Darryl, and Erin said that they felt they needed to give students more direction to look back through their portfolios before they commenced subsequent assessment tasks.

**Chris:** *"At the moment we store the [self-assessment sheets] but we're not actually building and it's likely that when you open [the student's portfolio] up at the end [of the year] the same issue is still going to be there, like time management, and we haven't actually addressed it."*

These teachers reported that getting students to review their portfolios would give them the opportunity to reflect on any issues that had been raised, act on the advice they had received, and work towards any goals they had set. Chris was also hoping to scaffold more self-assessment by introducing e-portfolios.

**Chris:** *"This is the dream. It will happen... We're going to set up e-portfolios... where they're going to log in... What were areas that they didn't do so well?... What did they do well?... Every time we do assessment they'll go back before they start and... somehow they'll show that they recognise they need to work on it and what they think they might be able to do this time and then record how it went. So there will be a bit more of a tracking system to it... Because it's computers they're happy to do it and it's personalised... so it will be a good way for parents to be able to see how things have changed and developed."*

Chris's commitment to implementing a robust e-portfolio system to record and track students' progress was indicative of each participant teacher's belief that valid and reliable grading, task-oriented feedback, and critical self-assessment can help improve students' learning.

#### 5.2.4 Teacher judgements

While this research did not set out to investigate the informal judgements that participant teachers were making during class, all teachers did mention some of the informal judgements they had made about their students' abilities, efforts, and motivation. Comments like Chris's below illustrate how teachers' ongoing informal

judgements can affect the formal judgements they make when grading students' work.

*Chris: "As a teacher I can look at this [assignment] and say ok I know this student - you can't compare this [assignment] to that [assignment] because this girl is way more academic than this boy, but this is the most this boy has produced all year. That much writing is brilliant! So he will get his effort credits<sup>30</sup>... academically he might have Achieved... and she's got an Excellence."*

Value-based statements found in students' social studies reports also demonstrated that teachers' informal judgements contributed to the ego-oriented feedback they included in formal school reports (see underlined words below).

[Kelly] is a very able and motivated student. She shows a mature understanding of the social studies issues studied and is able to express her ideas in a confident manner... She has developed sound independent work habits, using her time in class effectively and productively. (Part of a report written by Brook).

The reflective comments that the participant teachers made during our interviews, about their assessment and reporting practices, did indicate that many of them had begun to realise that their informal judgements influenced the formal judgements they made about their students' achievements.

The evidence in this section has shown that while all five schools operated structured programmes of formal assessment, it was the differences in structure that was the most significant characteristic. This variety, and in two cases multi-levelled nature of the teacher-made assessment tasks, and an increasing trend towards using reflective, affective and performance-based tasks, all contributed to the observed differences between the schools. There was, however, also some uniformity in the participant teachers' assessment practices as they were all using teacher-made CATs and standards-based grading systems. Most of them were also working towards finding ways of using their informal judgements and summative assessment information to inform future learning and teaching. The next section takes a more in-depth look at what the teachers were choosing to formally assess.

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<sup>30</sup> The credit gaining system that Chris is talking about is discussed in section 5.4.4.

### 5.3 What teachers formally assess

There was a lot of commonality between the five schools with regards to what teachers were formally assessing in social studies. As mentioned in section 5.2.2 a thorough analysis of each school's formal assessment tasks revealed that teachers had designed tasks to assess students' cognitive, reflective and affective abilities. Students were therefore usually required to demonstrate some sort of declarative and conditional knowledge of the topics, concepts, and skills they were learning about, and procedural knowledge of the skills they were developing. This section discusses the specific knowledge, skills, values, and Key Competencies<sup>31</sup> that students were expected to demonstrate. It also outlines changes that were occurring as teachers transitioned<sup>32</sup> from using *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum [SSiNZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997) to the new *New Zealand Curriculum [NZC]* (Ministry of Education, 2007b).

#### 5.3.1 Knowledge

All teachers had assessment tasks that were linked to social studies knowledge AOs.

*Alex: "The new assessment was more in line with the AO particularly for level 5 of the curriculum which is all about the response to [the Treaty]. The new task really tried to show what had been taught in the unit. We really wanted the kids to understand what the Treaty was all about. It is something that's really important. It is in the new curriculum. It's everywhere .... They don't know some of the key people involved and they certainly have very little concept about today. So that was the aim of the Treaty task."*

Part of the assessment task that Alex is talking about is shown in Figure 5.5. The first two instructions, in figure 5.5, have been derived from the specified AO. Students are required to demonstrate declarative and reflective knowledge about the Treaty of Waitangi in task 1, procedural<sup>33</sup>, conditional and reflective knowledge in constructing a magazine article and reflective and affective knowledge when commenting on the Treaty's relevance to people today. The skills aspect of assessment tasks like this will be discussed in section 5.3.2.

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<sup>31</sup> The MOE defines Key Competencies as "capabilities that young people need for growing, working, and participating in their communities and society" (2007b, p. 38).

<sup>32</sup> Teachers had had two years to revise their programmes to meet the new requirements of the NZC for 2010 when it which was due to become New Zealand's mandated curriculum.

<sup>33</sup> See explanations in footnotes 6-8 in chapter 2.

School A: Treaties	<b>NZC - Level 5 Achievement Objective:</b> <i>How the Treaty of Waitangi is responded to differently by people in different times and places</i>
<b>Task Instructions</b>	<b>Task Aim:</b> Students are to construct a magazine feature article about the Treaty of Waitangi
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 You are a journalist for a monthly news magazine (like TIME). Your editor has asked you to research the following questions and write a news feature article about the Treaty of Waitangi.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What was the background to the TOW? <i>What was early NZ like prior to European settlement? Why did a Treaty between NZ Maori &amp; Britain become necessary?</i></li> <li>b) What are the main terms of the TOW? <i>What did the Treaty propose for the Maori &amp; Europeans? (What did the preamble, and three articles actually say?)</i></li> <li>c) What were the problems associated with the Treaty and why were there differing responses to it?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2 OPINION PIECE: Why is the Treaty of Waitangi still an important document for people in NZ today?</li> <li>3 COMMUNICATION: <b>Format &amp; Style</b> aspects to be included:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A front cover for the magazine which includes a visual appropriate to your story.</li> <li>b) Relevant information on the cover – cost, date, barcode, title of the magazine etc...</li> <li>c) Photos, visuals (maps) throughout article.</li> <li>d) All questions covered (task 1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>e) Extra Features integrated into the article (see task 4)</li> </ol> <p>Examples of appropriate <b>style</b> include: an interesting introduction to the story, dramatic headlines, clear introduction and conclusion etc.</p> <p>Examples of appropriate <b>format</b> include: prominent headlines, use of 'breakout' boxes, use of columns, organised and effective layout, suitable visuals with captions - such as maps, photographs, diagrams, etc.</p> </li> </ol>

**Figure 5.5: Assessing knowledge related to a specific social studies AO at School A.**

Alex had created this assessment task to assess knowledge related to a new AO in the NZC. He, along with Brook and Chris, had also developed other knowledge-based assessment tasks that required students to transfer knowledge gained in one context to another situation.

**Brook:** *"I wanted to assess that Conceptual Understanding<sup>34</sup> in a particular case study... They had knowledge of Child Labour. They had knowledge of the conventions of the rights of the child but they had no knowledge of this particular case study... We'd looked at examples of rights that children have/don't have... We looked at a mini case study on the surgical instrument industry in Pakistan because that's of really high interest... So then they've... got an understanding of why children work because of the economic pressures of parents and that poverty cycle. So then the idea is to test that Conceptual Understanding in a totally different case study to see if they can link it."*

<sup>34</sup> In this instance Conceptual Understandings are aspects of knowledge that students develop about concepts like human rights, culture or economic sustainability. These concepts are embedded in, or associated with, the social studies AOs.

These comments by Brook, and Chris's comments in Figure 5.7, reveal that they were basing their assessment tasks on the concepts embedded in the social studies AOs as a way of scaffolding the transfer of knowledge. Chris was also trialing a more holistic approach to assessing knowledge as some of her new assessment tasks were aligned to the Conceptual Strands<sup>35</sup> rather than specific AOs.

**Chris:** *"So we have tried to make sure that we've hit the [four conceptual strands]. I didn't go into the individual AOs. I went to those key areas<sup>36</sup> that are in the front of the [NZC] because I remember when the curriculum came out they said: "Don't get hung up on the back bit (the AO pages)." So we've very much focussed on that front bit. So I haven't actually even gone through these nine (referring to the level 5 AOs) and started to go oh yes we've done this one or that one. What I did was say was ok [this assessment] covers Place and Environment (Appendix I). This one covers the Identity and Culture..."*

Chris, Alex, and Brook reported that they were so committed to adopting a concept-based approach to teaching social studies that they were actively trying to ensure that all their new assessment tasks gave students the opportunity to demonstrate in-depth transferable knowledge of key social studies concepts. They argued that a concept-based approach would lead to better outcomes for their students as it would enable them to use the knowledge they developed during years 9 and 10 to inform their future learning. While these teachers said they were assessing students' conceptual understandings, some of their marking rubrics did contain criteria that referred to topic specific declarative knowledge rather than conceptual knowledge.

### 5.3.2 Skills and Key Competencies

Other aspects of the curriculum that the participant teachers said they needed to assess were students' skills and Key Competencies<sup>37</sup>. Many of the specifications in the formal assessment tasks and associated marking schedules specified skills that

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<sup>35</sup> There are four Conceptual Strands for the Social Sciences in the *NZC*: Identity, Culture and Organisation, Place and Environment, Continuity and Change, and The Economic World (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 30).

<sup>36</sup> Chris was referring to the social sciences' learning area statement, the Key Competencies, and the Values (Ministry of Education, 2007b).

<sup>37</sup> The five Key Competencies that students are expected to develop are: Thinking; Using language, symbols and texts; Managing self; Relating to others; and Participating and contributing (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 38).

students needed to use or demonstrate (Figure 5.5 and Appendix I). Some of these skills were general like writing, research, and analysis, while others, like conducting a social inquiry<sup>38</sup> and mapping, are considered to be specialist social sciences' skills. Every teacher said that students needed to master these sorts of skills if they wanted to study social sciences' subjects in years 11-13.

***Alex:** "We start them at year 9 how to plan [a social inquiry project] properly because both history and geography use those skills and that's basically what we're catering for. Being able to write decent paragraphs. Being able to research appropriately - the inquiry, values and perceptions. All those are key things. [They] are what we are trying to bring in as well as other skills that they can transfer across."*

At the time of this research, Alex, Brook and Chris were trialing assessment tasks that complied with the *NZC*; so they were considering the place of the five Key Competencies in their teaching and assessment programmes. While they all believed that it was important to embed the Key Competencies into their teaching programmes, Chris was also trying to work out how she could formally assess them. Her comments below, and the final two learning outcome criteria in her marking rubric in Appendix I, highlight one way she felt she could assess the Key Competencies within a social inquiry assessment task.

***Chris:** "I don't think you should report on them as so and so can do **Managing self** at an excellence level... I don't think you can do that because [students] all start at completely different levels, but here (pointing to the criteria in the marking schedule in Appendix I) there's a signpost. This is what you must be able to do to get that Competency and it's all part of the workbook that they fill out. Those S.M.A.R.T.<sup>39</sup> goals are there. It's an activity that they do and it's not always... that it's done ... so much better than someone else. It's almost sometimes just the fact that they've gone through those steps and then can relate back to them... I know one of the big issues I had to start with was how could you assess a Key Competency. I don't think you really should, but I think you can in this kind of way because it's quite structured for them to see and it's good for them to be able to go ok - "Have I met that?" (marking criteria in Appendix I) Coz the criteria is nice and structured for them."*

Although Chris stated that she did not think she should formally rank students' levels of competency, her marking criteria statements show that she was in fact doing this when determining their holistic grades.

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<sup>38</sup> "A social inquiry is an integrated process for examining social issues, ideas, and themes" (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 2).

<sup>39</sup> S.M.A.R.T. = **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime bound goals

Alex was also embedding references to the Key Competencies in some of his new assessment tasks.

*Alex: "For year 10 there's more of Key Competency type [assessment] tasks coming through. I designed this [assessment] to fit in with the **Thinking** Key Competency... I did a whole [booklet] with the assessment for learning, thinking about thinking—metacognition, and we brought in De Bono to help do that....They were given charts to fill in about bits and pieces and taught how to think critically about these issues,"*

Like Chris and Brook, Alex appeared to be focused mostly on formally assessing students' 'Thinking' and 'Managing Self' Key Competencies, as well as their ability to use a variety of technological and language tools.

The comments made by all five participant teachers suggest that they felt that assessing students' skills and/or Key Competencies were definitely critical aspects of their formal assessment programmes, so too was assessing students' ability to explore and analyse values.

### 5.3.3 Values

Every teacher had at least one formal assessment event where the main focus was on getting students to demonstrate their affective knowledge through exploring and analysing people's values on some type of social issue. Figure 5.6 illustrates one of the values-based assessment tasks used at school B.

School B: Child Labour	A Year 10 Values Exploration Assessment
<b>Task Instructions</b>	<p><b>Task Aim:</b> Students are to explore and analyse people's values on banning the use of child labour in the carpet industry</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain what each of the following <b>people's values position</b> on banning the use of child labour in the carpet industry is and explain <b>why</b> they hold that values position. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carpet workshop owner</li> <li>Child Labourer</li> <li>Parent of a child Labourer</li> <li>Human rights Campaigner</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>Use a social studies concept (rights, family, laws, change, needs, tradition) in each explanation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Describe <b>4 different</b> consequences of banning the use of child labour in the carpet industry. You must identify an individual, group or society for each consequence and use a social studies concept in each response.</li> </ol>

**Figure 5.6: A formal assessment task to assess students' ability to explore and analyse values at school B**

Most values specific assessment tasks, like the one in Figure 5.6, contained values clarification activities. Chris's comments below, however, suggest that she was beginning to focus on getting students to demonstrate more critical values analysis.

***Chris:** "...there's generally two parts to each assessment. So the second part is the real: Do you understand? ...so that's that whole idea of empathy and understanding... how life experience will affect someone...**why people view things differently.** So the second part of it is the actual: Do you get it?"*

When teachers were asked why they were assessing students' ability to explore and analyse values, the common response was that Values Exploration was one of the three Process AOs in *SSiNZC* that they had been required to assess<sup>40</sup>. Brook added that she felt that values were still an integral part of learning in social studies as any investigation of a social issue should involve some sort of values analysis.

***Brook:** "The whole social inquiry process there's sort of values, social decision making and conceptual understanding... so much of the new part of the new curriculum is social studies."*

Along with Darryl and Erin, Brook also mentioned that three of the current *NCEA* social studies Achievement Standards [AS]<sup>41</sup> required students to explore and analyse values. These three teachers all indicated that they firmly believed that students needed to learn how to complete values-based assessment tasks in years 9 and 10.

The evidence in this section has highlighted three aspects of the curriculum that all participant teachers were formally assessing—knowledge, skills, and values. It was common practice for the participants to be assessing students' declarative and reflective knowledge of topics linked to specific curriculum AOs. They also thought it was vital to be assessing students' reflective and affective skills. There was however an emerging trend of assessing transferable knowledge by assessing social studies Conceptual Understandings and the Key Competencies. While this section has mentioned some factors that have influenced these teachers' approaches to assessment, the next section takes a more in-depth look at the factors that have had the most significant influence of their assessment practices.

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<sup>40</sup> The other two Processes were Inquiry and Social Decision Making. Teachers had been expected to "show the progress of individual students, within any two-year period, in relation to achievement objectives of all three processes" (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 25).

<sup>41</sup> In 2009 the social studies AS were being updated to align the new AOs in the *NZC*.

## **5.4 Factors that influence assessment practice**

This research has identified five factors that have had the most significant influence on the participant teachers' approaches to assessment. They are: their personal views on the purpose of assessment, school assessment policies and procedures, changes to NZ's national curriculum, assessment practices in years 11 – 13, and teachers' professional support networks.

### **5.4.1 Personal philosophy**

All the participant teachers expressed clear views on the purpose of assessment. The square boxes at the top of Figure 5.7, and the associated quotes, illustrate the range of views that teachers expressed during interviews. Grey shading has been added to three boxes to highlight commonly held views. This shading shows that all five teachers reported that their formal assessment programmes allowed them to discover what knowledge their students were constructing, aided learning, and helped students develop skills and knowledge needed for future learning in years 11-13. Alex, Chris, and Erin also emphasized that the assessment data they collected informed their future planning and teaching. While every teacher was able to clearly articulate their personal views on the purpose of assessment, the next section outlines how the contexts in which they were working significantly influenced their formal assessment practices.

### **5.4.2 School-based policies and procedures**

As stated in section 4.3, the case study schools were of varied typologies. Although all five schools had policies which aimed to foster student achievement, it was the differences in the culture, size, personnel, class structure, and school-wide assessment policies themselves that combined to cause distinct differences in the participant teachers' assessment practices.

All five schools had some form of streaming<sup>42</sup> at years 9 and 10. Schools A, C, and E

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<sup>42</sup> Streaming = grouping students in classes according to their academic ability

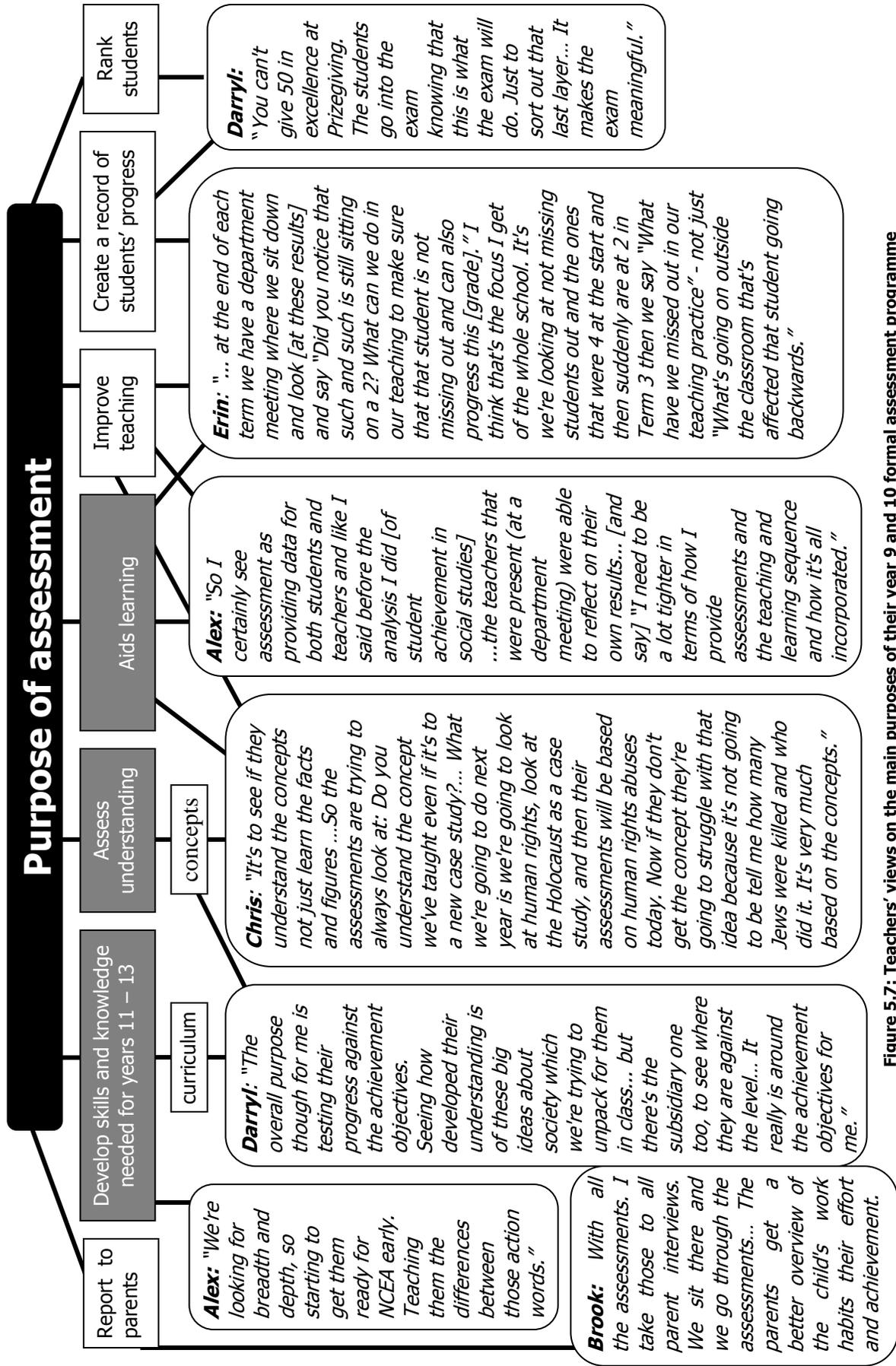


Figure 5.7: Teachers' views on the main purposes of their year 9 and 10 formal assessment programme

streamed the full year group, while schools B and D just placed the bottom and/or top groups of students in remedial and/or extension classes. All of the teachers reported that these streaming policies played a major role in influencing how they structured their assessment programmes. Alex and Erin stated that streaming was one of the reasons behind them implementing multi-levelled CATs at their schools. Brook and Chris said that streaming allowed teachers at their schools to modify assessment tasks to meet the needs of their remedial students, and Darryl said that exams in year 9 were also used to identify the top students so they could be placed in the year 10 extension classes.

School D had policies which emphasized the need for teachers to promote academic excellence at all levels to continue their stated tradition of academic success. As reported in section 5.3.1, Darryl stated that she had to follow some highly prescriptive assessment procedures which involved having to submit a sample of completed CATs to her Head of Department (HoD) for formal moderation<sup>43</sup>.

***Darryl:** "We need to have some sort of parity between what's going on in one classroom and what's going on in another otherwise it's not fair. That's why we have internal moderation."*

Darryl's comments here, and in section 5.3.1, indicate that she believed that her school's assessment policies and procedures fostered equality for students by enhancing the validity and reliability of teachers' assessment practices within such a large department of diversely experienced teachers.

The other four schools had smaller social studies departments with fewer teachers to manage. As reported earlier, School E's department had a large number of new and inexperienced teachers in 2009 so the HoD had changed the teaching sequence to allow everyone to assess the same units at the same time. Erin stated that the HoD had structured the course this way to enable the two more experienced teachers to mentor their less experienced colleagues.

***Erin:** "...like I said we're all new here apart from... so [we] work together for year 10 and just pool our resources."*

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<sup>43</sup> Every teacher in Darryl's department had a selection of their students' CATs re-marked by the HOD to ensure there was some form of grading consistency between teachers.

Brook stated that having a small number of teachers and a supportive senior manager had allowed the HoD at her school to make changes to the way she allocated classes. Brook was one of three teachers covering the six year 10 social studies classes in 2009 and she was expecting to teach this same year level again in 2010.

***Brook:** "There's only three teachers teaching year 10... I'm a firm believer you... become a specialist, an expert in one level and we do two years teaching year 9 and then two years teaching year 10... and then part of the logistics of being able to get your year 10 teachers together for a discussion is so much easier when you've only got to get three people... and it works out quite well as [Ashley], [Taylor] and I are upstairs [teaching] side by side."*

Changing the teaching sequence and clustering teachers together appeared to be fostering collaborative assessment practices and the development of subject expertise at schools A, B, and E.

The school-based assessment policy that appeared to have had the most significant effect on recent assessment practices was, however, found at school A. Alex outlined how his school required him to report students' achievement against a nine-tiered assessment profile that had been created by the senior management team to more accurately convey the broad range of student achievement at the school. Figure 5.8 shows how the grades that students' gained in social studies CATs aligned to the school's assessment profile.

Social studies CATs	Grades	Position on school-wide scale
Foundation (F) CAT	F Achieved	1
	F Merit	2
	F Excellence	3
Core (C) CAT	C Achieved	4
	C Merit	5
	C Excellence	6
Extension (E) CAT	E Achieved	7
	E Merit	8
	E Excellence	9

**Figure 5.8: How the social studies CAT grades at school A align with the school's nine-tiered assessment system**

Alex felt that this new assessment system allowed him to create assessment tasks that better met the diverse needs of his students. He also stated that it made it easier for him to communicate to parents the diversity of students' achievements. He had a poster of the grading scale in Figure 5.8, so he could show parents that an Extension Excellence demonstrated a higher level of achievement than a Foundation Excellence. He did, however, state that he had struggled to align his social studies teaching and assessment programme to this new nine-tiered assessment system because there was not always a fluid progression between the social studies AOs from one level to the next.

**Alex:** *"We're a school that works with assessment for learning... With the new curriculum coming in the school decided that we wanted to bring our assessment in line with the [curriculum] levels... It's been a heck of lot of work because for social studies it wasn't as easy adapting to the new curriculum as say science and maths because as you would know moving from level 3 of the curriculum to level 4 to level 5... the statements change. So it wasn't a nice rubric that we could adapt and say- list this, describe this, explain this... We had this wow we can't do that as easily! For us to be able adapt to this new system we actually need[ed] to be coming up with assessments that prescribe to that achievement objective within the level, which means essentially different assessments under the same context... The unit of work we have matched up [with the AO]. The assessments [are] kind of very holistic viewpoints to try to attach those [AOs] in. But they're certainly not 100% at the stage. It's been a lot of work and it's obviously a work in progress."*

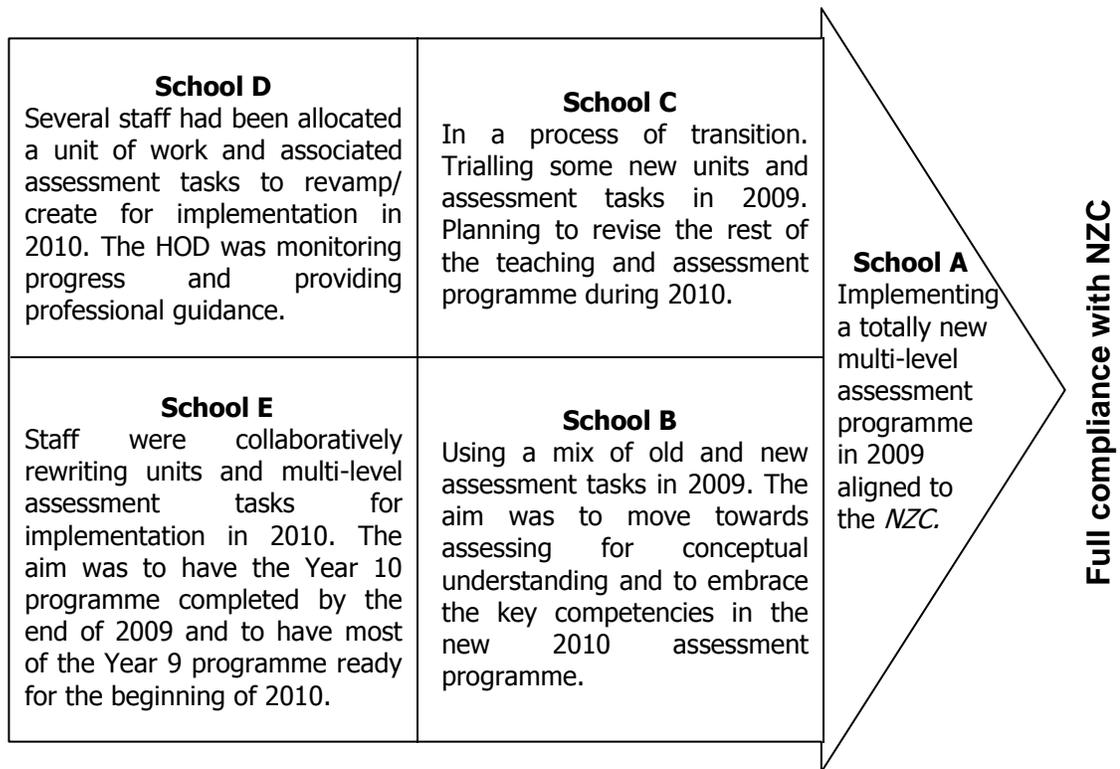
While Alex recognised that some of his assessment tasks still needed to be refined to create stronger links to multiple levels of AOs from the *NZC*, he did feel that it was worth doing as he thought his school's new assessment system supported the 'assessment for learning' philosophy he valued.

The comments reported in this section demonstrate that school-based policies significantly influenced the participant teachers' assessment practices. The introduction of a new national curriculum was also having an impact too.

### 5.4.3 National curriculum

The impending shift to reporting students' achievement against the *NZC* in 2010 meant that, at the time of this research, a key focus for the participant teachers was updating their year 9 and 10 teaching and assessment programmes. Figure 5.9 shows

the progress that each school's social studies department had made by the middle of Term 4, 2009.



**Figure 5.9: Progress reported in 2009 towards aligning year 9 and 10 social studies programmes with the NZC.**

While school A appears to have made the most progress, Alex reported that the impetus to implement a completely remodeled assessment programme in 2009 was really a result of the HoD wanting to comply with her school's new assessment policy. Although the teachers at the other schools reported that they had started writing new assessment tasks, many of their comments suggested that their primary focus was on ensuring that teaching programmes aligned with the new social studies AOs and embedded the values, Key Competencies and a social inquiry approach to learning; rather than having assessment tasks fully constructed.

#### 5.4.4 Experiences in years 11-13 ('trickle down' effects)

Another factor that all five participant teachers said influenced their assessment practices during years 9 and 10 was their experiences of assessing learning in years

11 - 13. All five teachers taught at least one year 11 - 13 social sciences subject and everyone had had at least five years' experience of assessing students' achievements against NCEA Achievement Standards. The influence of working in this standards-based assessment system was reflected in the teachers using a range of NCEA related processes in years 9 and 10, such as, four-point grading scales and marking rubrics with clearly defined criteria.

**Erin:** *"I stick to the NCEA type policy [when marking]... R - they've got a reason, D - they've described, I - they've just identified. Then they can see that they've identified, they haven't described and that's why it's gone from a merit to an achieved."*

**Brook:** *"I wanted to explain to them how NCEA works... If you get two questions where you get excellence and one where you get achieved [then] you get achieved overall. I wanted them to learn that."*

Four of the schools operated credit gaining systems in their year 9 and 10 programmes, similar to the one described by Chris (below), where students were awarded credits for effort and/or academic achievement throughout the year.

**Chris:** *"We also run a system in the junior school... which is like a credit gaining system. It's based along the same lines as NCEA as all the core subjects have 24 credits to give out... We have split it so there are effort and academic credits... so you can have someone who's extremely limited as long as they keep trying the whole time you can give them [effort] credits... so when they hit NCEA [they know] what you do."*

While every system was different, the motivational principles on which they were based were the same.

Erin's comments above also highlight that past experience of teaching year 11-13 social studies had influenced his marking practice. He also stated that...

**Erin:** *"Seeing if students have that conceptual understanding which they talk about at senior social studies level... they need to show me that they understand these particular key ideas or words... so I think it has influenced [my practice] in being more aware of the concepts and key ideas coming through social studies."*

Erin's comments here epitomize statements made by the three participant teachers who had taught NCEA social studies courses as they all stated that the knowledge they had gained about the importance of assessing students' knowledge of social studies concepts and perspectives was now influencing their assessment practices in years 9 and 10.

#### 5.4.5 Professional support networks

All five teachers reported that the support they received from other social studies teachers at their school and in the wider teaching community, combined with the knowledge they had gained from social studies specific websites, courses and resources, were invaluable in informing their assessment practices in years 9 and 10. All the participant teachers had attended social studies specific courses<sup>44</sup> in the past five years. Brook and Darryl emphasized that going to NZ's national combined Social Sciences Conferences [SocCon] had given them excellent insight into new developments in social studies education.

**Darryl:** *"Having gone to SocCon last time I've kind of got my head around the direction that it's all going in but I wouldn't think that everyone in the department has..."*

All five teachers reported that they used resources that they had downloaded through the social sciences community link on the MOE's TKI website<sup>45</sup> and some of them had read sections of the *Effective Pedagogy in Social Sciences / Tikanga a iwi. Best Evidence Synthesis [BES]* (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008) as well as some of the *Building Conceptual Understanding in the Social Sciences [BCUSS]* books (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). They did, however, all say that they felt they needed more time to read and absorb the messages in these resources and that they had received very little specific guidance about how to assess learning in years 9 and 10.

When asked whether they had ever used the *NZ curriculum Exemplars for Social Studies [Exemplars]* (Ministry of Education, 2004) to inform their assessment practices, the general response was no.

**Alex:** *"We've got them. They're in there. I don't use them."*

**Chris:** *"I'll have to say no because I have no idea what you're talking about. What ones? (additional prompt given). Oh I went to something about that years ago. Yes they showed us a whole lot of student work but I found it was very much primary*

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<sup>44</sup> Courses included MOE funded professional development, Post Primary Teachers' Association [PPTA] curriculum workshops, NCEA training days, regional social studies workshops, and sessions offered by private providers.

<sup>45</sup> <http://ssol.tki.org.nz>

*school oriented... So no I have seen them but I haven't used [them]... A lot of work would have gone into those but sadly people have not used them to their potential."*

The comments above illustrate that the participant teachers either did not know how to use the *Exemplars*, or they felt they were not relevant to their current practice.

The data in this section has highlighted that each participant teacher's assessment practices were influenced by a combination of their personal views on assessment, their school's assessment policies, national curriculum requirements, their experiences in assessing learning in years 11-13, and their professional support networks.

## **5.5 Issues for teachers**

The previous sections have included references to a range of issues that the participant teachers said they faced when trying to implement valid, reliable and manageable assessment programmes. Three issues that the teachers particularly emphasized during interviews were: (i) how to ensure consistency between teachers, (ii) how to transparently report students' progress in an honest and informative manner, and (iii) how to implement change in a manageable way.

### **5.5.1 Consistency between teachers**

One of the biggest assessment-related issues that the participant teachers identified was how to ensure consistency between teachers both in terms of administering assessment tasks and with marking.

***Erin:** "The assessment [tasks] - the conditions need to be the same for all classes. But they're not always the same. I just think that if you're going to assess students then you should all be doing it the same."*

Brook, Darryl, and Erin also expressed frustration with having to spend so much time formally assessing students' progress in years 9 and 10 as marking was time consuming and took up substantial portions of their non-teaching time. All five teachers did, however, state that using CATs with clearly defined marking criteria was a way of aiding consistency between teachers and advancing better outcomes for students. Darryl also firmly believed that the moderation system used in her

department (see section 5.4.2) helped to increase the reliability of teachers' judgements.

### 5.5.2 Transparent reporting systems

All five teachers shared the view that reporting systems needed to accurately communicate students' achievements in social studies. Brook and Chris had issues with the reporting systems at their schools. Brook said that her school's reports did not contain enough specific detail on students' achievements, while Chris felt that the variety of ranking scales found on their social studies reports just confused parents. Both teachers said they were looking at making changes for 2010.

**Brook:** *"I'm working with my [department] on how we can write more effective informative report comments and especially now with the Key Competencies."*

In contrast, Darryl and Erin were generally happy with the structure of their current reports.

**Erin:** *"... It's the first school I've been at where it says: "The year level is taught at this, this class is taught at this level, and such and such is achieving at... Down the bottom after the comment... it has [term by term] progression of levels, whether or not [the student] went up or down... which I think is good because I've never seen a report like that where they actually have the progression on the bottom."*

Erin's comments above indicate that he was particularly impressed that his current school generated reports which transparently outlined students' progress throughout the entire year. Alex was hopeful that his school's new nine-tiered assessment profile would help teachers convey more detailed information about students' progress in their end of year reports. The manageability and transparency of his school's 17 page reports had yet to be tested.

### 5.5.3 Implementing change

When it came to reflecting on any issues they were having with aligning their social studies assessment programmes with the *NZC*, most teachers' concerns related to workload, lack of professional guidance, tensions between school policy and the *NZC*, and how to implement an 'assessment for learning' philosophy.

As mentioned in section 5.4.5, all teachers were concerned about the limited professional guidance they had received on how to assess learning in social studies. While they had all accessed a range of MOE-funded social studies resources and attended a social studies course or conference over the last five years, they felt that these resources and experiences had given them more knowledge on effective pedagogy rather than **how** to implement effective assessment. These teachers were also quick to point out that they never had enough time for professional development (PD) and reflection, which was especially concerning at a time when they were trying to revise their programmes to comply with the soon to be mandated *NZC*.

***Darryl:** "We don't get enough time for PD on how we're going to approach all this... We've had PD on Conceptual Understanding but not enough..."*

All five teachers said they wanted to promote 'assessment for learning' practices by promoting self-assessment and reflective thinking, however, as reported in section 5.2.3 they were still working out how to do this. Erin and Darryl also had issues with how they could incorporate their informal judgements and observations into their formal assessment systems.

***Erin:** "When they're doing a task you are walking around and sometimes we've been told we could use [those observations] as an assessment tool if they are working in groups... it works better for some students. Like a lot of Maori students prefer to work together. It's not a formal way of assessing here but we've been told that we could use [our observations]. But I haven't yet... we've discussed that as a staff during a staff meeting but no one really came up with a way that we could [formally record our observations in] a way that all teachers were comfortable [with]... So it's just a diagnostic and formative thing for me at the moment."*

Alex was also having a hard time implementing change in a manageable and effective manner (see section 5.4.2), as he was not only having to update his programme to comply with the *NZC*, but he was also having to conform to his school's new assessment policy. Finding a way to comply with these policies had caused him a lot of angst and extra work.

Like Alex, the other four participant teachers raised a range of issues related to assessing learning in years 9 and 10. The most prominent issues being how to ensure that: (i) their formal judgements were consistent with their colleagues, (ii) they

reported students' achievements accurately, and (iii) they could implement change in a manageable way.

## **5.6 Summary**

The results reported in this chapter have outlined the characteristics of the formal year 9 and 10 social studies assessment programmes at the five case study schools. All five schools had some form of structured programme of formal assessment made up of a variety of teacher-made CATs. The structure of each school's formal assessment programme was most strongly influenced by school policy, national curriculum requirements, and teachers' experiences of assessing learning in years 11-13. These factors contributed to the development of a totally prescribed assessment programme at school D, the multi-levelled assessment structures found at schools A and E, and the standards-based grading systems used in all five schools. There was an established practice of assessing students' knowledge, skills, and values through a variety of cognitive, reflective, affective, and performance-based tasks, and a prevalence of non-test assessment tasks over end of topic tests. Where teachers had had experience of teaching social studies in years 11-13, or they had moved to assessing learning against the *NZC*, there was an emerging practice of assessing students' knowledge of key social studies concepts and Key Competencies. While all five teachers faced challenges in constructing and implementing robust programmes of formal assessment, the biggest issues that they emphasized were (i) how to gain access to the professional guidance they needed to ensure they engaged in assessment practices that transparently captured and reported students' progress in an honest and informative manner, and (ii) how to ensure their workloads remained manageable as they developed ways to implement an 'assessment for learning' philosophy, and address tensions between their school's policies, the *NZC*, and their own personal philosophies.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Discussion

*"Evidence in multicase studies will not win over every critic, but it does need to be persuasive to critical friends. The reader should have the opportunity to learn the reasons behind each Assertion"*  
(Stake, 2006, p. 41).

### 6.1 Introduction

Formal assessment events were once considered to be disconnected endpoints to learning, however changing views on how learning occurs has seen the emergence of new perspectives on assessment (James, 2006). When learning is viewed from a sociocultural perspective, it is said to be an active and socially constructed process that accounts for a range of social, cultural and situated factors. Educators, who hold this theoretical perspective often, consider assessment to be an integral part of the learning process that has the potential to positively or negatively influence students' learning. Extensive classroom-based research has suggested that assessment that is varied, well aligned, methodologically valid, and has clearly articulated criteria for success, has the greatest potential to positively influence learning and foster better outcomes for students (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Harlen, 2007; Moss, 2008). Assessment from this perspective is therefore considered to be a dynamic socially constructed process that is most effective when teachers and students actively use the assessment information they gather to inform future learning and teaching.

Effective pedagogy in social studies aligns closely with sociocultural theory (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008). Similarly the principles of 'assessment for learning' are grounded in sociocultural theory (Gipps, 2002; Moss, 2008). As such, it is pertinent to examine New Zealand [NZ] teachers' assessment practices from a sociocultural perspective.

Recent NZ-based research by ERO has reported that NZ teachers are using ineffective assessment practices and collecting superficial information about students' achievement in social studies (2006; 2007b). As these views are based on research that has predominantly been conducted in pre-secondary contexts where social studies is generally taught as an integrated subject by generalist teachers, there appears a need for more research on assessment practices in a secondary school context.

The current study, therefore, set out to gain some insight into teachers' assessment practices in NZ year 9 and 10 social studies courses by investigating the following research questions:

- *What approaches do teachers use to formally assess learning in year 9 and 10 social studies?*
- *What aspects of social studies and the wider New Zealand curriculum do teachers formally assess?*
- *How do teachers' formal assessment practices in social studies align with the principles of 'assessment for learning'?*
- *What factors influence teachers' abilities to engage in effective assessment practices?*

The discussion in this chapter considers each of these research questions in turn and discusses the key findings with reference to the literature reported in chapter two.

## **6.2 Approaches used to formally assess learning**

The current study found that teachers used a varied range of approaches to assess learning in social studies that align with the principles of effective assessment reported in chapter two. These approaches were: (i) engaging in transparent and collaborative assessment processes, (ii) aligning formal assessment tasks to important outcomes and students' prior experiences, (iii) basing judgements about students' learning on multiple assessment events, and (iv) providing for student diversity.

### 6.2.1 Transparent and collaborative assessment processes

Teachers in this study were actively promoting open, collaborative, and learning-oriented approaches to assessment. These approaches are reflective of research demonstrating that fostering active participation from both students and teachers, and dual responsibility for the outcomes of learning, are consistent with a sociocultural perspective of learning (ARG, 2006; Weeden et al., 2002). Teachers spoke of working collaboratively with colleagues to construct and mark formal assessment tasks. They were particularly concerned that their judgements and assessment processes were reliable. Teachers also showed a real commitment to valuing social aspects of students' learning by fostering collaborative partnerships with, and between, students through encouraging positive interdependence, individual accountability, and self-regulation in group assessment tasks (Appendix I) and by formally scaffolding self- and peer-assessment.

The current study also found that teachers were committed to ensuring that students gained a shared understanding of what they were required to do in assessment tasks and what the outcomes for success were. The teachers identified that they verbally reiterated written instructions and made sure that students were given the marking criteria before they commenced an assessment task. The teachers also claimed that they kept students informed of their progress through regular oral and written feedback. The written comments on students' assignments not only tend to support the teachers' claims, but also indicate that these teachers were generally providing students with task- and/or process-oriented feedback.

Three of the case study teachers—Brooke, Chris, and Darryl—expected students to complete reflective self-assessment activities during formal assessment events, with Darryl also encouraging students to record next step learning goals at the bottom of their assessment feedback sheets. Most teachers stored students' completed assessment tasks and feedback sheets in portfolios which were used throughout the year to check and report on students' progress. Transparent monitoring of students' progress and honest self-assessment have both been shown to have a positive influence on learning (Black et al., 2003). These findings are consistent with previous

research which has shown that providing students with clearly articulated criteria for success, task- and process-oriented feedback, and opportunities for critical reflection, enhances learning and raises student achievement, particularly when students' strengths and weaknesses are identified and then actively acknowledged in future teaching and learning (Black & William, 1998b; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Torrance, 2007).

Perhaps one of the best examples, from the results in chapter five, that illustrates how the case study teachers were engaging students in transparent, collaborative, learning-oriented assessment practices is provided by Erin:

***Erin:** "My class... They've seen their [past grades]... so they can choose whether they want to continue at level 4 and try and get [an excellence] or start on the level 5 and see where they fit on the level 5 [scale]."*

Erin's efforts to support students to reflect on past performances and to identify their strengths and weakness, demonstrates how teachers can use their formal assessment programme to empower students to make informed decisions for their future learning.

### 6.2.2 Aligning assessment with important outcomes and experiences

The current study found that all five teachers appeared to be making a genuine effort to ensure that their formal assessment tasks not only aligned with curriculum concepts, but also aligned with students' prior knowledge and experiences. This approach corresponds with Aitken and Sinnema's (2008) view that effective assessment in social studies is clearly aligned with the learning programme and students' experiences too. The wider literature provides additional evidence that constructively aligned teaching, learning, and assessment leads to more effective learning and better outcomes for students (Biggs, 2003; Black & William, 1998a; Harlen, 2007; Miller et al., 2009).

Teachers in this study were also using a high proportion of socially collaborative performance-based assessment tasks that were, in most cases, seamlessly integrated into the teaching and learning programme. They had also developed several formal

assessment tasks that aligned with social components of the *New Zealand Curriculum [NZC]* (Ministry of Education, 2007b), such as, the Key Competencies, the social inquiry process, and the values (to be discussed in section 6.3). Aitken and Sinnema (2008), also report that previous research has shown that robust social, cognitive, and constructive alignment helps to scaffold better outcomes for students through: (i) identifying and addressing students' misconceptions, (ii) fostering social construction, and (iii) connecting learning to students' prior experiences and interests.

### 6.2.3 Multiple assessment events

All teachers had created programmes that had multiple assessment points where students' learning was formally judged through a variety of assessment tasks. Previous research has reported that basing formal judgements about students' progress on a variety of formal and informal assessment events not only allows teachers to assess different social and cultural attributes, but also demonstrates that teachers understand that students learn in different ways and at different speeds (Black et al., 2003; Harlen, 2007). Having multiple assessment events has also been shown to increase the validity and reliability of teachers' judgements about students' achievements (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Wood & Milligan, 2010).

Interestingly the current study also appeared to find evidence that teachers' formal judgements were influenced by their general observations and informal evaluations of students' contributions during group work and classroom discussions. Chris's comments about some of the judgements she made when formally grading students' work demonstrate how prior knowledge of students' work habits and abilities can influence teachers' formal judgements. This finding is not surprising given that the literature suggests that within standards-based assessment systems there is often a subjective component to teachers' judgements (James, 2006; Moss, 2008). While subjective judgements based on a variety of evidence can provide additional insight into a student's social, cultural, and academic abilities, teachers need to consciously protect the validity and reliability of their judgements by ensuring that their judgements are based on robust evidence.

#### 6.2.4 Catering for student diversity

The teachers in the current study were catering for students' diverse learning needs by using a varied range of knowledge-based, reflective, affective, and performance-based assessment tasks. The predilection for using a variety of what might be considered more subjective forms of assessment (Alexander, 2006) is not surprising given that the *National School Sampling Study* in NZ (McGee et al., 2003) and Yildirim (2004) reported similar results. Unlike the teachers in Yildirim's study, the five teachers in the current study were able to use a higher proportion of social inquiries and non-test activities as the NZ government gives schools the autonomy to decide how to assess learning during years 9 and 10.

Group assessment activities like the environmental issues activity in Appendix I, were designed to allow teachers to assess students' social dispositions. Teachers could, for example, judge students' abilities to form cooperative and constructive relationships with their peers. This finding is not surprising as previous research has suggested that more subjective non-test types of assessment allows teachers to consider the social and situated aspects of learning (Gipps, 2002; Moss, 2008). Teachers were also trying to cater for students' cultural needs by designing assessment tasks of potential personal or cultural significance (e.g., local history investigations and activities on the Treaty of Waitangi). The positive value for students' learning of catering for cultural diversity in social studies has been previously reported by Kanu (2002) and Aitken and Sinnema (2008). The *NZ Curriculum Exemplars for Social Studies [Exemplars]* (Ministry of Education, 2004) have also suggested that assessing students' abilities to take an active role in their learning and to understand the 'personal and social significance' of the learning they are involved in, are important aspects of effective assessment in social studies.

All schools were also actively trying to cater for students' diverse academic needs. Significantly, two schools had created assessment systems where two or three different versions of each common assessment task [CAT], with varying degrees of complexity, were used to assess the particular units of learning. School E used the achievement indicators from the processes in *Social Studies in the New Zealand*

*Curriculum [SSINZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997) to vary the degree of difficulty in their inquiry CATs, while school A used different levels of Bloom's taxonomy stem words in their task instructions and marking criteria statements (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), and varied workload expectations, to create the three versions of their CATs. While the intention at both of these schools was to develop assessment tasks that would cognitively challenge students, the reality was that some extension tasks really only required students to do more of the same work as their less able peers. For example, in the 'government systems' task from school A (shown in Figure 5.1) extension students have to investigate four systems of government, while foundation students complete less work than their more able peers—as they only have to investigate one system of government.

The transparent, socially collaborative, well aligned, and improvement-oriented approaches to assessment discussed in this section, suggest that the teachers in this study were not only catering for students' diverse learning needs, but that their assessment practices also align with the principles of effective assessment reported in chapter two.

### **6.3 Assessing different aspects of learning**

A second avenue of enquiry in the current study was to investigate what aspects of social studies, and the wider NZ curriculum, teachers were formally assessing. The results reported in chapter five signal that teachers were assessing a range of social studies specific knowledge and skills, as well as some general aspects of learning that are now incorporated in the Values and Key Competencies components of the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b).

#### **6.3.1 Social studies' knowledge and skills**

As previously stated, all the formal assessment tasks that were reviewed as part of this research demonstrated clear alignment to concepts embedded in social studies Achievement Objectives [AO]s and the conceptual strands of the curriculum. This result was not surprising as the requirements in the *SSINZC* (Ministry of Education,

1997, p. 25) state that teachers need to measure students' progress against knowledge-based AOs and the ERO (2006; 2007a) and McGee et al. (2003) had reported similar findings in their studies. Of particular note was that teachers in the current study who had already written new assessment tasks to comply with the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) were still basing many of their assessment decisions on the *SSiNZC* requirements. Again it could be argued that this result is not unexpected as previous research has reported that teachers' prior knowledge and experience often influence their assessment practices, and as there is no prescribed direction in the *NZC* as to what social studies teachers need to assess, they are likely to revert to practices they know and value (Aitken, 2005a; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Earl & Katz, 2000).

The current study also found that many formal assessment tasks had been constructed to provide teachers with the opportunity to assess skills specifically related to the inquiry, values exploration, and social decision making processes from *SSiNZC* (Ministry of Education, 1997). Again this was not a totally unforeseen result as the *SSiNZC* stipulates that teachers need to be able to show students' progress against the AOs related to these processes. What was again interesting was that assessment tasks that had been written to comply with the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) contained criteria to assess students' values and Key Competencies. While the Values and Key Competencies are aspects of the wider *NZC*, the teachers in this study felt that these aspects of the curriculum were actually still critical facets of learning in social studies as they felt they align with the social studies processes that they had traditionally assessed.

**Brook:** *"The whole social inquiry process [in the NZC includes]... values, social decision making and conceptual understanding... so much of the new part of the new curriculum is social studies.*

The high value that teachers placed on assessing students' affective dispositions was evident in the high proportion of assessment tasks that included some sort of values-based activity, such as asking students to give their opinion on a controversial issue. In discovering that several values-based assessment tasks required students to comment on contemporary issues, it would have been interesting to have had the opportunity to determine whether year 9 and/or year 10 students' knowledge of

current issues is significantly better than the knowledge that year 8 students demonstrated in the NEMP (Crooks et al., 2005).

Furthermore some of the assessment tasks, that had been developed to align with *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b), assessed students' ability to conduct inquiries. While the *NZC* stipulates that students should use a social inquiry approach for learning, it does not specify AOs for this process in the same way that the *SSI/NZC* (Ministry of Education, 1997) did. So the fact that these teachers were formally assessing social inquiry skills again relates more to established practice than any specified requirements in the current curriculum.

### 6.3.2 Key Competencies

As stated above, some of the newly developed assessment tasks contained criteria which relate to the Key Competencies in *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b), such as thinking skills; participatory, contributory, and reflective dispositions; and self management skills. Chris's assessment task in Appendix I, for example, demonstrated how some of the new assessment tasks were not only aligned to social studies concepts but were also linked to a range of social components from the *NZC*. Teachers could therefore judge a range of competencies in the same assessment task (e.g., in the Appendix I task teachers could assess students' ability to work in cooperative groups and the use of prior knowledge—from playing board games and constructing business plans).

Like the task in Appendix I, most of the formal assessment tasks that teachers were using required students to apply their knowledge and skills rather than just recalling facts. This finding is significantly different to ERO's (2006) report on assessment practices in years 4 and 8, which found that teachers tended to use recall of knowledge tasks. The formal assessment tasks that were reviewed during the current study also revealed that teachers were formally assessing a range of cognitive, affective and reflective aspects of knowledge, as well as students' participatory, contributory and self-regulatory abilities. Cognitively speaking, tasks like the Treaty of

Waitangi magazine activity (Figure 5.5) illustrate how teachers were assessing students' declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge, while the environmental issues task (Appendix I) illustrates how teachers were moving towards assessing more complex thinking skills.

The current study, therefore, supports a wider body of international research which suggests that using problem-based assessment tasks that assess critical thinking skills and students' ability to regulate learning processes, and assessing transferable knowledge, leads to better learning outcomes for students (Alexander, 2006; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; James, 2006). The findings discussed in this section are also consistent with key messages in the *Exemplars* which signal that effective assessment in social studies assesses: (i) students' knowledge of key ideas about society, (ii) their participation in and contribution to learning, and (iii) the personal and/or social significance of the learning (Ministry of Education, 2004). Interestingly, because most of the teachers in this study were not familiar with the content of the *Exemplars* they attributed these practices to their experiences of teaching year 11-13 courses and/or knowledge gained from professional development opportunities such as SocCon<sup>46</sup>.

#### **6.4 'Assessment for learning'**

Reviewing the approaches that the participant teachers were using to formally assess learning in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses, and the aspects of social studies and the wider *NZC* that teachers were assessing, suggests that these teachers were consciously or unconsciously favouring 'assessment for learning' practices that align with sociocultural theory. This claim can be justified by exploring how the participant teachers' assessment practices align with the 'assessment for learning' principles and sociocultural theory discussed in chapter two.

As outlined in chapter two, projects such as the King's-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project [KMOFAP] (Black et al., 2003) and LEARN (Weeden et al., 2002);

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<sup>46</sup> SocCon = the biennial combined Social Sciences Conference in NZ.

seminal studies by Natriello (1987), Crooks (1988), Sadler (1989) and Black and Wiliam (1998); and the work done by the Assessment Reform Group [ARG] (1999); have generated some widely accepted 'assessment for learning' principles. Figure 2.3 suggested that teachers' who: (i) view assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning, (ii) adjust their teaching to address needs that they have identified through assessment, (iii) recognise all educational achievements, (iv) understand the effect that assessment has on learning and motivation, (v) provide specific task-oriented feedback, and (iv) help students to engage in honest self-assessment, are embracing the principles of 'assessment for learning'. The results from the current study found many aspects of the participant teachers' assessment practices that aligned with these principles of 'assessment for learning'.

#### 6.4.1 An integral part of teaching and learning

Teachers continually emphasized the learning function of their formal assessment programmes. Formal assessment tasks were constructed at the same time as new units of work to foster strong alignment between the teaching and assessment programmes. Teachers also worked hard to develop dynamic assessment processes and a range of non-test type assessment tasks so that students would consider assessment to be a seamless part of their learning programme.

#### 6.4.2 Future focussed

Most teachers saw learning in years 9 and 10 as a platform for learning in years 11-13. Formal assessment tasks were therefore designed to help students gain specific knowledge and skills for their future learning. Formal assessment points were, consequently, no longer consider endpoints to the learning process but points where teachers made 'of the moment' judgements about students' progress which could then be used to inform future teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 39). Teachers were not always in a position to immediately adjust formal assessment tasks to address emerging needs, as formal assessment programmes had often been set before the school year began. There was, however, evidence that teachers were consciously or unconsciously using the information they gained through their formal

assessment programmes to inform their subsequent teaching. In Figure 5.7, for example, the comments made by Alex, Chris, and Erin demonstrate some of their future focused practices.

### 6.4.3 Success oriented

All teachers appeared to share a common core value that student outcomes could be improved if assessment programmes were designed to cater for students' diverse learning needs. This view is widely supported in the 'assessment for learning' literature which states that students have diverse social, cultural, and academic needs that need to be catered for and that assessment that is actively and collaboratively implemented by teachers and students has been found to be hugely successful in raising standards and generating positive outcomes for students (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Alexander, 2006; Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Gipps, 2002; Harlen, 2007; Moss, 2008). The teachers were therefore all trying to scaffold better outcomes for students by using a range of assessment tools to assess different aspects of knowledge and promote self-regulation and positive self efficacy in their students.

### 6.4.4 An open and reflective process

As already discussed in section 6.2.1, teachers were engaged in open learning-oriented assessment practices. Chris's comments regarding the need to encourage students to more regularly review their portfolios, and her desire to establish an interactive e-portfolio system, demonstrate her appreciation for the value to students' learning of engaging in open and honest feedback and self-assessment through developing portfolios of learning. These views appear to align with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) feedback model (Figure 2.5), and the wider 'assessment for learning' literature, that report that assessment and feedback only promote learning when they provide specific information that students and teachers can, and do, action (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Gipps, 2002).

#### 6.4.5 Aligns with sociocultural principles

Many of these 'assessment for learning' principles have also been shown to align with sociocultural theory as they acknowledge the interplay between assessment and the social and cultural aspects of learning, and the complex, multifaceted and dynamic nature of assessment. The approaches to assessment discussed in this chapter align with the sociocultural theories of learning reported in chapter two as they demonstrate that these teachers: (i) value active social construction between students and their teachers (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Gipps, 1999, 2002; Moss, 2008), (ii) believe that students can develop the self efficacy to self-regulate their learning with support from their peers and teachers (Alexander, 2006; ARG, 2002), (iii) view assessment as both a product and process of learning (Gipps, 1999), and (iv) believe that social collaboration and transparency are important aspects of assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Torrance, 2007). As research has reported that teachers' conceptions of assessment are usually based on their conceptions of learning (Gipps, 2002; Harlen, 2007; James, 2006), a teacher who holds a sociocultural view of learning should therefore tend to favour assessment practices that align with sociocultural theory.

The emphasis that these teachers placed on assessing social, participatory, reflective and affective dispositions acknowledges the positive value that social construction in a supportive learning community has on learning (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Earl, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moss, 2008). It also demonstrates that these teachers were embracing assessment practices that align with 'assessment for learning' principles and sociocultural theory by transparently catering for the social, cultural and situated aspects of learning. The last section of this chapter discusses some factors that were found to enable and constrain the participant teachers' abilities to implement valid, constructively aligned, learning-oriented programmes of formal assessment.

### **6.5 Factors that influence teachers' abilities to engage in effective assessment practices**

Consistent with the nested diagram of influencing factors in chapter two (Figure 2.6), the current research found that teachers' assessment practices were influenced by a

dynamic combination of their personal epistemologies, prior experiences, contexts in which they worked, and education policy demands. The experiences that they had had of teaching social sciences subjects in years 11-13, for example, appeared to result in similar 'trickle down' effects, on their teaching and assessment practices in years 9 and 10, as reported by Taylor (2008; 2009) and Alison (2007). Their knowledge of assessment requirements associated with the National Certificate of Educational Achievement [NCEA] appeared to inform their assessment practices in years 9 and 10. They used similar marking and moderation techniques, constructed assessment tasks that would test knowledge and skills that students would need for learning in years 11-13, and used NCEA descriptor headings—Achieved, Merit and Excellence—on their standards-based marking rubrics. Additionally teachers who had, at some stage, taught NCEA social studies emphasized the importance of checking that students were developing knowledge of key social studies concepts.

A range of positive influencing factors have already been woven into the discussion within the previous sections. There were, however, four factors that were found to significantly constrain the participant teachers' abilities to implement valid, constructively aligned, learning-oriented programmes of formal assessment. These factors were the curriculum, school policy, time, and professional support. The discussion that follows explains how each of these factors can constrain teachers' abilities to engage in effective assessment practices. There is some interweaving between these influencing factors, within the discussion, due to their interconnected nature.

### 6.5.1 Curriculum constraints

The non-prescriptive nature of *SSiNZC* (Ministry of Education, 1997), and even less prescriptive nature of the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b), combined with a general lack of guidance on how to assess learning in social studies, has not only been criticised (Aitken, 2005b; Openshaw, 1999), but has also resulted in increasing the potential for ineffective and invalid assessment practices in social studies. Concerns have been raised about the lack of linked progression between some of the Strand AOs in the *SSiNZC* and the evidence from the current study suggests that

there may be the same issue with the AOs in the *NZC*. As reported in chapter five, Alex had struggled to create assessment tasks that could assess the same unit of learning at three different levels of the curriculum to generate the nine-tiered range his school required. Alex's solution had been to align units of learning to specified AOs and then create a range of assessment tasks by varying the literacy and workload requirements. The concern is that, while Alex is supposedly reporting that students are meeting level 3, 4, or 5 AOs, the reality is that all students are currently required to demonstrate declarative knowledge related to the same AO and it is actually the level of detail and their literacy and processing skills that are the differentiating factors. Alex had recognised some of the misalignment between the curriculum levels, his assessment tasks, and his school's nine-tiered structure, so he was reviewing his assessment programme for 2010.

Other challenges that the introduction of the *NZC* was presenting for teachers were determining the alignment between the new social sciences conceptual strands and the social studies AOs, and how, and indeed whether, they should be assessing the Key Competencies and Values. Chris, for example, had decided to align her environmental issues task (Appendix I) with a conceptual strand, rather than a social studies AO, and several teachers were trying to assess some of the Key Competencies. There did, however, appear to be a degree of uncertainty about how to assess the Key Competencies or whether the Key Competencies should be assessed.

The results from the KMOFAP (Black et al., 2003) suggest that it is good for teachers to experience these sorts of dilemmas and struggles, when designing new assessment programmes/tasks, as they will be more likely to understand and sustain changes in practice due to feeling more ownership and control. There are, however, some potential threats to the validity of teacher-made assessment tasks when there is real or perceived misalignment between school policies and the curriculum, or between a teacher's conception of the curriculum and the curriculum writer's conception (Aitken, 2005a; Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Brown, 2004). Teachers and stakeholders in the education community therefore need to note that if one or two people design a new

teaching or assignment programme in isolation, and the alignment and development struggle is not shared with their colleagues, then there may not be as much 'buy in' from teachers, especially if they see potential flaws in some of the assessment tasks (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

### 6.5.2 School policy constraints

All of the research schools had assessment policies that were explicitly aligned with the National Education Goals [NEGs] and National Administration Guidelines [NAGs] (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The smaller schools in the study did appear to have more flexibility to alter their assessment systems and programmes. There were, however, aspects of most schools' policies that constrained teachers' assessment practices. The high level of prescription, for example, in school D's assessment programme meant that Darryl had to administer assessment tasks that did not always allow her to meet the diverse needs of her students. Having to use exams to rank students also appeared to clash with her personal sociocultural view of learning. While it could be argued that School D's assessment procedures aided reliability and addresses some of the concerns that have been raised about teacher capability and the assessment practices used in social studies (Aitken, 2005b; Cubitt, 2005; ERO, 2007a; McGee et al., 2003), it could be countered that such a prescriptive approach fails to fully address the sociocultural needs of learners.

As previously identified, school A's nine-tiered assessment system was constraining Alex's ability to implement a valid and manageable programme of assessment. While he was not opposed to his school's multi-tiered assessment system—as it was founded on the 'assessment for learning' philosophy that he stated he supported—it was the fact that there was no easy way to align the nine-tiers with an incremental range of social studies AOs, that had caused him tension and hours of extra work. This case demonstrates how the dissonance between national policy documents and school policies can cause workload issues and professional tensions for teachers.

### 6.5.3 Time factors and professional support

As identified in chapter five, the time available to develop new assessment tasks, to engage with Ministry of Education [MOE] support materials, and to attend professional development sessions, was limited. As a consequence there were a few instances where teachers' assessment practices were affected by the nature of their professional knowledge and their ability to engage in extensive big picture reflections. Resources, such as: (i) the social studies *Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004), (ii) the *Effective Pedagogy in Social Sciences / Tikanga a iwi. Best Evidence Synthesis [BES]* (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008), (iii) the *Building Conceptual Understandings in the Social Sciences [BCUSS]* series (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), and (iv) the social studies units and resources that are available through the social sciences community site on Te Kete Ipurangi [TKI] (Ministry of Education, 2010) all contain some guidance for teachers on effective teaching and assessment practices in social studies.

The evidence from the current research is that most teachers' schedules were so dominated by their year 11-13 teaching programmes, and their other administrative commitments, that they did not generally have time to extensively explore or evaluate resources like the ones listed above in any great depth. This was evident in their comments about the *Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004). Hardcopies of the social studies *Exemplars* had been sent to every school in NZ from 2005 yet most of the teachers in this study appeared to have limited knowledge of the purpose or usefulness of this resource. Whether this lack of knowledge was due to the limited professional development that surrounded the release of this resource, or the fact that year 9 and 10 teaching programmes appear to get less attention than year 11-13 programmes, is unknown. An issue that these results do raise for the MOE is how can they provide effective support and guidance for teachers, to ensure they engage in robust and effective assessment practices in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses?

Teachers' comments about having limited time to engage in professional development and big picture reflections also raises some concerns, as previous research has

indicated that uncritical use of resources has the potential to lead to flawed practices (Black & William, 1998a; Crooks, 1988; Harlen, 2006a). This is concerning as the five teachers in this study appeared to assume that MOE funded resources were robust. They also appeared to believe that if they aligned their assessment tasks to curriculum AOs then they were valid. The evidence from the current research also suggests that these teachers spent more time checking the reliability of teachers' judgements<sup>47</sup>, rather than checking the validity of their assessment tasks and their wider teaching and learning programme.

It is, however, important to note that some of the impacts of the constraints discussed in this section were moderated by the fact that all five teachers had many years of teaching experience. They were also dedicated professionals who were committed to engaging students in effective learning, and they all appeared to understand the positive and negative impacts that assessment can have on learning. Additionally, they all appeared to work in well functioning, collaborative departments where they were well supported by their colleagues.

## **6.6 Summary**

The discussion in this chapter has suggested that, effective teachers consciously or unconsciously use 'assessment for learning' practices that align with sociocultural principles, to assess learning in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses. This assertion is based on observations made about the approaches that the teachers in this case study were using to assess learning, and the aspects of social studies and the wider *NZC*, that they were choosing to assess. This evidence included how teachers were: (i) fostering social construction in group assessment tasks, (ii) using social inquiry approaches to assess learning, (iii) scaffolding self- and peer-assessment, (iv) assessing a range of cognitive, affective, and reflective aspects of knowledge, and (v) assessing students' participatory, contributory, and self-regulatory abilities. The discussion has also acknowledged that there are often a variety of factors—curriculum, school policy, time constraints and professional support—that

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<sup>47</sup> Their own or their colleagues.

limit teachers' capacity to implement valid, constructively aligned and effective programmes of assessment. While the discussion claims that teachers may not always be consciously aware of the theory that underpins their practice, or the implications of the decisions they make, 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 would foster the best outcomes possible and accurately convey students' progress and abilities.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Final thoughts

*"What teachers need is a variety of living examples of implementation, as practiced by teachers with whom they can identify and from whom they can derive the confidence that they can do better. They need to see examples of what doing better means in practice"*  
(Black & William, 1998b, p. 146).

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws the thesis to a close by reiterating what the purpose, nature, and design of the study were. It reconfirms the major findings and discusses the implications of this study for teachers' practice and future research. It ends by outlining some limitations of the study and some final thoughts.

### 7.2 Purpose and design

This research set out to contribute some new insight into assessment practices that teachers in New Zealand [NZ] use in their year 9 and 10 social studies courses by exploring how five experienced teachers were formally assessing learning in their junior—year 9 and/or 10—social studies programmes. The intention was to add to the limited body of previous NZ-based research that has been conducted on assessment and learning in this subject at the secondary school level. The rationale for this study was outlined in the first two chapters of the thesis. This rationale was based on the fact that there is a paucity of NZ-based empirical data on pedagogy, and assessment practices, in year 9 and 10 social studies. This has meant that many of the judgements and decisions that the education community of NZ has made about teaching, learning, and assessment in social studies at this level, have been based on general educational research or research on social studies learning in pre-secondary school contexts. As the pre-secondary and secondary school contexts in NZ are, in the main, quite different with year 9 and 10 social studies generally being taught as a

stand-alone subject by specialist teachers, this research set out to contribute to the research into teachers' assessment practices in social studies in a secondary school context.

Years 9 and 10 are important formative years in students' learning journeys as they transition between being taught by generalist teachers to entering NZ's secondary school credentialing system—the National Certificate of Educational Achievement [NCEA]—in years 11 – 13. Given the importance of the junior years of secondary school, the intention of this study was to conduct some in-depth school-based research that could advance the education community's knowledge of assessment practices that are currently being used at this level. The research therefore set out to explore how a group of experienced teachers were formally measuring students' learning. Key aims for the research were to discover:

- *What approaches do teachers use to formally assess learning in year 9 and 10 social studies?*
- *What aspects of social studies and the wider New Zealand curriculum do teachers formally assess?*
- *How do teachers' formal assessment practices in social studies align with the principles of 'assessment for learning'?*
- *What factors influence teachers' abilities to engage in effective assessment practices?*

The research adopted a multiple case study approach to allow for potential variability in teachers' assessment practices and conceptions of assessment. Purposeful sampling was used to select five secondary schools who signaled they had experienced social studies teachers who were willing to be part of the research. Each participant teacher was visited and interviewed on two separate occasions using a semi-structured interview format. The interview data and a range of assessment documents from each school were coded and analysed to identify cross-case patterns, themes, and unique instances. This data was then compiled to report how the participants were formally assessing learning in social studies in 2009.

As there had been a limited amount of previous research into teaching and assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10 in NZ, the research questions

were derived from international and pre-secondary research on effective assessment practice, and the general assessment theories, discussed in chapter two. Comprehensive and ethically sound approaches to the collection and analysis of the data, and multiple case comparisons, contributed to an in-depth understanding of assessment practices in year 9 and 10 social studies and the potential for making 'fuzzy generalizations' from the results.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

The research has been successful in discovering more about teachers' formal assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10, specifically in relation to the approaches that they use to formally assess learning in social studies and the aspects of social studies and the wider curriculum they choose to assess. The research has also been able to draw some conclusions about whether teachers' assessment practices align with contemporary theories of assessment, endorse the Ministry of Education's [MOE]'s 'assessment for learning' philosophy, and support conclusions drawn from previous social studies research.

All schools had identifiable programmes of formal assessment that in addition to allowing teachers to make formal judgements about their students' achievements, are also consistent with the MOE's National Education Guidelines (Ministry of Education, n.d.). All teachers saw the value to students' learning in using the information gained from their formal assessment tasks to inform subsequent teaching and learning. While the structure of these assessment programmes differed between the schools, this study identified a common well established practice of assessing a range of knowledge, skills, and values, through a variety of reflective, affective, and performance-based tasks. These results were not surprising as all the participant teachers had been, or still were, implementing assessment programmes that complied with "the requirements" in the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum [SSiNZC]* (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 25). Additionally, those teachers who had already written some assessment tasks to comply with the *New Zealand Curriculum [NZC]* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) were found to be basing many of their judgements on previous practice. This is not necessarily problematic as there is strong alignment in

the social studies curriculum statements between the *SSINZC* and the *NZC*. There were several emerging practices, such as providing task-oriented feedback, scaffolding self- and peer-assessment, and assessing the Key Competencies and conceptual understandings, that are consistent with an 'assessment for learning' philosophy.

The thesis that has resulted from this research is that **teachers consciously or unconsciously use 'assessment for learning' practices that align with sociocultural principles to formally assess learning in year 9 and 10 social studies courses**. This assertion is based on the observations that the case study teachers were scaffolding transparent and collaborative assessment processes, aligning their assessment tasks to important outcomes (and students' prior experiences), and catering for student diversity—through judging students' learning on multiple occasions with a range of assessment tools. In making these claims it is acknowledged that there are often a range of factors that can, at times, constrain teachers' abilities to implement valid, constructively aligned, and effective programmes of formal assessment. Curriculum constraints, policy demands, teacher knowledge, and time are among a range of factors that can influence how teachers assess learning. This study does, however, suggest that experienced teachers can use their skills and knowledge to moderate potential negative effects.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for future research**

While this research provides some insight to teachers' assessment practices in years 9 and 10, there is still a lot of scope for further NZ-based research into teachers' pedagogical practices and student achievement in social studies. As teachers, in 2010, are currently realigning their teaching and assessment programmes to meet the requirements of the *NZC* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) it could be timely to broaden this study to investigate what sort of teaching and learning programmes are being developed. Alternatively the study could be broadened to investigate the informal assessment practices that teachers use during class. A third avenue for research would be to work with some teachers to help them reflect on their practice, in light of

the findings from this current research, and then work with them to construct and implement a theoretically grounded assessment innovation.

## **7.5 Limitations**

Any research has a range of limitations related to the particular study, or the wider methodology itself. It is important to acknowledge what some of these limitations are, as they play a role in determining the robustness of the research findings. This research focused on exploring five teachers' formal assessment practices in a junior secondary school context. It therefore only provides a partial picture of assessment practices in social studies, within and beyond a junior secondary school level in NZ. Only one teacher at each of the five schools was interviewed. While all teachers had extensive experience of teaching social studies, the findings are limited by what the teachers chose to tell the researcher during interviews, the documentation they were willing to share, and their perceptions of their assessment procedures. It is also difficult to make valid judgements about the effectiveness of the assessment practices that teachers were using, in relation to raising student achievement, as in-class observations and student achievement data were beyond the parameters of the study. The assertions regarding the effectiveness of teachers' formal assessment practices are therefore based on theory contained in the literature, rather than observed practice.

It has already been stated, in chapter three, that the decisions that researchers make undoubtedly influence the accuracy, credibility, transferability, and value of their research. The decision to use a multiple case study approach was made to allow for potential variability in practice. Working with five teachers over a relatively short period of time did mean that some of the 'thick description' of a single case was potentially lost, however, a multiple case approach can aid trustworthiness as it has the potential to allow patterns to emerge from the data which can be triangulated and used to make fuzzy generalisations.

## **7.6 Final thoughts**

Years 9 and 10 are vital transitional years in NZ students' schooling experiences, as they enter secondary school and prepare to move into the national credentialing years—years 11-13. It is therefore vital that teachers use assessment practices that foster learning and empower students to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become self motivated lifelong learners. Assessment practices that align with sociocultural theories of learning and that advance the principles of 'assessment for learning' have the most potential to achieve this aim.

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# Appendix A

## Massey University Human Ethics Approval Letter



9 June 2009

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Dear Rosemary

**Re: HEC: Southern B Application – 09/21**  
**Assessment practices in New Zealand Year 9 and 10 social studies programmes: An exploratory case study**

Thank you for your letter dated 5 June 2009.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karl Pajo".

Dr Karl Pajo, Chair  
**Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B**

cc Dr Peter Rawlins  
School of Curriculum & Pedagogy  
PN900

Dr Rowena Taylor  
School of Educational Studies  
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Massey University Human Ethics Committee  
Accredited by the Health Research Council



# Appendix B

## Participant School Information Letter

*(N.B. The original documents were supplied on Massey letterhead)*

Date

To the Principal

*(insert name of school & address)*

**Request for permission to conduct research at your school into:  
Assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10.**

Dear *(insert Sir or Madam)*.

My name is Rose Atkins and I am a student at Massey University undertaking Masters research into **current assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10**. I have a strong interest in social studies education in New Zealand as I have taught the subject for many years and I have previously been a facilitator on the Social Studies Exemplar Team and a social studies professional leader during the Beacon Schools' Project. I am now writing to you to request permission to conduct a M.Ed. research project in your school between the end of Term 3 of 2009 and the end of Term 1 of 2010.

### Overview of the research

In recent years, there has been much debate on the role that assessment plays in improving students' learning and teachers' teaching. To date, much of the attention has been directed towards the more formal assessment at the NCEA level. This project, however, seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions of their current assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10 as there is an absence of New Zealand-based research into teachers' assessment practices at this level. A key aspect of this research will be to determine how current assessment practices in social studies at this level align with: contemporary theories on assessment, the Ministry of Education's assessment for learning philosophy, and the new *New Zealand Curriculum*. This project will investigate how teachers at four New Zealand secondary schools formally measure learning in year 9 and 10 social studies and how they use the assessment information they collect. Involvement in this project will provide the participant teachers and their schools with an opportunity to reflect on their current assessment practices in years 9 and 10 social studies. The research findings will also contribute to our growing understandings of the complex role of assessment in students' learning.

### Participant Selection

The project will involve a series of semi-structured interviews with one experienced social studies teacher from each participant school. These interviews and the wider research will centre on reviewing: the year 9 and 10 social studies assessment programme, a selected assessment task, recording and reporting systems, and school wide assessment policies and procedures. Participant teachers will need to be New Zealand registered teachers who **have a good knowledge and experience of assessing learning in social studies**. They need to be **currently teaching year 9 and/or year 10 social studies** and have **taught at this level for at least two years** since 1997. Ideally they must also be New Zealand trained **or** have been involved in some social studies specific professional development or taught year 11, 12 or 13 social studies in the last three years **or** were teaching social studies in 1997/1998 when the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* document was introduced. *Please note: If more than 4 schools and teachers accept the invitation to be part of the research I will use stratified criteria to select a mixed typology of schools and teachers.*

### Project Procedures

When four schools have agreed to take part in this research I will contact participant teachers to set up the following visits:

- Visit 1: This visit will require **approximately one and one-half hours** of the participant teacher's time. During this visit I will clarify the research procedures and ethics, carry out a 40-50 minute semi-structured interview with the participant teacher and collect copies of school policy documents that relate to year 9 and 10 social studies learning and assessment to take away for further analysis.
- Visit 2: This visit will require **about one hour** of the participant teacher's time. The purpose of this visit will be to conduct a second semi-structured interview with the participant teacher about a specific assessment task and to ask any follow up questions that have arisen from the previous interview and document analysis. I will negotiate to take away copies of documents that relate to the specific assessment task and the social studies department's recording and reporting systems for further analysis.

- Visit 3: A third visit will be organised to follow up on any questions that have arisen from any of the previously collected data and to give participant teachers a progress report. It may be necessary to conduct another semi-structured interview and collect some additional documents. This visit should require no more than **one hour** of the participant teacher's time.

There may also be a need for some brief email contact with participant teachers between visits to request that certain documents are available at the next visit, to alert teachers of potential interview questions/topics and to provide progress reports.

### Data Management

I will ensure that consent forms, interview recordings and all the raw data are stored separately in locked or password protected storage systems for a period of five years. At the end of this period, all material will be disposed of by one of my supervisors through a secure document disposal service. The identities of participant schools and teachers will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and numeric coding systems. Students' names will need to be removed from any school reports, assessment tasks or grading sheets (by the participant teacher) before they are given to me.

### Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time up to the end of Term 1 2010;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give the researcher your permission;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

When any research is conducted it must be recognised that there is always a risk of a breach of confidentiality and that I can only give an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity to the extent allowed by law. It should be noted, however, that there is a clear expectation that all participants, including the researcher, will respect any information shared through the research process and will treat it with confidentiality. Neither the school nor any individuals will be identified either directly or indirectly in verbal or written form. Where direct quotes from the interview recordings or written correspondence are used in subsequent publications pseudonyms will be assigned to maintain anonymity.

### Project Contacts

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me by phone on 06 3544221 (home) or 0273 383290 (cell), or email me at [rose.atkins@clear.net.nz](mailto:rose.atkins@clear.net.nz).

Alternatively you can contact one of my supervisors from the College of Education at Massey University:

**Dr Peter Rawlins** can be contacted on 06 3569099 ext 8855 or by email [P.Rawlins@massey.ac.nz](mailto:P.Rawlins@massey.ac.nz); and

**Dr Rowena Taylor** can be contacted on 06 3569099 ext 8753 or by email [R.M.Taylor@massey.ac.nz](mailto:R.M.Taylor@massey.ac.nz)

I would like to thank you in advance for your careful consideration of this opportunity. If you would like your school to participate in this important study **please complete and return the attached consent forms to me in the prepaid envelope supplied. You will need to nominate and approach a social studies teacher** (at your school) who you think best **meets as many** of the following **participant selection criteria** as possible:

- N.Z. registered with a good knowledge and experience of assessing learning in social studies.
- Currently teaching year 9 and/or year 10 social studies and has taught at this level for at least 2 years since 1997.
- N.Z. trained **or** has been involved in some social studies specific professional development or taught year 11, 12 or 13 social studies in the last three years **or** was teaching social studies in 1997/98.

Please ensure that you **give them a copy of the enclosed *Participant Teacher's Information Sheet* and *Consent Form*** so they can express their interest in being part of my research by completing and returning the *Participant Teacher Consent Form*.

Yours faithfully

Rose Atkins  
M.Ed. student

### Committee Approval Statement

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 09/21. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)*

# Appendix C

## Participant School Consent Form

*(N.B. The original documents were supplied on Massey letterhead)*

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

#### BOARD OF TRUSTEE'S/PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

We agree / do not agree (*please circle one*) that Rose Atkins can conduct her Masters in Education research, into assessment practices in social studies at years 9 and 10, at our school as outlined in the Participant School Information Letter.

We agree / do not agree (*please circle one*) that Rose Atkins can have access to students' social studies assessment tasks, grades and reports. [Students' anonymity will be protected by the school removing names from these documents before they are given to the researcher].

**Signature of Principal  
or BOT Chair**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

**School:**

.....

**Name of nominated  
participant teacher:**

.....

**Email:**

.....

**Tel:**

.....

# Appendix D

## Assessment practices in New Zealand years 9 and 10 social studies programmes: An exploratory case study

### Participant teacher information sheet

(N.B. The original documents were supplied on Massey letterhead)

#### Researcher Introduction

My name is Rose Atkins and I am a student at Massey University undertaking Masters research into current assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10. I have a strong interest in social studies education in New Zealand as I have taught the subject for many years and I have previously been a facilitator on the Social Studies Exemplar Team and a social studies professional leader during the Beacon Schools' Project.

#### Project Description and Invitation

In recent years, there has been much debate on the role that assessment plays in improving students' learning and teachers' teaching. To date, much of the attention has been directed towards the more formal assessment at the NCEA level. This project, however, seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions of their current assessment practices in social studies in years 9 and 10 as there is a scarcity of New Zealand-based research into teachers' assessment practices at this level. A key aspect of this research will be to determine how current assessment practices in social studies at this level align with: contemporary theories on assessment, the Ministry of Education's assessment for learning philosophy, and the new *New Zealand Curriculum*. This project will investigate how teachers at four New Zealand secondary schools formally measure learning in year 9 and 10 social studies and how they use the assessment information they collect. Involvement in this project will provide participant teachers and their schools with an opportunity to reflect on their current assessment practices in years 9 and 10 social studies. The research findings will also contribute to our growing understandings of the complex role of assessment in students' learning.

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in my M.Ed. research project between the end of Term 3 of 2009 and the end of Term 1 of 2010 if you meet the following criteria.

#### Participant Identification and Recruitment

Are you a New Zealand registered teacher who is currently teaching year 9 and/or year 10 social studies and has taught at this level for at least two years since 1997? Are you New Zealand trained or have you been involved in some social studies specific professional development or taught year 11, 12 or 13 social studies in the last three years or were you teaching social studies in 1997/1998 when the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* document was introduced? Do you think you have a good knowledge and experience of assessing learning in social studies? If the answer to most of these questions is yes and you are willing to take part in the research procedures that are outlined below please contact me and/or complete the attached *Participant Teacher Consent Form*.

#### Project Procedures

If your school and you agree to take part in this research I will contact you to set up the following visits:

- Visit 1: This visit will require **approximately one and one-half hours** of your time. During this visit I will clarify the research procedures and ethics, carry out a 40-50 minute semi-structured interview with you and collect copies of school policy documents that relate to years 9 and 10 social studies learning and assessment to take away for further analysis.
- Visit 2: This visit will require **about one hour** of your time. The purpose of this visit will be to conduct a second semi-structured interview with you about a specific assessment task and to ask any follow up questions that have arisen from the previous interview and document analysis. I will negotiate to take away copies of

documents that relate to the specific assessment task and the departments recording and reporting systems for further analysis.

- Visit 3: A third visit will be organised to follow up on any questions that have arisen from any of the previously collected data and to give you a progress report. It may be necessary to conduct another semi-structured interview and collect some additional documents. This visit should require no more than **one hour** of your time.

There may also be a need for some brief email contact with you between visits to request that you have certain documents ready for my next visit, to inform you of potential interview questions/topics and to provide you with progress reports.

### **Data Management**

I will ensure that consent forms, interview recordings and all the raw data are stored separately in locked or password protected storage systems for a period of five years. At the end of this period, all material will be disposed of by one of my supervisors through a secure document disposal service. The identities of participant schools and teachers will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and numeric coding systems. Students' names will need to be removed from any school reports, assessment tasks or grading sheets (by you) before they are given to me.

### **Participant's Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time up to the end of Term 1, 2010.
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give me your permission;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during an interview.

When any research is conducted it must be recognised that there is always a risk of a breach of confidentiality and that I can only give an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity to the extent allowed by law. It should be noted, however, that there is a clear expectation that all participants, including the researcher, will respect any information shared through the research process and will treat it with confidentiality. Neither the school nor any individuals will be identified either directly or indirectly in verbal or written form. Where direct quotes from the interview recordings or written correspondence are used in subsequent publications pseudonyms will be assigned to maintain anonymity.

### **Project Contacts**

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me by phone on 06 3544221 (home) or 0273 383290 (cell), or email me at [rose.atkins@clear.net.nz](mailto:rose.atkins@clear.net.nz).

Alternatively you can contact one of my supervisors from the College of Education at Massey University:

**Dr Peter Rawlins** can be contacted on 06 3569099 ext 8855 or by email [P.Rawlins@massey.ac.nz](mailto:P.Rawlins@massey.ac.nz); and

**Dr Rowena Taylor** can be contacted on 06 3569099 ext 8753 or by email [R.M.Taylor@massey.ac.nz](mailto:R.M.Taylor@massey.ac.nz)

I would like to thank you in advance for your careful consideration of this opportunity. If you would like to accept this invitation to participate in my research project could you please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the prepaid envelope supplied.

Yours faithfully

Rose Atkins  
M.Ed. student

### **Committee Approval Statement**

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 09/21. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)*

# Appendix E

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

### Participant teacher consent form

*(N.B. The original documents were supplied on Massey letterhead)*

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Participant Teacher Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Teacher Information Sheet.

I agree/do not agree (*please circle one*) to interviews being recorded by an audio digital recorder.

I wish/do not wish (*please circle one*) to have my digital files returned to me.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full Name - printed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:** **School:** .....

**Tel:** ..... **Cell:** .....

**Email:** .....

# Appendix F

## Emails sent to participants before visits 1 & 2

### VISIT 1

Hi [*insert name*]

Thanks again for agreeing to take part in my MEd research project. I now want to confirm the appointment time that we have agreed on for my first visit which is [*insert date*]

The purpose of this visit is for me to:

- reiterate the aims of my project and the role I'd like you to play in it as outlined in the PARTICIPANT TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET that you have already received.
- conduct a 40-50 minute semi-structured interview with you about your current assessment programme and practices. This interview will be based on the following questions/topics
  1. *Tell me how you assess learning in social studies in years 9 and/or 10 (depends on which year group you're teaching)*
  2. *How long has your assessment programme been structured this way?*
  3. *What would you say is the purpose of the assessment you do in social studies at years 9 and 10?*
  4. *What professional development have you had about how to assess learning in social studies?*
  5. *What do you consider to be the strengths and limitations of your current assessment programme?*
  6. *Anything else you'd like to add*
- collect copies of school policy documents that relate to learning and assessment in social studies at years 9 and 10. These documents **could** include:
  1. *your current social studies scheme for years 9 and 10*
  2. *your current assessment programme for years 9 and 10*
  3. *copies of the assessment tasks you are currently using at years 9 and 10*
  4. *school assessment and reporting policies that you have to comply with*
  5. *any changes you might be considering making to your programme for 2010*

Please note: I would prefer (where possible) to be given access to **electronic versions** of these documents as this would help me with data management, security and analysis. However where this isn't possible I will cover photocopying costs and keep documents securely stored.

- Outline what visit two will involve

As I stated in my initial communications with you I expect that we should be able to discuss the project aims, conduct interview 1 and collect these document in 1 -1½ hours as I do appreciate how busy you are at this time of year.

I look forward to hearing from you soon

Thank you in anticipation

*Rose*

[*insert contact details*]

## VISIT 2

Hi [*insert name*]

Thanks so much for all the information you shared during our first meeting. I have transcribed most of our conversation (see attached document) and completed some initial processing. I'm now ready for my second visit so I'd like to organise a time with you. I know this is a busy time of year as you have junior activities weeks and planning for next year to fit in on top of your normal teaching load however I'd appreciate it if you could give me **60 minutes** of your valuable time.

During this visit:

- I will give you a brief summary of some of my observations from visit 1 (see attached) and answer any questions you might have.
  
- I will conduct a second semi-structured interview with you where we will look at [*insert the name of a specific assessment task*] and review your recording and reporting systems. The interview will be based on the following questions/topics
  1. Can you tell me about this assessment task? i.e *What are you assessing? Why have you decided to assess this learning in this way?*
  2. What sort of feedback do students get? [*If possible could you provide me with photocopies of feedback you've given to 3 students (names removed) after the above assessment task i.e. the marking sheet you gave them back. Could you also give me copies of any self or peer assessment they have done in relation to that assessment?*]
  3. Looking at your wider assessment programme. Can you describe all the assessment you do. What would you say is the purpose of the assessment you do?
  4. Why do you use the type of marking system you do?
  5. Tell me how you report student achievement to students, parents and the wider community?
  6. Can you show me some examples of how you record and report student achievement? [*If possible could you provide me with a copy of your class' results to date AND copies of 3 students' reports (with names removed)*]
  7. Is there anything else you'd like to add?
  
- I would also like to ask you one or two follow up questions that have arisen out of my analysis of the data I collected during my first visit. These will include
  1. What tertiary qualifications do you hold and what was your major(s)?
  2. [*insert specific questions*]

I know I have asked you to do a bit of photocopying for me in preparation for this visit and during the first phase of this project. I have just been awarded a small grant to cover some of my research expenses so I would like to reimburse your school for any costs you have incurred on my behalf so I will bring my cheque book with me.

I look forward to hearing from you soon

Thank you in anticipation

*Rose*

[*insert contact details*]

# Appendix G

## Interview Questions

*N.B. The italicised questions are follow-up prompts that were not sent to participant teachers but were used to elicit further detail when needed.*

### **Interview 1 (first in-school visit):**

#### **1. Tell me how you assess learning in social studies in year 9/10**

- *Prompt for information on what is assessed (if conceptual understandings mentioned follow up on where they got the idea to assess conceptual understandings)- links to SSiNZC,*
- *Ask how learning is assessed (the types of tasks/number of assessments) and reasons why these methods are used?*
- *Discuss their philosophy on assessment - links to standards based types of assessment or norm referenced depending on the type of assessment they're using. Is student self assessment promoted? Discuss*

#### **2. How long has your assessment programme been structured this way?**

- *Has it always been structured this way?*
- *Prompt for information on what has changed and the reasons why*
- *Do you think you are doing a better job of assessing learning in SST now than say 5 years ago? Do you want to see any changes over the next few years? What sort of changes would you like? Why are they needed? (Links to NZC)*

#### **3. What would you say is the purpose of the assessment you do in social studies at years 9 and 10?**

- *How do you use assessment to promote learning in your classroom?*

#### **4. What professional development have you had about how to assess learning in social studies?**

- *Prompt specific to year 9/10 and the methods of assessment they use.*
- *What informs your decisions on what you assess and how you assess?*
- *Have (How do) you used the Social Studies Exemplars to help you write assessment activities?*

#### **5. What do you consider to be the strengths and limitations of your current assessment programme?**

- *Might cover concepts such as manageability, validity and reliability. Link to school wide policies and procedures*
- *Department wide policies or individual choice?*

#### **6. Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

**Interview 2 (second in-school visit):**

1. **Can you tell me about this assessment task<sup>48</sup>?**
  - *What are you assessing?*
  - *Why have you decided to assess this learning in this way? Have you always assessed this topic/concept in this way?*
  - *What are the strengths/limitations of this task? How do students cope with the task?*
  - *How do you mark it? What do you record?*
  - *What do you do with the information you collect?*
2. **What sort of feedback do students get?** e.g. link to (Clark 2003): *Reminder vs. scaffold vs. example prompts,*
3. Looking at your wider assessment programme. **Can you describe all the assessment you do. What would you say is the purpose of the assessment you do?**
4. **Why do you use the type of marking system you do?**
  - *Do you mark all assessments using the same system?*
  - *Do you encourage peer and self assessment? Ask for some specific examples*
  - *Prompt discussion to capture their views on grades vs. comments and links to formative assessment*
5. **Can you show me some examples of how you record and report student achievement?**
  - *Discuss their views of any benefits/limitations of current systems*
  - *What do you do with the information you collect? Provide prompts to see if there are links to reporting and future learning*
6. **Tell me how you report student achievement to students, parents and the wider community?**
  - *Discuss their views of any benefits/limitations of current systems.*
  - *Links to school wide policies and procedures (constraints)*
7. **Follow up questions from interview 1 and document analysis**
8. **Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

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<sup>48</sup> relates to a specific assessment task that I will have selected for more in-depth investigation from my first visit

# Appendix H

## Authority for the release of transcripts

*(N.B. The original documents were supplied on Massey letterhead)*

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

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript may be used by the researcher, Rose Atkins, in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

## Appendix I:

### A formal assessment task and marking schedule from school C.

	School C: Environmental Issues	Conceptual Strand Place and Environment		
Task Instructions	<p><b>Task Aim:</b> Students are to research a major environmental issue and produce a poster and a children’s board game to educate people about their issue.</p>			
	<p>1. In groups you are to research one of the major environmental issues facing the world today. You must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↳ Explain <b>What</b> the issue is. <span style="float: right;">↳ <b>How</b> it has come about</span></li> <li>↳ <b>Where</b> and <b>Whom</b> are affected. <span style="float: right;">↳ <b>How</b> are people affected</span></li> <li>↳ Three “things” that we can do to help stop this environmental issue.</li> </ul> <p>This information needs to be produced on a poster... to educate students...</p> <p>2. ... you are to produce a board game (using information from task 1) that educates the players about the issues and what can be done. The game should be easy to play, attractive, informative.</p>			
Marking Schedule				
	Learning Outcome	Achieved	Merit	Excellence
	<i>Students will have explored the causes of their chosen environmental issue.</i>	Students will have identified a minimum of 2 relevant causes of their environmental issue.	Students will have identified and explained a minimum of 3 relevant causes of their environmental issue.	Students will have identified and discussed in detail (depth) minimum of 3 relevant causes of their environmental issue.
	<i>Students will have explored the effects of their chosen environmental issue.</i>	Students will have identified a minimum of 2 relevant effects of their environmental issue.	Students will have identified and explained a minimum of 2 relevant effects of their environmental issue with examples from around the world	Students will have identified and discussed a minimum of 3 relevant effects of their environmental issue with each covered in depth.
	<b>Key Competency – Managing Self</b> <i>Students will set goals and manage the completion of these goals to a high standard</i>	Students will have set 4 S.M.A.R.T goals relating to their research, poster and game on their chosen environmental issue.	Students will have both set <b>and</b> achieved the 4 S.M.A.R.T goals relating to their research, poster and goal on their chosen environmental issue.	Students will have both set <b>and</b> achieved to a high standard the 4 S.M.A.R.T goals relating to their research and poster on their chosen environmental issue. (1 and 2 must both be at excellence.)
	<b>Key Competency – Language, Symbol, and Text</b> <i>Students use language, symbol and text to make meaning of information &amp; produce an informative poster on their chosen environmental issue. Confidently use ICT to access information.</i>	Students will have used their research (including information from websites) to create a poster on which they identify their chosen world event.  Students have completed the board game that deals with their environmental issue.	Students will have used their research (including information from websites and books) to create a poster on which they identify and explain the causes and effects of their chosen environmental issue.  Students have completed the board game and business plan that deals with their environmental issue.	Students will have used their research (including information from websites and books) to create a poster on which they identify and discuss the causes and effects of their chosen environmental issue.  Students have completed an informative board game and business plan that deals with their environmental issue.

Marking criteria