Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Rethinking Assessment:

The Challenging Issues for Schools and Teachers

A thesis submitted as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Administration

Massey University: Albany

Jan Hill

1998

Massey University

THESIS MEMORANDUM

Private Bag 11 222,
Palmerston North,
New Zealand
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099

Wayne Edwards
8968

x 8961

TO: Helen Sneddon
Learning & Teaching - HOKOWHITU

FROM: RECORDS OFFICE

DATE: 08 June 1999

SUBJECT: RETURN OF THESIS FOR LIBRARY PURPOSES

Can a copy of Jan Hill's thesis be returned to the Records Office, Level 4, Registry (Turitea), as the student has now been recommended for the degree of M.Ed.Admin.

Thanking-you

Have been unable to ~~[illegible]~~ obtain second copy.

Massey University Library Thesis Copyright Form

Title of thesis:

(1) (a) I give permission for my thesis to be made available to readers in Massey University Library under conditions determined by the Librarian.

(b) I do not wish my thesis to be made available to readers without my written consent for ... months.

(2) (a) I agree that my thesis, or a copy, may be sent to another institution under conditions determined by the Librarian.

(b) I do not wish my thesis, or a copy, to be sent to another institution without my written consent for ... months.

(3) (a) I agree that my thesis may be copied for Library use.

(b) I do not wish my thesis to be copied for Library use for ... months.

Signed Jill

Date

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author. Readers must sign their name in the space below to show that they recognise this. They are asked to add their permanent address.

NAME AND ADDRESS

Jan Hill
2/22 Norwood Rd
Bayswater
North Shore, Auckland

DATE 4.2.98

Jan HILL

2/22 Norwood Rd

Bayswater

Auckland

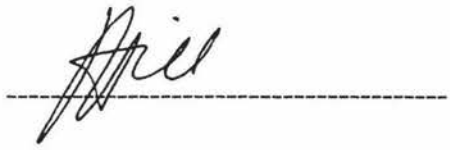
Ph 4456214 WORK IPDER Building 53
Albany Campus
4439388

Supervisor:

Dr Jenny Poskitt
Dept. of Learning and Teaching
Massey University: Palmerston North
Ph. X 8959

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgment is made, and it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or any other institution for a degree, diploma or any other qualification.



Jan Hill

Abstract

This thesis examines how four urban primary schools used changes to their assessment practices as a means to improve the learning opportunities and outcomes of their students. In 1993, a new national curriculum was introduced into New Zealand schools and this was accompanied by legislation and guidelines mandating new requirements in assessment. These reforms were occurring against a backdrop of burgeoning developments in assessment internationally. The study documents how the four schools responded to the new demands, to the challenges posed by alternative approaches to assessment and how they were able to incorporate and build on their previous assessment practices.

Action research was selected as the methodology and was used both by the schools and the researcher on two distinct yet overlapping levels. It gave the schools the opportunity to take ownership of the issues that emerged and greater control over the research process. The data gathering strategies woven into the programme included group discussions, individual interviews, observations, questionnaires, document analysis and a Help Desk which formalised contact with the schools between school-based visits and workshops and provided the researcher with valuable ongoing insights into the work of the schools. The thesis incorporates an analysis of methodological issues relating to collaboration, the tension between first and second order domains of action research and difficulties the schools experienced in relation to the action research process itself.

The data revealed a number of emerging themes. Summative rather than formative assessment practices dominated the aspects of assessment the schools selected to work on as a result of their baseline data collection. All of the schools put new school-wide recording systems in place. This had the most impact on the practices of the teachers who, in the past, had assessed in an ad hoc way, often based on 'gut reaction'. For many teachers, it was first time they had investigated and understood assessment theory. The data also highlighted that many do not have a level of technical assessment expertise that allows then to design basic assessment tasks that they know to be valid measures or to analyse and use the results with confidence. Although the common orientation of the teachers was towards a learner-centred philosophy, there is a considerable gap between theory and practice. Rethinking assessment practices provided some of the teachers with a vehicle for shifting the locus of control in their classrooms. Traditional reporting practices were also challenged and possibilities emerged for new assessment partnerships with parents. For some teachers, giving honest feedback to students and parents, in particular, poses a dilemma. The transfer of assessment information both within and between schools remains a possible barrier to student achievement. The thesis concludes that, overall, the curriculum and assessment changes appear to have had a positive impact on the learning and teaching programmes in the four schools, but that much professional development work remains to be done if both contemporary assessment theory and policy are to translate into classroom practice.

Acknowledgments

There are many people who have contributed significantly to this research even though my name appears on the front cover. I owe a particular debt to the principals and staff of the four schools that participated in the research, particularly the members of the four Lead Teams. The research was dependent on their participation and the outcomes of the research are a tribute to their expertise, their willingness to share that expertise and their preparedness to take risks. The introduction of the changes outlined in this document demanded a great deal of them and without their efforts and determination to do the best for their schools and their students, none of these changes would have happened.

Many other people have contributed both formally and informally to this thesis in many different ways. I acknowledge the invaluable contributions of both Dr Jenny Poskitt and Dr Ken Ryba, especially Jenny, who did her best to keep me on task and constantly challenged me to go the extra mile. I owe special thanks to my friend and colleague Kay Hawk, for her encouragement and understanding when the going got tough, as it did from time to time. Also, to Norma Roberts for her secretarial support and for helping out in many, many practical ways. And to Julie who lent me her spare room for some weeks so that I could escape to write.

Lastly, and most important of all, my love and gratitude to Noel and Sam, for all those weekends without me, for often doing my share of the tasks, for understanding how important this study was to me and without whom I could never have achieved this dream.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Introduction 1
The context: assessment 2
The research problem 3
The research questions 3
The process: action research 5
My role in the research 6
Organisation of the thesis 7

CHAPTER TWO: Background to the study

Introduction 9
The era of the Proficiency Examination 9
Register of Progress and Achievement 11
Primary Progress Records and educative assessment 14
The impact of the New Right, new legislation and the new curriculum 17
Summary 21

CHAPTER THREE: Literature Review

Introduction 23
The interaction of assessment with theories of learning 24
The role of assessment 27
Approaches to assessment 31
Designing assessment tasks and questions of validity 35
The role of teachers in the assessment process 38

Reporting to parents 41
Summary 44

CHAPTER FOUR: The methodology in theory

Introduction 46
The evolution of action research 46
The key principles that underpin action research 49
Action research models 53
Action research tools 56
Summary 58

CHAPTER FIVE: The methodology in practice

Introduction 60
Origins of the action research process in the four ABLE schools 61
The action research model 65
Tools used to gather the data 67
How action research principles were reflected in the study 70
Data analysis 73
Ethical issues 74
Methodological limitations 79
Summary 81

CHAPTER 6: Emergent Themes

Introduction 82
Understanding assessment theory 83
Understanding the curriculum and the expectations of Ministry 88
Planning and design 93
Control 98
Honesty 105
Consistency 108
Summary 112

CHAPTER 7: Insights and conclusions

Introduction	114
Autonomy and accountability	115
Assessment literacy	118
Assessment partnerships	121
Methodological insights	125
Future research	129
Summary	130

BIBLIOGRAPHY 132

APPENDICES

A. National Administration Guidelines
B. Letter of introduction to the Contract and Expression of Interest form
C. Baseline post-box question questionnaire
D. Sample action plans
E. Sample of fax form used to set up the workshop agendas
F. End-of-study lead team evaluations used to review the year's work and to plan for the following year
G. Samples of annotations used to code and analyse transcriptions and field notes; a sample analytic memo

LIST OF TABLES

1. Statistics for each school in relation to the selection criteria

2. The action research model developed for the study

3. The list of tools used to gather the data, when they were used and how the data were recorded

4. Procedures used in the study to reflect the principles of action research

5. The key purposes of assessment as identified by the four study schools

6. Techniques the teachers are knowledgeable about and are confident in using