

Using narrative assessment to support secondary school teachers' inclusive practices

PROJECT AIM

Narrative assessment is an assessment for learning process underpinned by sociocultural perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It uses a combination of photographs and/or videos of students' learning experiences alongside narrative descriptions. The images and descriptions are then connected with the New Zealand Curriculum's key competencies and learning areas. Teachers, students and their families describe the process as a powerful tool to notice, recognise, describe and share the learning of disabled students whose learning we have not always seen in the New Zealand Curriculum. Often these are students who have ORS funding, or who have applied for and missed out on ORS fundings.

In this two-year project, teachers in two secondary schools and one special school worked together learning how to use narrative assessment to drive a process of teacher inquiry into quality teaching and learning for this group of students. One year of the project included working in and out of lockdowns.

OUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can narrative assessment processes support teacher inquiry?
2. In what ways does using narrative assessment impact students' academic and social achievement?
3. What does assessment for learning look like for assessment capable teachers and students at secondary school?

WHAT WE LEARNED

Partnership is a central theme in understanding and sharing student learning across home, school, and community settings. Key learnings across teachers and schools suggest that narrative assessment supports teachers to reflect on their role as a teacher for all students, the complexity of teaching and learning, and their developing pedagogy. It invites conversation about inclusion and school cultures that support student belonging and learning and enables school leaders and teachers to think differently about local and responsive curriculum. Critically, narrative assessment is less about serving the system and more about serving student and teacher.

Teachers developed an understanding of the student and their capability which was made more visible, and of their own agency as teachers to recognize, respond to and support student and teacher learning. Narrative assessment enabled them to examine the big picture goals of education around citizenship and belonging in a community, and to appreciate that relationships and knowledge sharing amongst teachers, students, whānau, and community members are central to an inquiry process that fosters quality teaching, learning and assessment. Goals for student learning were co-constructed between student, whānau and teacher with a shared commitment to the processes and contexts in which those goals would be achieved.

Students enjoyed enhanced participation and achievement within the NZC which became the focus for teaching and learning. Some students achieved NCEA (National Certificate in Educational Achievement) credits in drama, creative writing, and art, but NCEA did not dominate the assessment landscape, rather teachers focused on learning that capitalized on students' strengths and interests and was considered most relevant and useful for the student. Learning was recorded and fostered across people and places, home, and school. Narrative assessment effectively linked teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting as it became a format for reporting to and celebrating learning with whānau.

As teachers saw the relevance and value of the curriculum for every student, they described improvements in their own curricular knowledge and stronger narrative assessments appearing out of their own subject knowledge. In paying attention to small steps in student learning, teachers became more aware of the context (people, lessons, parts of the school day) that were most motivating and meaningful for the student. Teachers and students both felt validated as students progressed towards more complex learning goals. As an iterative process that recognises current progress and signals next teaching steps, narrative assessment demanded collaborative and critically reflexive planning that values and includes the thinking of whānau, students and teachers. School-wide process and systems also changed to effectively record teaching and learning and celebrate success.



Missy Morton & Jude MacArthur
University of Auckland



Anne-Marie McIlroy
University of Canterbury

CONTACT

missy.morton@auckland.ac.nz

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

There are many ways to get started using NA. Important "ingredients" include:

- finding a critical friend who has been using NA for a while (for example: what are some of the questions you have about assessment approaches, do these approaches show students' learning, how to make better use of the NZC)
- building a team for shared inquiry, a team that includes a teaching colleague, the student and the student's whānau
- meeting regularly as a team to share successes, worries and plans for next steps
- celebrating the learning of all team members

NA usually leads to strengthening knowledge of, and planning for learning within, the NZC for all students. In some settings, greater use of NZC may be a new approach that requires conversations with colleagues and leadership support.

Using NA can point up short comings in some existing approaches to assessment. This can lead to useful (if initially difficult) conversations about changes in emphasis or application of assessment practices as well as subsequent reporting mechanisms.

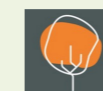
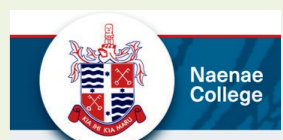
THE SCHOOL TEAMS

St Kevin's College, Oamaru – Paul Olsen (principal), Jo Walsh (DP), Tina Dooley (SESCO), Ryan Gower (maths teacher), Sue Booth (teacher aide); Kimi Ora Special School, Wellington – Jess Hall (DP), Sarah Robinson (teacher), Brooke McCord (teacher); Naenae College, Wellington – Tamsin Davies-Colley (head teacher, special needs unit).



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College

Kimi Ora School



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