

Strategies for dealing with assessment during these disrupted times

Summary of points made during NZAI webinar 21 June 2022

The discussion, led by NZAI President Jenny Poskitt, centred on some ways that schools are dealing with assessment during the ongoing disruptions caused by COVID-19 and other illness. Absenteeism is very high in many schools and often means that traditional assessment processes are very difficult or impossible to execute.

Jenny called on members of the NZAI Executive to share some assessment strategies that they are using or have seen used in schools. They included Viv Mallabar, DP of Ormiston Junior College; Garry Taylor, National Manager - Assessment and Evaluation at Evaluation Associates and Angela Thorogood, former DP at Prospect School. Webinar attendees then shared their knowledge with the audience through the chat function.

What adjustments have you made, or have you seen made, to assessment programmes?

Viv: OJC roll has risen from 400 to 850 during the two and a half years of COVID-19, and now about two thirds of the school population is back on a regular basis.

Teachers are **concentrating on formative assessment strategies** to improve their knowledge of the students and focus on their well-being. The school is carrying out **e-asTTle testing** to establish some starting points, **but over a much longer period of time than usual.**

The school has found that their **narrative assessment strategies**, what they call learning journeys, have proved useful in marking touchstone points in students' learning.

Ang: In the schools that Ang has been in recently, she has found frustration among teachers with the huge numbers of absences, some for months on end. She reports that teachers are particularly anxious about report writing for the end of Term 2, which usually requires assessment information.

Garry: Garry's schools have similar stories of absences, both students and teachers. Schools are asking PLD facilitators how they can be confident giving information to parents and whānau. His advice is for **schools to be honest and transparent about the difficulties that schools are facing with assessment** (and teaching!) and to admit that the information given is **'to the best of our knowledge'**.

Self and/or peer assessment – what role could it play in assessment processes?

Viv: **Narrative assessment** through learning journeys requires **students to reflect on their progress**, either in school or from home. The process requires students to provide evidence of what they have managed, **assessed formatively against criteria** leading to digital badges based on the graduate profile. Students have a voice within a framework.

Ang: There are opportunities to explore the possibilities of **peer dialogue, peer sharing and assessment** in, for example, writing. Students are given agency to talk about their learning. Schools can choose to keep it simple, allowing opportunities in class, or explore online possibilities with the **uploading of artefacts to provide evidence of learning**.

Viv: **Portfolios** gather evidence of learning, **hard copy or online** depending on technological capability and accessibility. Students find it easy to 'talk to' artefacts. Teachers **mentor students if necessary**, and peers can also be mentors. OJC advisory groups are vertical; students help each other with the technology. This **helps build assessment capability**. Students have **agency in sharing their learning**. **HERO** – an online sharing platform – provides live information and **opportunities for parents and whānau to be involved**.

Garry: Finding goodness from adversity, students have been **forced to be reflective** about their learning. Teachers are thinking differently about assessment, **using student knowledge rather than teacher knowledge**. There are opportunities for teachers to **pass agency over to the students**.

Online accessibility provides **opportunities for learning outside standard learning hours**.

Feedback from schools I've worked with has emphasised the **importance of access to a teacher, to question and clarify**.

What strategies have you used to manage assessment?

From attendees:

- Using **Education Perfect, Knowledgehook or online tasks** which measure student progress online. Then I take a broad overall teacher judgement on results from students who participated.
- **Senior Secondary** - we've heard about possible reductions to credits and changes to timing etc and reduction at school level for internals. NZQA are encouraging innovation in assessment.
- **Google Classroom** is a useful way for students to keep track of their work and teachers to be able to have assessments visible and tracked during the year. Teachers are using this to put work up regardless of whether the students are in class or at home so are fluent in the use.
- **Google Classroom** has been great for our year 5 -8 students and the teaching teams in these rooms.
- There were times when I simply asked students to **take a screenshot or photo** of their work.
- **ARBs** have been accessed more over past two years. <https://arbs.nzcer.org.nz/>
- Students can use **screencastify** to talk about their learning
- Yes, **screencastify** is excellent. **Vocaroo** is another free tool, records voice and can link straight to other platforms such as google classroom. <https://vocaroo.com/>

Vocaroo is voice only, good for students who may be shy to appear on camera or who are not good with writing.

- **Loom** is an excellent on-screen video recorder. Fewer restrictions than screencastify and free for teachers.
- **Assessment Online TKI** is a useful resource for assessment for learning strategies and assessment tools and resources. <https://assessment.tki.org.nz/>

Final comments

Teachers should be kind to themselves. And each other. These are extraordinary times, and it's okay to be feeling rather at sea at the moment. This is not the time to be beating ourselves up.

Remember the assessment for learning principles, particularly about learning-focused relationships.

Be transparent with parents and whānau about the difficulties that are being experienced in the collection of dependable data.

Be innovative in your approach to assessment. One example is a teacher taking a running record over Zoom.

Take the opportunities to look at things differently.

Put more onus on your students.

The disruptions are, of course, not only in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are upcoming publications detailing innovations that teachers have tried from around the world. NZAI will provide links on the website to relevant documents when they become available.

Universities are very aware of the situation and are adjusting expectations of first year students.

Be collaborative, talk with each other, share information and innovations.