

Driving a Learning Revolution by Taking Agency and Assessment Seriously¹

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We need to take agency and assessment seriously at all levels if we want a learning system in which all players demonstrate improvement over time.

Each of us responsible for supporting the education system needs to model the learning and improvement we wish to see in the schools we support. As adults in education, irrespective of our roles, we all must learn to become models of agentic learning, of engaging in cycles of inquiry that demonstrate that we are getting better at playing our part in improving outcomes of excellence and equity for students. All of us, modelling and demonstrating self-evaluation and improvement.

For this to happen, there are six interrelated and significant system-wide shifts that need to be made: justifying to all why 10 years of education is compulsory; being clear about what we want our young to learn across the whole curriculum; explicitly articulating expected rates of progress; ensuring everyone in the system is learning; gathering and using progress information; and modelling learning at all levels.

Justify why we make education compulsory for 10 years of a child's life.

We need every student in compulsory education to know that education is compulsory because what they will learn over those 10 years is fundamental to becoming an adult. We need parents and whānau to understand and support this so we can grow and nourish thriving individuals and communities for our future. As an education system we need to monitor to ensure that the message is being heard and supported by our whole community.

Develop progressions across all of the compulsory curriculum.

We need progressions of learning across the whole curriculum, not just literacy and numeracy. We need greater clarity about the whole curriculum and students must be clear about how they are progressing across the entire curriculum. Teachers must be clear about learning progressions in each curriculum area. This means that the curriculum should be supported by clarification of each high-level learning outcome and supplemented with assessment and teaching resources. We understand that it is intended that this will happen with the curriculum refresh. If this is the case, we applaud it. Alongside this clarity

¹ This is part two of the blog written by the authors of [Reviving the Flames of Excellence: Igniting a System that Learns](#), to summarise the points made in that paper. Part one is: [Unleashing the Power of Assessment: A Path to Meaningful Learning and Improvement in Education](#).

must be a very clear rationale as to why each part of the curriculum is important so students are more likely to understand and be motivated to learn.

Explicitly articulate expected rates of progress and standards.

We also need clarity about what to reasonably expect students to know after 10 years of schooling and after each year or transition point of schooling. Without this, we have no way of knowing:

- whether our aspirations for our children are comparable to those of other countries. It is not conscionable to set standards of attainment that are not internationally competitive.
- how reasonable any child's learning progress is. Parents and whānau, and students, expect good answers to the questions: "What has been learnt this year? Has enough been learnt?" "Is my eight-year-old at the standard of an eight-year-old, give or take?" As a student, "Have I learnt enough this year so that things will be okay next year? If I want to be a doctor, or a plumber, am I on the right path?" These are not trivial questions and they cannot be ignored.

Ensure everyone in the system is learning.

Well-resourced, research-informed, professionally applicable and relevant professional learning is essential for teachers, school leaders, educational agencies, and policy makers.

Effective professional learning should be designed to be responsive to the collective and individual needs of all in the education system, and continually reviewed and informed by evaluative information from all involved.

Relevant professional learning and development must include research-based effective pedagogy and assessment capability in the use of assessment tools and the statistical analysis and use of data.

No teacher or principal should be a teacher or principal unless they are genuinely curious about how well their students are learning, how he/she might help them to learn better, and the evidence that will tell him/her that 'better' has been achieved. No one in the Ministry of Education or ERO or those facilitating teacher learning should be in these positions unless they are genuinely curious about how they are demonstrably supporting schools and leaders to improve.

Gather and use measures of progress and achievement.

Government cannot be credible in its administration of our nation's education without good information about how well students are learning. Excellence and equity are key notions here. If we seek excellence, we must have good data about how our students learn in relation to students in other jurisdictions. If we seek equity, we must have good data about how our different gender, ethnic, socio-economic and other groups learn with respect to each other. We need to make sure that assessment tools are of high

standard and that results can be aggregated across kāhui ako and nationally, without inadvertently significantly compromising their formative classroom use.

Good data comes from good assessment tools and processes. Any assessment tools used to inform system learning must also be, at the very least, compatible with learning processes at all other levels so that the needs of one level do not compromise the learning at any other level.

Model learning at all levels

If we have a learning and improving system, the leaders of the system need to model both their personal and system learning. If things go backwards, address it, own it, fix it, learn from it.

There needs to be a publicly available analysis of what has been changed/improved (or not) across the system over the last year, what has been learnt about what might be further improved by the leaders personally and across the system, and what the plans are for the ensuing period. The analysis needs to show long term performance trends, particularly of learner outcomes, and include evaluations of initiatives designed to improve. And we need to model just the sort of curiosity about personal and system performance that we would expect of every registered teacher, leader, and every well-taught young person. ERO and the Ministry are actively engaging in some of this evaluative work but, to go further, more complete and robust information is needed. The modelling needs to be system-wide.

Making these six fundamental and necessary changes at every level will ensure that we all become part of a system that learns, and a system that improves. Nothing gets sustained or embedded unless we all lead, model and follow through.