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National Education Monitoring Project

Probe Study
Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results as presented to teachers and schools

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Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results as presented to teachers and schools

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DISSEMINATION, REPORTING, AND DISCUSSION OF NEMP RESULTS AS PRESENTED TO TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Abstract

This probe study provides a practitioner voice to illustrate the extent to which one aim of New Zealand's National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) has influenced classroom teachers' assessment knowledge and skills relating to designing and using assessment tasks and interpreting the information gained from their use to guide future programme decisions. Focus group interviews were held with three groups of teachers: (i) classroom teachers who hold formal roles with the NEMP programme as teacher administrators and/or teacher markers; (ii) teachers with no formal role with NEMP; and (iii) teachers with professional development responsibilities as principals, advisors, and teacher education lecturers. Semi-structured interview schedules provided opportunities for the participants to share the ways they had accessed the NEMP information and were using it in their daily work to inform their assessment data decisions. The participants also made recommendations on how to enhance current dissemination and reporting of the NEMP findings. Their key recommendations to the NEMP office were to extend the roles of teacher administrators and teacher markers to help teachers make connections between the national data trends and individual classroom programmes and work through principals to promote NEMP resources and learning opportunities for teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1995 the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) has provided detailed national assessment of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of primary and intermediate school students at two levels: Year 4 (ages 8 to 9) and Year 8 (ages 12 to13). Crooks (2002) describes such information as serving to 'identify aspects which are improving, staying constant or declining, allow successes to be celebrated and priorities for curriculum change and teacher development to be debated' (p. 251).

NEMP is of interest to multiple audiences (policymakers, teacher educators, and practising teachers and principals). However, the extent to which the NEMP findings are applied to and inform practitioners' teaching practices is another matter. The focus of this probe study is to explore how much those closest to classrooms are using this information to guide their practice.

This probe study begins with a brief description of some of the design features of New Zealand's model for national education monitoring to illustrate why policymakers and educationists consider it important to include teachers in reporting and disseminating the findings. This is followed by a scoping of issues pertaining to teachers' professional learning in assessment in general and NEMP in particular. This section covers three earlier probe studies that complement this present study. The first of these earlier studies documented the NEMP experience of teacher administrators (TAs) and teacher markers (TMs) (Gilmore, 1999). The second used the NEMP reports as the focus of a 'quality learning circle' professional development experience for teachers (Lovett, 2003). The third, a school-based study, examined the usefulness of NEMP as a tool for school review and development (Verstappen, 2005). The data collected for the present study provides a practitioner voice on issues relating to current and future NEMP reporting and dissemination and discussion of results. The report concludes with recommendations for future practices and ideas likely to provide teachers with additional opportunities for using the NEMP information to learn about assessment.

NEW ZEALAND'S NATIONAL EDUCATION MONITORING PROJECT (NEMP)

Flockton (1999a) purports that before 1995 there was a lack of regular and systematic monitoring of student achievement in New Zealand. NEMP, he claims, filled this gap by providing researched information to support and inform public and professional insight, comment, debate, and policy direction regarding student achievement (p. 2). The NEMP model offers both accountability *and* improvement given that quality information about student performance cannot make a difference to student achievement on its own. According to Flockton (1999a), interpreting and using the information is what is needed to make that difference. The NEMP model deliberately involves practising teachers in all aspects of its design, implementation, and analysis to enhance the likelihood that reporting and disseminating the assessment findings will lead to improvements in practice. For some teachers, this participation is front-end (administering the assessment tasks); for others, it is back-end (marking). Still others opt to do both administering and marking. However, the majority of New Zealand teachers rely on the dissemination of written reports to satisfy any curiosity they might have regarding national trends in student achievement for Year 4 and Year 8 children. Some of these 'majority' teachers wait for principals and curriculum leaders to distribute the latest NEMP reports, but event then may choose not to read the reports.

The invitation for teachers to undertake formal roles in administering and marking the NEMP assessments is a particular feature of the New Zealand model. The rationale for involving practising teachers is two-fold. First, the knowledge and experience of the teaching profession is valued, acknowledged, and used in the process. Second, commitment and ownership develop (or so it is assumed) when teachers are partners in the development of policy and practice. Teachers, according to this assumption, are also more likely to understand, support, and accept the direction and outcomes of this process. Flockton (1999a) argues that the NEMP model 'gains considerable strength and quality from direct teacher participation in the development, administration and marking of assessment tasks, which in turn heightens the validity of both the process and product of national monitoring' (p. 20). Flockton (1999b) also reminds us of the importance of 'a belief system which is capable of being both internalized (understood) and externalized (practised) by those who are most closely connected to the student' (p. 25).

Because approximately 100 TAs and 180 teacher markers are employed each year relative to NEMP, there is considerable potential for these teachers not only to improve their own assessment knowledge and practices but also to influence those of their colleagues. Gilmore's (1999) evaluation found that participation in NEMP experiences was extremely positive for both TAs and TMs. These teachers reported gaining valuable insights into assessment processes and how children perform on a range of assessment tasks in different contexts and from different perspectives. For TAs, this direct experience highlighted issues of rapport building, impacts on children, and the need for standardised administration processes. Learning for the TMs related to the importance of marking criteria and marker consistency, and of colleagues reaching consensus. Benefits related to personal and professional factors, teaching and curriculum factors, and assessment factors. For both groups, participation in NEMP was a time of rejuvenation, confirmation of existing practice, and gaining of new knowledge.

However, teacher involvement as administrators and/or markers is limited because selection is by application, and is subject to yearly quota. This practice means that NEMP has to consider other ways of disseminating and reporting NEMP information to reach the wider body of teachers. To date, dissemination has been through the annual production and release of two types of written publications issued free to all schools. These types are the NEMP reports and a shorter periodical originally called *Forum Comment* but since 2008 renamed as *Focus*.

NEMP Reports

Reports are published the year following each period of research. Schools receive multiple copies of three reports for the assessed areas from the previous year. The NEMP website also provides for online access to the reports and those from previous years, and users can also order additional hard copies via the website from the NEMP office. The information supplied in the reports follows the same format in each one:

- A summary of findings
- Key features of the project
- The assessment framework
- Task descriptions and results
- Survey results
- Performance of subgroups
- Description of the National Education Monitoring Project
- Sample composition.

Task reporting

A distinctive feature of the NEMP reports is the manner in which the tasks are reported and made available to all teachers. As Flockton (1999a) explains, the national monitoring assessments are reported task by task so that results can be understood in relation to what the students were asked to do.

Three types of task appear in each NEMP report. These are called access, link, and trend tasks. A*ccess tasks* are new tasks for a particular cycle. A full description is given of each one and the results for it. *Link tasks* allow comparisons of performance between cycles of NEMP monitoring. The descriptions for these are general given that the tasks will be used in the next cycle of assessments four years later. Full details of the results are available, however. A *trend task* is one that has been a link task in a previous cycle. Trend tasks are used to examine trends in student performance levels. Consideration is therefore given to whether performance has improved, stayed constant, or declined over the four-year period since the last assessments. Recent NEMP reports have also included a page providing guidance on how to read the tasks and results (see Figure 1).

Exemplars

The reports also contain exemplars to illustrate high-, middle-, and low-range student performances. These are particularly useful in the NEMP report for the visual arts and are accompanied by commentaries that describe the features and characteristics of each level. Figure 2 depicts an exemplar from the visual arts report.

Survey results

In addition to the assessment tasks, students complete survey questionnaires that investigate curriculum preferences and perceptions of their own achievement. Flockton (1999a) suggests that these surveys are easy to reproduce and administer in the school and classroom setting:

> [T]heir usefulness lies in the information they provide about a students' attitudes and motivations. If students like an area of study, are willing to take risks, and have good expectations of themselves, then they are more likely to succeed and progress. The strong positive relationship between students' achievements, attitudes and motivation is such that it warrants regular monitoring and review. (p. 70)

Figure 3 shows how survey responses are typically presented in the NEMP reports.

Figure 1: Sample page providing information on how to read NEMP tasks and results, taken from *Visual Arts Assessment Results 2007*, p. 14

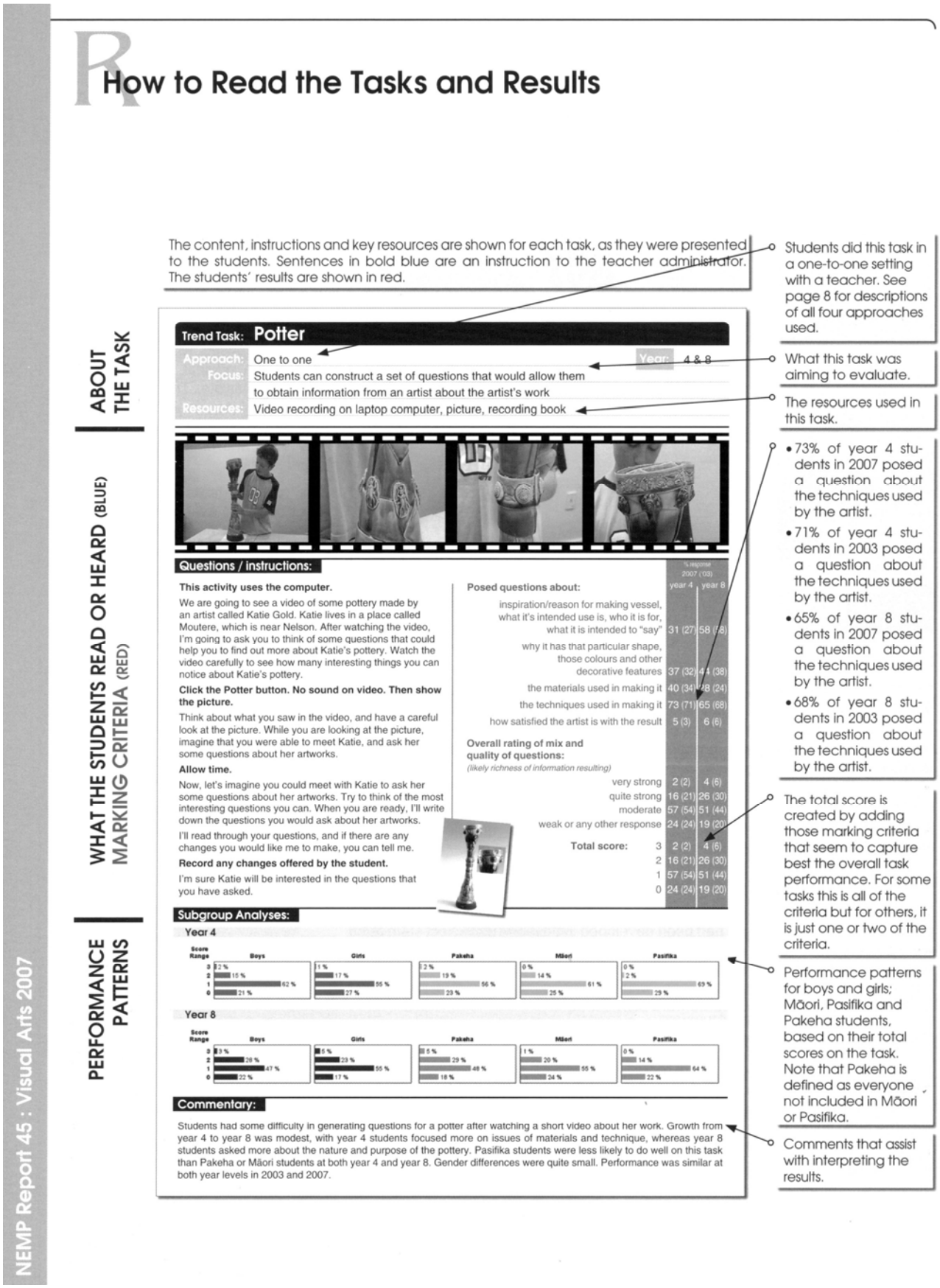


Figure 2: NEMP exemplars (Kiwi pencil drawings), taken from the *Visual Arts Assessment Results 2007*, p. 18

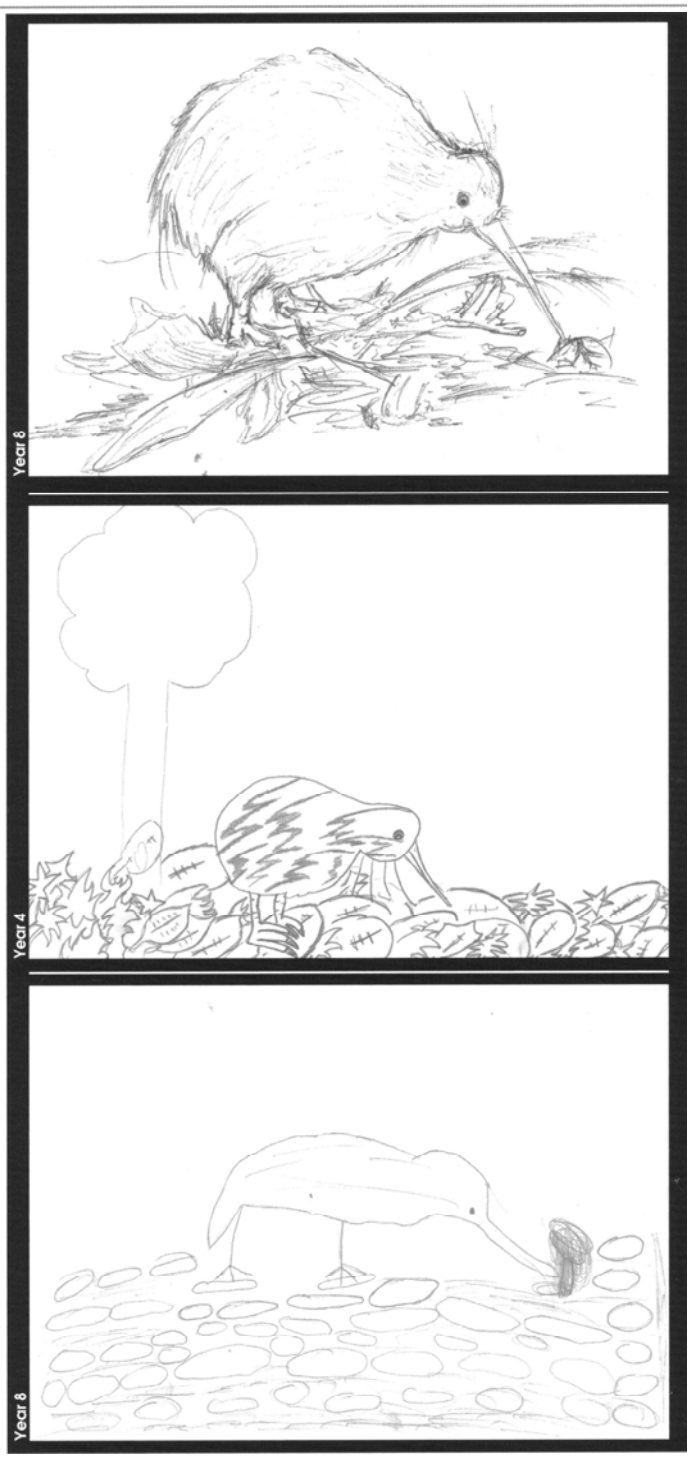
Kiwi Pencil Drawing : Exemplars

DISCUSSION :

HIGH RANGE:
The task calls for careful observation skills and the ability to use pencil to suggest form and texture. In this sample, students are achieving contrasting mark making for feathers, beak, legs, bark and leaves. Attention has been given to the orientation of the kiwi, the way its weight is distributed on its sturdy legs and the balance of its overall proportions. The kiwi securely stands in a contrasting forest floor that makes sense spatially.

MID RANGE:
The visual links to the task are clear. However, in the mid-range sample often some aspects in each drawing are well observed while others remain undeveloped or uninformed by observation. Feathers and other surfaces may be given approximations and symbolic mark making to suggest texture. Individual leaves may be given careful but standardised shapes or summarised in random marks. This results in spatial ambiguity, some awkwardness of shape and a lack of overall coherence in the drawing.

LOW RANGE:
While a kiwi bird in some kind of leafy enclosure may be indicated, students within this range were consistent in producing a personal symbol using a visual summary rather than careful observation. One might expect at year 4 the transition between personal symbol and observation still to be taking place. It would appear that by year 8, at least for some students, their cumulative drawing experiences have lacked the opportunity, challenge and support for further development.



NEMP Report 45 : Visual Arts 2007

Figure 3: Example of NEMP survey responses, taken from the *Visual Arts Assessment Results 2007*, p. 53

YEAR 8 ART SURVEY RESPONSES 2007 (2003) [1999]

1. How much do you like doing art at school?					
	44 (49) [55]	41 (40) [37]	11 (9) [5]	4 (2) [3]	
	heaps	***quite a lot***	***some***	***little***	
2. How much do you think you learn about art at school?					
	10 (13) [16]	39 (48) [49]	41 (34) [30]	10 (5) [5]	
3. How often does your class do really good things in art?					
	5 (8) [9]	31 (31) [28]	56 (56) [57]	9 (5) [6]	
	more	***about the same***	***less***		
4. Would you like to do more art or less art at school?					
	50 (53) [60]	38 (39) [35]	12 (8) [5]		
	heaps	***quite a lot***	***sometimes***	***never***	
5. How often do you do these things in art at school? *(Photography/video is new to survey in 2007)*					
drawing	26 (27) [26]	35 (34) [35]	36 (37) [37]	3 (2) [2]	
making models/construction	4 (5) [7]	12 (7) [10]	41 (48) [45]	42 (40) [38]	
painting	16 (13) [13]	29 (27) [30]	45 (52) [50]	11 (8) [7]	
working with clay	6 (7) [8]	11 (13) [15]	34 (40) [40]	50 (40) [37]	
printmaking	6 (3) [5]	11 (11) [11]	40 (44) [50]	43 (42) [34]	
work with fabrics/weaving	6 (7) [6]	12 (17) [16]	37 (40) [42]	45 (36) [36]	
collage	4 (2) [4]	10 (7) [10]	53 (51) [53]	33 (40) [33]	
group art making	8 (23) [24]	17 (30) [27]	44 (32) [33]	31 (15) [16]	
carving	3 (2) [4]	7 (5) [5]	29 (28) [26]	62 (65) [65]	
computer art	10 (10) [–]	20 (19) [–]	34 (30) [–]	37 (41) [–]	
photography/video	7 (–) [–]	10 (–) [–]	34 (–) [–]	49 (–) [–]	
	heaps	***quite a lot***	***sometimes***	***never***	
6. How often do you look at art and talk about art at school?					
	2 (5) [7]	16 (20) [23]	61 (66) [58]	21 (9) [12]	
7. How often do you plan and share ideas for making art at school? (New question for 2007 survey)					
	1 (–) [–]	19 (–) [–]	58 (–) [–]	22 (–) [–]	
					don't know
8. How good do you think you are at art?					
	13 (17) [19]	49 (52) [52]	19 (19) [16]	10 (5) [6]	9 (7) [7]
9. How good does your teacher think you are at art?					
	14 (15) [17]	26 (33) [28]	10 (12) [7]	4 (1) [3]	46 (39) [45]
10.How good does your mum or dad think you are at art?					
	35 (42) [43]	29 (30) [26]	6 (7) [4]	1 (1) [1]	28 (20) [26]
11. How much do you like doing art things in your own time – when you're not at school?					
	28 (39) [37]	38 (31) [37]	23 (20) [18]	11 (10) [8]	
	heaps	***quite a lot***	***sometimes***	***never***	
12. Do you do really good things in art in your own time – when you're not at school?					
	12 (18) [16]	26 (25) [27]	49 (45) [46]	12 (12) [11]	
	yes	***maybe***	***no***		
13. Do you want to keep learning about art when you grow up?					
	32 (37) [39]	55 (53) [51]	13 (10) [10]		
14. Do you think you would make a good artist when you grow up?					
	9 (11) [10]	50 (52) [53]	41 (37) [37]		

Performance of subgroups

Although New Zealand's national monitoring is designed primarily to present an overall national picture of student achievement, there is some provision for reporting on differences in performance patterns for different demographic groups and categories of school. The variables considered are:

- Student gender
- Student ethnicity
- Home language
- Geographical zone
- Size of community
- Socioeconomic index for the school
- Size of the school
- Type of school (for Year 8 sample only).

Three of the demographic variables relate to the students themselves. These are gender, ethnicity, and home language. Analyses of results allow comparisons to be made between the performances of boys and girls, Pākehā and Māori students, Pākehā and Pasifika students, and of students from predominantly English-speaking and non-English speaking homes.

Focus

Focus is a shorter document that accompanies the NEMP reports. It includes a summary of what students are generally doing well, and specifies those areas where improvements are desirable (for an example, see Figure 4). The comments derive from a national forum of teachers, subject specialists, representatives of national organisations, and government agencies.

Focus also contains a list of suggestions for principals and curriculum leaders to consider. These are:

- *Inform* staff, board members, and the school community of the arrival and availability of reports, and encourage them to 'have a look'
- *Suggest* to the Board of Trustees chair that some trustees might like to preview the reports and lead discussion at a board meeting
- *Arrange* individual staff members to preview the reports and give a summary outline to colleagues at a staff meeting
- *Read* the summaries to get a quick introduction to key findings
- *Encourage* teachers to try some of the tasks with their classes and to consider the performance of their children in relation to the national sample
- *Use* the survey questionnaires to find out more about one's own students' curricular interests and involvements
- *Consider* the relevance of the forum's comments to one's own school's priorities, practices, and programmes.

Other NEMP Resources

Stimulus video and audio material for the assessment tasks have been available since 2001 on the NEMP website, http://nemp.otago.ac.nz. The website also provides access to probe study reports and a summary of probe studies completed before 2003. Probe studies and their reports explore students' responses in greater detail than is possible within the tight timelines for initial reporting of the NEMP assessments. They also allow more in-depth analysis of the factors influencing students' performance.

Figure 4: Example of information for teachers on student performance on NEMP tasks, taken from *Focus 2008 NEMP Project Summary and Forum Comment on 2007 Assessment Reports: Visual Arts*, p. 3

Visual Arts

GOOD NEWS

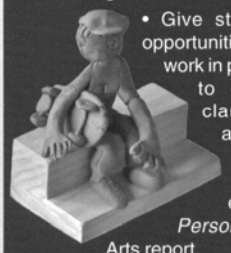
- The visual arts remain very popular for New Zealand students. Out of 14 subjects listed, visual arts ranked behind only physical education for year 4 students and was third for year 8 students (behind physical education and technology). About three-quarters of year 4 students and half of year 8 students were very positive about doing art at school, and about 60% of year 4 students and 30% of year 8 students were also very positive about doing art at home. Māori and Pasifika students were particularly enthusiastic.
- About 70% of year 4 students and 50% of year 8 students reported that they did "heaps" or "quite a lot" of art at school. Similar percentages would "like to do more".
- Year 8 students performed better than year 4 students on art-making tasks, and on tasks involving responding to art that called for explanations and understandings.
- Both in art-making and responding to art, students performed as well in 2007 as in 2003, with suggestions of a small gain for year 8 students.
- Most students performed well on tasks that called for personal reactions and opinions, with year 4 students often doing as well as year 8 students.
- Year 4 students' responses indicated that they did more drawing and computer art activities in school in 2007 than in previous years.
- Students typically performed somewhat better on art-making tasks that allowed them to look at their efforts and then modify them (such as clay modelling, computer drawing and collage).
- At both year levels, boys and girls performed similarly on tasks involving responding to art, while girls generally did slightly better than boys on art-making tasks.

CONCERNS

- Student performance in the visual arts did not match up with the enthusiasm that the students held for the subject. Tasks involving art making produced consistently low scores at year 4, with very few overall ratings (2% to 6%) in the "very good" to "excellent" range. Year 8 students did better, with 10% to 20% in the same range.
- In art-making tasks, skills in using the medium involved in the task (e.g. working with clay) and in including appropriate finer details generally scored lower marks than for expressiveness and composition.
- The results suggest that many students appeared to have had limited experience in responding to art. They did not perform well when asked for explanations.
- Many students at both year levels reported that they had little or no opportunity to engage in some types of art-making. Clay modelling, photography, construction, printmaking, carving, and working with fabrics/weaving were areas where large numbers of children (between 40% and 70%) reported never getting to do these things at school. These percentages have increased since 1999 for clay modelling, construction, printmaking, and working with fabrics/weaving.
- For year 8 students, group art-making activities in school appeared to be less common in 2007 than in 2003 or 1999. Just 25% of the 2007 students reported experiencing group art making "heaps" or "quite a lot", compared to about 50% in both 2003 and 1999.
- Although students from all ethnic groups received marks in the highest and lowest score categories on all tasks, on average, Pakeha students performed better than Māori students, with Pasifika students a little lower again. The differences were larger at year 4 than year 8, and larger for tasks involving responding to art than for art-making tasks. Differences are also larger on tasks having a strong language component. It should be noted that there are strong relationships between performance and socio-economic status (decile ratings of schools), and that it is difficult to disentangle the relative effects of ethnicity and socio-economic status.
- Over the 12-year span of NEMP assessments in the visual arts, the relationship between school decile and performance on tasks has increased considerably for year 4 students (students in higher decile schools receiving higher marks). There is not a consistent trend for year 8 students.

LOOKING AHEAD

- Recognise that the quality of and resources for students' art education are strongly dependent on the commitment and support of the school's leadership.
- Ensure opportunities, by providing sufficient and regularly timetabled time, for both making and responding to art in both two-dimensional media, such as drawing and painting, and three dimensional media, such as clay modelling and construction.



- Give students regular opportunities for reviewing work in progress in order to deepen skills, clarify intentions, and increase language use in art contexts, e.g., the *"Clay Person"* p28, Visual Arts report.
- Increase group experiences in art to help enrich the development of ideas, language and team collaboration, e.g., the *"Pair Trees"* p 46, Visual Arts report.
- Ensure that rich art ideas and skills development are given prominence when the visual arts are incorporated into integrated learning programmes.

- Recognise that the results and examples shown in NEMP reports are the product of student work that did not involve direct instruction or teacher assistance. When teachers are guiding student art making, they should expect work to be more similar to the high-end examplars included in the report.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature is presented according to three themes. The first section focuses on teacher learning in general. The second section explores teacher learning in assessment. The third section addresses teacher learning opportunities through NEMP.

Section 1: Issues in Teacher Learning: The Time to Change Approaches

This section focuses on current debates regarding the quality of teachers' professional learning opportunities and experiences. A call is made to improve current approaches, with arguments in this regard presented from within and beyond New Zealand.

According to Wood (2007), consensus that the quality of students' educational experiences depends primarily on the quality of teachers is becoming more firmly established. The findings of a 15-year study into 83 million students from around the world by John Hattie (University of Auckland) has shown that the key to effective teaching is student interaction with teachers and the quality of feedback on students' work ('Editorial', 2009). An obvious implication of this study is that wherever the quality of teachers' work needs to be improved, attention must be directed at the professional learning and ongoing development of teachers. This approach will not only facilitate retention of high-quality teachers but also provide confidence in the processes used to ensure that teacher learning contributes to student learning and achievement. There is a need to know what helps and hinders teachers' professional learning and what teachers themselves see as effective learning experiences.

As Lorna Earl claims in her foreword to a best evidence synthesis on teacher professional learning and development (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007), 'If teachers, school leaders, and governments are going to expend energy and resources on professional learning, an understanding is needed of the kinds of learning that help teachers develop and grow in ways that will serve all their students well, even as expectations of students and schools are constantly changing' (p. *viii*).

Similar calls have been made internationally for research to address new directions for the design and study of teacher professional learning and development. In Canada, Fullan (2007) recently called for a radical shift in how learning and the conditions under which teachers and students work are conceived. He presented five ideas to substantiate his argument.

1. *Professional development as a term is a major obstacle to progress in teacher learning:* Fullan suggests the notion which maintains that external ideas alone will result in changes in the classroom and the school is deeply flawed as a theory of action.
2. *Learning needs to be related to individual classroom contexts:* Here, Fullan reminds us of Elmore's (2004) writing, which states, '... there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in other schools confronting similar problems' (p. 127).
3. *Student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time:* This requirement is about meeting individual student needs (personalising learning) and responding to these needs in a focused and precise manner (precision). However, as Fullan argues, schools are not set up to respond to personalisation, precision, and the ongoing learning of teachers.
4. *There is a need to 'deprivatise' teaching:* Fullan suggests that opening classroom doors to colleagues is necessary for teacher learning. He admits, though, that in an accountability-driven world, this approach requires some level of risk-taking by teachers and other leaders if they are to see themselves working in a professional learning community where ideas and concerns are shared and discussed and where teacher practice provides the opportunity for such learning.

5. *Teachers' working conditions need to be reviewed and, where necessary, improved:* Fullan argues that a whole set of issues needs to be addressed simultaneously. He claims that taking this approach is not just a matter of giving teachers time to work together. Rather, it requires exploration of issues relating to structure, norms, and deprivatisation, a focus on results, and improved instruction through continuous development.

In America, Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) set their concerns about teacher learning in a public letter to the President-Elect. They called for a transformation of teacher in-service learning, arguing that such learning is a powerful means of eliciting educational reform. In addition to establishing the importance of teacher learning, the authors outlined current practice and issues that need addressing, and ended by providing examples of possible ways forward.

The letter, also published in an academic journal, is bold, to the point. In stating the problem of teacher learning, the authors argue that rectifying the problem has to go beyond teaching teachers how to improve their practice: 'professional development, though well intentioned, is often perceived by teachers as fragmented, disconnected, and irrelevant to the real problems of classroom practice' (p. 226). They also suggest that a 'one size fits all' approach continues to dominate teachers' professional development, denying the 'variability of how teachers teach, and how they and their students learn' (p. 227). Lieberman and Pointer Mace accordingly highlight the need to create social contexts for teacher learning. Learning, they say, occurs 'through practice (learning as doing), through meaning (learning as intentional), through community (learning as participating and being with others), and through identity (learning as changing who we are)' (p. 227).

With this framework in mind, Lieberman and Pointer Mace urge the President-Elect to encourage and support the creation of 'learning communities'. They highlight 'the need for external resources to support internal work, different expectations for teaching and learning and opportunities to practice different roles, responsibilities and relationships ... [in schools by fostering] teacher leadership to extend and expand professional development' (p. 228).

When presenting their suggestions for future practices in teacher learning, Lieberman and Pointer Mace highlight examples from other countries. One of these is a school network in the United Kingdom. This five-year government-sponsored project saw schools working with one another to form networks to enhance the quality of student learning. The authors describe the ways in which these networks enhanced teacher and student learning. There were opportunities, they said, to create practitioner knowledge (from teachers' experience), public knowledge (from research and theory), and new knowledge (from what was created together). Thus, the authors concluded, the prospect of learning communities in schools and networks across schools presents a viable way of thinking differently about teachers' professional development.

Wood (2007), also from America, is another advocate of teacher learning communities. Her vision is one of teachers being users of pedagogical knowledge as well as creators, disseminators, and preservers of it (p. 281). Wood argues that teachers need not only to be knowledgeable but also to know how to use that knowledge. However, she goes on, just how teachers might best acquire that knowledge throughout their careers begs a number of questions:

- should teachers be trained in so-called best practices, coached by mentors, or in-serviced by outside experts?
- should they take college courses?
- should they be engaged in peer observations, teacher research, or study groups? (pp. 281–282)

Increasingly, educational commentators and researchers (see, for example, Hargreaves, 1994) are favouring knowledge societies and schools as sites for knowledge construction, with teachers

placed at the centre of that effort. The literature on teachers' reflective practice (Absolum, 2008; Harris, 2002; Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) highlights the benefits of teachers reflecting on their teaching practices by engaging in enquiry and doing this in collaboration with their colleagues. Wood (2007) cites Cochran-Smith and Lytle's taxonomy of the three types of knowledge that teachers need to have in order to recognise the complexity of teaching:

- knowledge-for-practice emanating from outside experts;
- knowledge-in-practice built—often unconsciously—as teachers go about their work; and
- knowledge-of-practice which is deliberate construction of knowledge by communities of teachers drawing on both outside experts and inquiry into daily practice. (p. 284)

The challenge, says Wood, is for teachers to move into the third knowledge type where there is a greater chance that their learning will closely relate to the concerns of their own immediate practice.

A more focused form of professional learning in schools has emerged in the form of peer coaching. Here, the learning occurs within a dyad known as reciprocal peer coaching. This approach has become a popular tool for teacher learning and has been given particular prominence in New Zealand (Robertson, 2005).

In the Netherlands, Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, and Bolhuis (2007) acknowledge the extensive literature on peer coaching, which suggests that the professional development of teachers can be improved through experimentation, observation, reflection, exchange of professional ideas, and shared problem-solving (p. 165). Their study offers a rich description of patterns of change among four secondary school teachers. They document their application of Clarke and Hollingsworth's Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth, which they adopted with a few adaptations. Zwart et al. (2007) particularly commended Clarke and Hollingsworth's model for acknowledging the complexity of professional growth. The model, they say, not only allows users to identify multiple patterns of learning and to recognise these patterns are non-linear in form, with multiple entry points, but also to define professional growth as an ongoing process of learning.

Using the model, Zwart et al. (2007) analysed changes in teacher learning in terms of four domains—personal, practice, consequence, and external. The personal domain included teacher knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes. The domain of practice related to professional experimentation. The domain of consequence included inferred salient student learning outcomes, teacher control, student motivation, and student development. The remaining external domain included sources of information, stimulus, or support, such as in-service sessions, professional publications, and conversations with colleagues (p. 168). The data the authors obtained from coaching conferences and teacher interviews permitted detailed analysis of shifts in teacher cognition and/or behaviour and indicators of change in teacher reports of student work. These findings suggested that teacher learning within a context of reciprocal peer coaching may start anywhere and can take many different forms. Teachers who reported having learned from reciprocal peer coaching demonstrated more complex and, to use the authors' expression, possibly more 'profound' processes of learning.

What this discussion of teacher learning highlights is the social nature of that learning. Teachers need to access knowledge to confirm existing practices and they need to continually extend those repertoires to meet the needs of their students. Harris (2002) maintains 'collegial relations and collective learning are at the core of building capacity for school and student improvement' (p. 99). Teachers, furthermore, need to learn with and alongside one another in cultures that make it permissible to ask questions, trial new ways, reflect on the impact of one's efforts, and plan for next steps. In conclusion, attention needs to be given to collaborative cultures that celebrate and promote opportunities for teacher learning.

Section 2: Teachers' Professional Learning in Assessment

Hill (2006) suggests that New Zealand teachers' assessment knowledge and confidence in assessment is lacking: '... even in successful schools, a lack of teacher expertise in assessment [has] caused roadblocks for evidence-based improvement of teaching and learning' (p. 1). This view is endorsed by Gilmore (2008) and Parr and Timperley (2008). This section reports mainly on New Zealand studies that have attempted to build teachers' expertise and capacity in classroom assessment to ameliorate such deficiency.

In the New Zealand context, schools are responsible for setting their own achievement targets, monitoring achievement against those targets, and reporting achievement and any variance from those targets to their communities and the Ministry of Education. Teachers have access to numerous assessment tools that can be used diagnostically and to view progress against national normative data. Some of these tools include:

- Assessment tools for teaching and learning (asTTle)
- Six-year observation surveys (Clay, 2006) to identify readers at risk
- Primary achievement tests (PATs)
- Supplementary test of reading ability (STAR).

Hill's (2006) account of her study, titled 'Great Expectations: Strengthening Teaching and Learning in Schools with Diverse Student Populations Through Action Research', demonstrates how teachers in six primary schools in partnership with two university researchers used a variety of standardised assessment tools for gathering this evidence. Hill reports:

> ... although most of the schools were able to use the tools, the data indicated that a lack of technical understanding about standardized assessment, issues related to the type of professional development and practical issues with some tools impeded assessment practices and led to some invalid and unreliable achievement results, particularly in the first year of this two-year project. (p. 1)

Hill's 'Great Expectations' study is particularly useful because it highlights the ways in which schools can draw on existing research and, through their own effort, initiate and sustain high expectations and increased student achievement. The project raised the participating teachers' assessment knowledge and practices and their application of research findings. Action research frameworks helped them to identify current achievement of students at their respective schools in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In addition, the action research framework allowed those teachers to:

- investigate innovative approaches to improve their teaching;
- collect data on the basis of categories and criteria developed by the research team;
- share findings with other teachers in their own and the other schools in the project; and
- develop further observational and analytic techniques and communicate the findings to broader teacher, policy and research audiences. (p. 3)

Each of the schools in this project measured and reported student achievement idiosyncratically, and they all attempted to apply externally designed assessments to measure and report progress over time. They also showed that professional learning tailored to each school's contextual needs rather than a structured package for all schools meant teachers' assessment knowledge and practice improved because of a considerable amount of 'just-in-time' learning.

However, even with the availability of various assessment tools, the preparedness of schools and teachers to use evidence to inform future teaching and learning programmes is still being questioned. According to Parr and Timperley (2008), considerable knowledge and skill are required to interpret data from diagnostic measures and from measures that have associated normative data.

Three smaller studies within their larger literacy project support this claim. For example, one study concerned the evidence collected to monitor the success of new materials. Another study had schools setting goals and using evidence to inform next steps. The remaining study examined the capacity of teachers and their leaders to interpret and use student achievement data.

The findings from Parr and Timperley's (2008) first study showed that while teachers were using a number of tools to find out about student needs, they did not use student achievement data to make decisions about the efficaciousness of the commercial materials. This lack suggests that either the teachers did not see the relevance of the information or they lacked the skills to interpret and use it. In the authors' second study, few schools were able to provide student achievement information on their school-based project that allowed an evaluation of progress over time. Often the conclusions were difficult to substantiate from the data supplied. In the remaining study, teachers were provided with hypothetical data. The teachers were asked to interpret the data for a junior colleague by stating the main points to be taken from the data and what advice they would give about what their colleague should do given the data. It was clear that the teachers lacked skill in data-referenced inference. Parr and Timperley conclusion was as follows:

> ... the upskilling of practitioners to participate in evidence-informed decision-making with respect to practice requires professional learning on two fronts: understanding and skill in gathering and interpreting evidence and knowledge of the content to which the data refer and how to teach this, in order to apply the information gained from the evidence. (p. 69)

Brown's (2004) larger study is also worthy of mention, as it used a 50-item teacher conception of assessment questionnaire, which was administered to New Zealand primary school teachers and their managers ($N = 525$). Before completing the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to react to a hypothetical scenario advertising a new assessment package intended to promote a national policy initiative aimed at improving teachers' assessment literacy. The teachers' responses illustrated four conceptions of assessment, where assessment:

- was related to the improvement of student learning and teachers' instruction;
- makes students accountable for learning;
- evaluates the quality of schools and teachers; and
- is irrelevant to the work of teachers. (p. 302)

Brown argues that 'the implementation of any new assessment policy, tool, or practice, whether at the national or local school level, needs to take account of the complex structure of teachers' conceptions of assessment to ensure success' (p. 314). He maintains there is a need to expose and address these differing and interlocking conceptions if the initiatives are to serve useful purposes. Brown also purports:

> ... the introduction of any assessment policy intended not only to diagnose and monitor student learning but also to improve the quality and quantity of learning should be done in such a way as to minimize association with student accountability and instead maximize association with teachers' commitment to improving their own instruction and the learning of their own students, while taking advantage of teachers' agreement that assessment can identify quality schooling. (p. 315)

Beyond New Zealand, a further study serves to illustrate how data from large-scale international and national assessment programmes can provide formative information that enlightens teachers about the effects of assessment on their classroom practice. Doig (2006), writing from an Australian context, argues there is merit in comparing countries' results and practices and finding ways to share the outcomes of these comparisons with classroom teachers. He suggests, however, 'these achievement data need to be re-worked and re-presented in ways that are plausible, provide a basis for inferences about practice, and be appropriate for the intended audience'(p. 265). He maintains that formative assessment possibilities are present in these summative programmes, although they usually are hidden. Doig also argues that education systems need to be more explicit about their

professional development provision to ensure the development addresses the role of formative assessment in effective learning, offers opportunities for teachers to explore and practise formative assessment, and integrates feedback into the teachers' classroom practice.

Clearly, the findings of each of these aforementioned studies leave us in no doubt that teachers require professional learning in how to use assessment data to inform their decision-making. Above all, though, as Wiliam (2006) reminds us, there is a need to be sensitive to issues of context:

> ... classrooms are so complex that we cannot predict what will happen, and so training teachers to respond appropriately to what we anticipate might happen is likely to be ineffective. It is rather like trying to predict the different situations that might arise in a football game and trying to develop a set of moves for the quarterback for each situation. (p. 20)

Wiliam therefore suggests that professional development programmes take into account the nature of teacher expertise and how teachers learn. Such programmes need to employ small action steps, flexibility, choice, accountability, and the support of the learning community.

Section 3: Teachers' Learning from the NEMP Reports

In New Zealand, NEMP has been carefully planned to provide high-quality assessment information that contributes to the improvement of student learning in classrooms. The extent to which this information impacts on classroom practice depends very much on effective interpretation and use of it by teachers. NEMP also realises that teachers require ongoing learning opportunities in order to further their assessment knowledge and expertise in classroom assessment. This section acknowledges the need for teacher learning opportunities in assessment to receive serious consideration.

Gilmore and Hattie (2000) maintain that not only must the burgeoning number of assessment resources available to teachers and schools be of excellent quality and produce valid and dependable information but also that the assessment programmes are 'accessible' to the teaching profession. Fulfilling these requirements means creating the kind of learning opportunities that will bring national assessment into classrooms in ways that are sensitive to local contexts.

Gilmore (2001a) suggests that national assessment should be a 'teacher's dream' because of the lessons that teachers learn in relation to improving their teaching and assessment practices. She considers NEMP is 'potentially a very rich mine of assessment consisting of many veins of assessment practices and assessment data that can inform school-based teaching and assessment practices in a range of ways' (p. 6).

Gilmore (1999) earlier reported the impact of teachers' formal involvement with NEMP (as TAs and/or TMs) during the project's formative phase (1995–1997). One focus of this evaluation was to determine to what extent teachers' NEMP experiences influenced their classroom or school in terms of implementing the ideas they had gained, and in terms of having a 'spin-off' effect for their colleagues. Data were collected a short time after the teachers returned to their schools as well as several months later. These data sources included weekly diaries, a series of questionnaires, and interviews with 10 case study teachers. More than 80% of the TAs rated, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive rating, each aspect of the NEMP experience as a '4' or '5' in importance. Similar very positive ratings were given by 69% of the TMs, who gave a '4' or '5' rating; 27% gave a '3' rating.

Approximately 60% of the TAs reported a wide range of practices they had put into place as a result of their NEMP experiences. These ideas included changes to their questioning techniques to allow more 'wait' time for children to respond, being selective in the objectives being assessed, using

smaller and more specific tasks, and basing their teaching on the shortcomings they had observed in the children they had tested. The remaining teachers lamented insufficient time, saying that competing demands had prevented them from implementing their NEMP knowledge and skills.

In respect of opportunity to share their NEMP experiences and insights with their colleagues, 75% of the TMs reported that they had managed to have informal discussions with their colleagues. They considered the most important factor influencing their ability to hold such discussions was having interested and supportive staff, particularly the principal. As one teacher said, '... principals hold the key to whether a flow-on effect is possible in an individual school—if you were the principal, you could do so much.'

The teachers also offered suggestions for ways in which the effects and benefits of the NEMP experience could be further enhanced. These included:

- Access to NEMP resources for use in classrooms and schools so that the tasks could be replicated for teachers' own use;
- Having their respective schools, particularly the principal, recognise their experience and the resultant opportunity to share the NEMP lessons learned with colleagues;
- Encouraging schools to have more than one teacher engaged in the NEMP experience over time; and
- Improving the public image of NEMP by providing staff meeting packages to educate teachers about the NEMP philosophy, tasks, resources, and findings.

The NEMP office responded to these findings by making some NEMP resources available for sale through the New Zealand Council of Educational Research distribution services. Selected NEMP tasks from a variety of reports were also made available in the *Teachers' Choice of NEMP Tasks* kit (Gilmore, 2002), which was distributed free to all schools. This kit was the initiative of Alison Gilmore, who invited six teachers to attend a series of seven one-day meetings. The teachers worked in teams to examine all the NEMP tasks from 1995 to 2000 (approximately 400 tasks). The teachers scrutinised each task for its link to the New Zealand Curriculum and produced a NEMP *Curriculum Map* (Gilmore, 2001b). The mapping exercise led to 23 tasks being selected and task sheets developed for teachers' use.

Six principles guided the selection of these tasks as 'tasters' to tempt the wider body of New Zealand primary teachers. The principles ensured the tasks were:

- exciting;
- innovative;
- particularly good models of an assessment or teaching activity;
- easy to implement or adapt for use with readily accessible resources in the classroom or school;
- highly motivating for students; and
- able to provide valuable information about what children know and can do. (p. 24)

Gilmore's (2003) *SET* article provides an overview of these tasks, and her example of one particular task ('Nils and Nelli') indicates possible ideas for classroom use or the types of adaptation possible. The recounting of the example describes task sheets, which provide the information teachers need to implement the tasks in the classroom. Similarly, photocopy masters allow replication of the stimulus materials, and worksheets are supplied ready for student use. In addition, electronic copies of the audio and video stimulus clips and exemplars provide links to the NEMP website: http://nemp.otago.ac.nz.

An article in the *New Zealand Principal* magazine by Eley and Hague (2002) provides a further indication of how schools (in the case of this article, three schools) use NEMP tasks for school-wide or classroom-based assessment. This article offers a useful framework of processes and questions

for other schools to consider when using NEMP tasks to monitor school and student achievement. The questions relate to the purposes of the assessment, task selection and administration, the marking and recording of responses, and analysis of data.

The three case study schools in the article offer different themes. School A used a NEMP task, 'The MAP', from the *NEMP Social Studies Report*, 1997, pp. 36–37, to gain information on student knowledge about New Zealand. This task was administered across Year 4 and Year 8 classes and implementation followed agreed protocols. The teachers involved then met to consider what had been confirmed by the results, what was a surprise, and where they would go next. The teachers then set school-wide targets that were accompanied by a progression of expectations for students. School B used the NEMP Reading and Speaking Survey (*NEMP Reading and Speaking Report*, 2000, pp. 63–64) to determine student attitudes towards reading and to ascertain any gender differences. As with the teachers at School A, the teachers at School B met to collate and analyse their findings. At the end of the process, the teachers agreed that the survey would provide useful data if collected on an annual basis for Year 4 and Year 8 students. The focus for School C was one art teacher's interest in students' self-assessment. This teacher used the observational pencil drawing task 'Teddy', from the *NEMP Art Report*, 1999, p. 25. As well as using the five pages of exemplars for low-, middle-, and high-achievement categories with the students, the teacher used the work samples to develop school standards set out in a benchmark portfolio. This approach was so worthwhile that the teacher wanted to repeat this exercise in a subsequent year in order to monitor changes in student achievement over time.

Eley and Hague end their article by offering three reasons why using externally referenced assessment tools to give information on student performance is highly desirable. The first is convenience: the test items and marking schedules have been developed and trialled by experienced others. The second reason is that teachers can compare the achievement of their own students (and their own teaching programmes) against a national standard. The remaining reason is that gathering of school-wide information on a regular basis offers comparative and trend data (p. 27). Associated with these gains is the collegial support that teachers gain from meeting with one another to make sense of their results and plan next steps.

Deputy school principal, Peter Verstappen, is the author of a 2005 NEMP probe study that shows how his school used NEMP tasks as the basis for school-wide review and development. In his account of the study, Verstappen describes the school's model of school-wide curriculum review. He highlights early initiatives to adopt NEMP as a data source for making judgements about student achievement. The report recounts the school's use of a four-year cycle, similar to that adopted by NEMP, which sees two essential learning areas selected for review and development each year. The school's review phase involves analysis of student achievement data obtained from a cross-section of Year 4 and Year 8 students. The results from the school's students are then compared with NEMP's nationwide data. One advantage of this model is its subsequent development of highly targeted professional development focused on reducing specific gaps in student achievement. Verstappen discusses examples of this developmental work as it relates to the school's mathematics programme. This component of the report makes the report a particularly practical resource for teachers and schools. The study also provides a good example of how schools and teachers can share their practice in a public document and how NEMP can be used to inform assessment practice and its analysis.

This theme of using NEMP as the context for teachers to talk with one another about their practice was also central to Lovett's (2002) study. In acknowledging the problems of schools as sites for teachers' ongoing professional learning, Lovett trialled a quality learning circle (QLC) approach as a means of increasing the likelihood of teachers' learning. In the QLC, eight teachers from different schools met regularly as a learning community to work their way through the NEMP reports,

finding ideas for use in their own programmes. As part of their participation, the teachers agreed to trial NEMP assessment tasks and report their success to one another. At times, they also observed one another in classroom settings. The teachers were able to build a trusting culture that allowed them to take risks, make mistakes, and be supported by one another as they adapted the NEMP tasks for their own classroom use.

It was this encouragement to talk about their work in a focused, non-threatening manner that made the QLC experience a highly suitable professional development tool. Lovett (2002) noted the advantages of a structured approach to counter the reality that 'most opportunities for teacher talk in schools are infrequent, hurried and spontaneous' (p. 153). The QLC is not, of course, argued as a panacea for every school to follow because clearly there are some combinations of teachers for whom joining together is difficult, and it would be pointless to force teachers to join a QLC under this type of circumstance. Also, not all teachers welcome working and sharing with their colleagues, but they are still effective as teachers. Others, however, develop their expertise by working in a learning community that supports and challenges them. Lois, one of the QLC teachers, had this to say about the QLC experience:

> I probably wouldn't have done anything as in-depth on my own. It has been a focus and definitely made me look at the exemplars and think which ones I could use. I wouldn't have done it without the meetings. (p. 131)

Diane made a similar comment when discussing the usefulness of collegial learning:

> I think being able to share with each other the things we were doing … has prodded us into, 'Oh, that looks all right. Oh, I think I can handle that one', and I'll have a go at it … I think they've [the QLC meetings] developed into a style that's functional and effective. (p. 132)

On a wider scale, Lovett's (2002) study also surveyed teachers in Canterbury schools to determine how NEMP could benefit and was benefiting classroom assessment practices. Questions asked included:

- to what extent have teachers realized the potential offered by NEMP?
- how widespread is teacher use of the NEMP information?
- what information does NEMP offer teachers in New Zealand schools?
- what sorts of NEMP information are teachers using?
- is NEMP or general staff development impacting on the way teachers assess children's work in their classrooms and schools? (p. 12)

The results were disappointing. In the first questionnaire sent out in 1998, 71% of teachers answering the questionnaire had not used any of the material from the NEMP reports. Two years later, a repeat of the questionnaire showed some improvement: 54% had still not used the NEMP information.[1] In 2008, Green surveyed a range of national assessment tools (including NEMP) and their usage.[2] Green asked similar questions to those asked by Lovett. Seventy-two per cent of the primary teachers surveyed gave NEMP a 'most familiar' rating; 64% said they had read or used NEMP to inform their teaching. The average usefulness of NEMP received a 2.6 rating on a scale that ranged from 1 (not at all useful) to 4 (useful to a large extent). The average frequency with which the teachers said they used the NEMP information was 'a few times a year'.

The results of these two studies show that although an increasing number of teachers are aware of NEMP, it is still not in the assessment repertoires of a large number of schools and teachers.

[1] A response rate, within a six-week return period, of 37.5% was achieved for the initial questionnaire. Thus, 62.5% of the teachers who were targeted via their principal did not respond for one reason or another. The response rate for the second questionnaire was 29.5%. One reason for this low response rate was due to some principals choosing not to distribute the questionnaires to their staff.

[2] Green's survey response rate was 35.4% from teachers and 49.15% from principals.

However, given the low response rates for both the Lovett and Green surveys, this conclusion is offered cautiously. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the challenge remains one of helping teachers realise the very real benefits of NEMP information for their classroom and school decision-making.

As with the study by Lovett (2002), the purpose of this probe study report is to investigate how teachers and principals currently use the publications reporting NEMP findings and *Focus* now that NEMP is into its fourth cycle. In addition, this probe study set out to investigate how dissemination, reporting of NEMP findings, and promotion of teacher discussion around findings and resources might be enhanced to better meet the needs of (and thereby have far greater benefits for) not only teachers and principals but also teacher educators and advisors.

Research Questions

The questions that informed this study were as follows.

1. Use of the NEMP reports and *Forum Comment/Focus*
   - How do schools (teachers and principals) use the NEMP reports of findings and the *Forum Comment/Focus*?
   - What features of the reports are useful? Easy to interpret?
   - What features are difficult to understand? Not useful? Irrelevant?
   - What features/information/resources/reports would schools like to be available for their use and/or information?
   - In what format? Electronic? Hard copy? Mix? Other?
2. Dissemination of the NEMP reports and *Forum Comment/Focus*
   - To what extent are the NEMP reports of findings and *Forum Comment/Focus* available for teachers to read and use in schools?
   - What are the barriers to teachers making fuller use of the reports?
   - How might these barriers be overcome?
   - What kinds of alternative materials (e.g., discussion questions, DVD of children's achievement relative to tasks, etc) would facilitate a better understanding of the reports? Use of the resources?
3. Promoting professional discussion
   - What opportunities are there/have there been for professional discussions around NEMP in schools?
   - How might staff professional discussions be facilitated by the NEMP team in the way of support materials? Alternative reports? Other mechanisms (e.g., discussion questions, DVD of children's achievement on tasks, etc)?
4. Alignment with other national assessment tools, information, and approaches to assessment/curriculum
   - How well do the NEMP reports and resources align with other assessment/curriculum/instructional practices in schools?
   - In what ways do they contribute usefully?
   - In what ways might they be able to contribute usefully?

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study came from two New Zealand cities, Dunedin and Christchurch. They included five groups of people:

- Teachers who had formal roles with NEMP as TAs and TMs;
- Teachers who had no formal role with NEMP (had not been TAs or TMs);
- Principals;
- Advisors in curriculum and/or assessment; and
- Primary teacher educators lecturing in professional studies and/or curriculum areas.

Selection of Participants

Lists of TAs and TMs from the 1997 programme were requested from the NEMP office in Dunedin. This list was used to select six teachers. Letters were sent to the teachers inviting them to participate in a one-hour focus group interview in their city region. These teachers had been TAs or TMs or, in a couple of cases, had experienced both roles, and they were employed as permanent or relieving teachers attached to a variety of schools. Teacher release payments were offered to enable the teachers to attend the interview in school-time. Follow-up phone calls were made to speed up the responses from the teachers.

Teachers with no formal connection with NEMP were approached through letters to their school principals and several follow-up phone calls. The principals were asked to nominate a teacher for the interview and to pass on the letter to that teacher. The teachers selected then responded directly to the interviewers to make arrangements for the interview. A mix of primary and intermediate schools was sought for each focus group but was not always possible to achieve. Teacher release payments were similarly offered to the participating schools.

Principals were invited to form their own focus group and were selected by the interviewers from a range of school types and decile levels. Approaches to advisors were made through their respective directors, who provided a list of recommended names. Lecturers were approached directly by the interviewers. Sample letters are included as appendices for each type of participant (please refer to Appendices 1 to 5).

Table 1: Participant categories and totals according to interview locations

	Christchurch	*Dunedin*
TAs/TMs	4	8
Teachers	4	-
Principals	5	1
Advisors	2	2
Lecturers	4	4

All interviews were semi-structured. Most were held as focus group interviews, with several exceptions made to accommodate the availability of some individuals. Face-to-face interviews dominated, with the exception of two phone interviews with individual school advisors.

The interviewers handwrote notes (on summary documents) of all interview discussions. The Christchurch interviews were also tape recorded. Each interview began by exploring the participants' use and levels of familiarity with the NEMP reports and *Forum Comment/Focus* in their work contexts. For the teachers and principals, discussions about their use of the NEMP

material focused on school-wide involvement as well as on individual classroom uses. For the remaining groups (lecturers and advisors), discussions focused solely on their own practice.

During the interviews, participants had access to copies of the NEMP reports and *Forum Comment*/*Focus.* This access helped the participants recall or view particular features of the documents that they considered to be useful. At the same time, the presence of other participants talking about their NEMP experiences served an educative purpose for those with more limited knowledge or experience of NEMP. The presence of other professionals also helped to make the interviews relaxed occasions, with talk focusing on teaching practice, and the interviewers providing question prompts. Discussions also explored the barriers to teachers' use of the NEMP publications. Finally, the interviewers asked participants to suggest improvements or additions to the current reporting methods. Alternative methods of dissemination were similarly probed by the interviewers. Appendix 6 provides the generic question framework.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to question themes of current uses and suggestions to enhance future NEMP reporting and dissemination. The responses from each type of participant are included within these themes.

Current Use of the NEMP Reports of Findings and the *Forum Comment/Focus*

At the school-wide level, the participating *principals* outlined the ways in which they promoted the NEMP material and the extent to which they used the information to inform assessment knowledge and practices within their schools.

Forum Comment/Focus was the most widely read of the two documents. One principal indicated that teachers would willingly read a three-page document but typically found it harder to read the more detailed NEMP reports for a variety of reasons, mainly pressures of time. Principals acknowledged *Forum Comment/Focus* as providing useful summaries and they considered its layout appealing. While a few principals claimed to introduce NEMP at staff meetings, the general pattern was for the full reports to be distributed to the relevant curriculum leaders and stored in the curriculum areas. One principal said:

> *I give the reports to the teacher in charge of curriculum areas matching the NEMP reports. Use is varied and depends on the teachers' experience with NEMP. So far we have only had one teacher involved with NEMP. The reports tend to sit in relevant areas in islands rather than being brought back to the full staff.*

The same principal spoke of 'tsunamis' of written resources arriving in schools and admitted that more often than not the NEMP material travelled to and from work unread. Others mentioned the steady stream of documents arriving in schools from a range of sources, and their difficulties in keeping pace with the reading piles most typically received from the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office. If the arrival of NEMP reports coincided with other documents, then it was harder for principals to devote time to reading the NEMP documentation.

Another principal similarly indicated distribution of the reports to learning directors and of some alignment with the school's review process. Typically, the NEMP findings were used as reference points for discussions to determine whether the same patterns were prevalent at individual schools. Occasionally, some NEMP assessment tasks were administered to check this alignment. Again, one principal considered that more in-depth NEMP work would be likely if the school had someone on the staff who deliberately promoted NEMP.

NEMP was used as a framework for school review in one particular school where the principal, as a first step, spoke of gathering up back issues of NEMP for a particular curriculum area, scrutinising the assessment tasks for possible replication, and looking for resources that could be readily purchased to enable those tasks to be used by teachers.

Elsewhere, media coverage of the NEMP findings seemed to have acted as a catalyst for several principals, particularly in relation to the 2007 science results. This finding suggests that principals referred to the NEMP reports in case they were asked questions by teachers, parents, or board of trustee members about the extent to which the national findings were reflected at the level of their school. The media interest was particularly noted when the reports were publicly released.

TAs and *TMs* in one city commented that one reason why the NEMP material had received less impact than it deserved was the lack of encouragement from within schools. They said that teachers generally knew where to locate the NEMP reports but then it was over to the teachers themselves to read and act on the material. In schools where principals took the lead in supporting teachers' use of

the documents, NEMP was taken off the shelves and absorbed. The role of principals was also mentioned at the other focus group of TAs and TMs. One said:

> *[I]t must come from principals to allow use. Principals need to be on board, not just talked at but experiencing the tasks themselves. It needs to come from the top to have bang. If principals did some professional development with the activities, they would see the possibilities with the structured approach.*

One teacher who had undertaken NEMP marking several times over, and who had more recently been involved in administering work, admitted, 'I'm the one who reads most of the reports and I do that from a "follow-up" point of view.' Similarly, when teachers were able to devote time to NEMP familiarisation, their typical first action was to find the summary section in the report or to read *Forum Comment/Focus* for an overview. Some did not get beyond this step.

It was also apparent that schools were beginning to realise the merit of purchasing the NEMP access kits for particular curriculum areas when these aligned with school review areas. When schools applied the NEMP tasks and the marking schedules to their own classes, comparisons could be made between results from the national sample and their own school.

Specific examples of curriculum application were also shared. One TM had shared her NEMP knowledge of marking rubrics in art with members of her syndicate. She recalled showing the other teachers how specific skills could be made more explicit because of the precision in the marking rubric. At the same time, exemplars depicting high, medium, and low performances helped the teachers to note strengths, weaknesses, and skill progressions.

For another teacher with marking and administering experience, it was the simplicity of the NEMP resources and tasks that had prompted her to integrate them into her own programme of work. She recalled the use of buckets for music, and biros and hair clips for technology lessons. This teacher, acknowledged her repeated experiences with NEMP several years in a row as providing useful extensions to her teaching resource repertoire.

Four *teachers with no direct involvement in NEMP* highlighted the value of *Forum Comment/Focus*. In each case, the leadership teams had discussed the trends, celebrations, and areas of concern in the *Forum Comment/Focus* issues. The school of one of these teachers had also raised points of interest with the board of trustees, but again it was noted that the sole action for most teachers was to file the NEMP material for it to 'gather dust on the shelves'.

The *school advisors* noted that they promoted the full range of national assessment tools, of which NEMP was just one. One advisor lamented that the NEMP reports were no longer, as per earlier years, in the 'gaze of teachers' on coffee tables and thus were more likely to be filed in boxes and out of sight. While acknowledging schools' interest in collecting and analysing student achievement data, the advisor also noted the downside of NEMP comparisons being limited to two age levels. This practice, the advisor said, lessened the impact of NEMP, as schools were required to report achievement and variance from targets at all levels, not just Year 4 and Year 8. The same advisor was concerned that the new National Government's interest in national testing could serve to background NEMP even further.

Another advisor knew of only two or three schools that were using NEMP information. He had administered one of the attitudinal surveys with small samples of local intermediates and had used the *Teachers' Choice* kit a few years ago. He acknowledged the need for advisors to actively draw teachers' attention to how to access the NEMP tasks.

However, one other advisor highlighted the value of NEMP for its capacity to provide student achievement information on all learning areas in the curriculum, with reference to the national picture. The advisor stressed that this attribute was not a feature of any other assessment tool in New Zealand.

Lecturers shared their experiences of incorporating NEMP material in their lectures. They reported a range of uses, including:

- Establishing a reporting and recording assignment in the final-year professional studies programme in which student teachers were required to gather a range of data sources to give reports to parents on two children's achievements;
- Using some NEMP assessment tasks as exemplars;
- Listing NEMP websites in course booklets and providing at least one sample of a NEMP report;
- Using NEMP results as data for a research assignment in lieu of gathering data in schools. The analysis culminated with achievement profiles for children;
- A two-hour lecture about NEMP and its philosophy followed by a practical workshop locating information in a NEMP report to substantiate achievement claims;
- Incorporating NEMP's oral language tasks to counter the lack of quality oral language assessment tasks;
- Using NEMP findings as a catalyst for individual research projects; and
- Encouraging final-year teacher education students to apply for NEMP student marking.

Suggestions to Enhance Future NEMP Reporting and Dissemination

The *principals* considered the need to build further bridges between the NEMP resources and teachers as an essential one. One principal suggested that the TAs could usefully extend their involvement with the schools in which they administered the assessments. This principal went on to say that because the TAs had built up some rapport with the staff over the four days of testing, it would make sense for them to return to the schools with the written reports and to lead discussions with the staff on the findings and implications for their practice. It was thought that the NEMP training and subsequent experience of testing would provide sufficient knowledge for these teachers to answer teachers' questions.

Other suggestions from principals included having regional meetings and perhaps sessions, conducted by NEMP staff or advisors, at the Principals' Association meetings. One principal questioned the current level of NEMP promotion, saying:

> *[W]e know it [NEMP] is important but it is almost too comfortable. We know it comes every year. It works. It asks for people to be involved and the reports are circulated. It now needs a major promotional burst in terms of how people have benefited and examples of how the information is being used in schools.*

The potential of advisors playing a more prominent role with NEMP reporting and dissemination was mentioned. It was thought that perhaps the advisors could target particular groups, such as senior management and teachers, to highlight key messages and possible uses.

While the exemplars were applauded, the fact that they were not linked back to curriculum achievement levels was a disadvantage for some principals., one of whom stressed:

> *I know the reports mention areas for improvement but what we don't get is a sense of levels. I consider this is where NEMP falls down. There is no sense of the assessment items being at a particular level. Therefore we cannot confidently use these as examples to argue a child is working competently at a particular level.*

Suggestions from the *TAs* and *TMs* highlighted the need for NEMP information to include further suggestions for teacher actions. One TM commented:

> *The information is great but it is the 'what next' which matters. As teachers, we want units of work developed around the gaps to help us fill those gaps. We want a model of how things could go forward, as the NEMP tasks are one-off lessons. These don't add depth to curriculum by [being] one-offs. A unit of work targeting areas of need going out alongside the reports would really help teachers.*

Videos were offered as possibilities for enhancing the impact of the NEMP information. Short taster videos were suggested as were videos showing how a task could be introduced, continued with whole class follow-up, and extended. It was thought that a video generated from each year's testing would help schools and teachers not only use NEMP for curriculum review but also address areas of need in classroom programmes.

The NEMP website was mentioned as needing a higher profile to reach a wider teacher audience. It was argued that teachers needed to be shown how to access the website and shown what they could do with the hyperlinks. Someone needed to do this prompting. It was not considered sufficient to have the website without adequate promotion.

The TAs and TMs were similarly adamant that the key to promoting NEMP was to sell the idea to principals. They even suggested that the TAs and TMs should be the 'NEMP messengers' to schools, presenting information and working with individuals because they (the TAs and TMs) were so passionate about the value of NEMP. One TA suggested that a possible solution would be for principals to actively encourage every teacher on their staff to take a turn at NEMP administering or marking, but principals needed to be reminded of this. The TA thought that this approach over time would increase a school's assessment knowledge and practices by building a critical mass of NEMP-experienced teachers. However, if this were to happen, NEMP would need to attract teachers who were not just working at the Year 4 and Year 8 levels. Another TM said:

> *NEMP administrating or marking is off-putting in that you can only be a Year 4 or Year 8 teacher or have strength in the area being assessed. I think curriculum strength is needed more for the marking experience than curriculum.*

Discussion relating to the wider promotion of TA and TM involvement also featured ideas for 'hooking' teachers into spending holiday time in Dunedin where the teacher marking takes place. The question was raised as to whether the marking had to happen in Dunedin. It was noted that those who had served as TMs had family connections in Dunedin, and that it was difficult for 'out-of-towners' to contemplate finding their own accommodation, especially if there was a cost involved. Moreover, NEMP reimbursed only travelling expenses. The following suggestion from a TA was well received by the others in her focus group:

> *How about getting stories of TAs and TMs to other teachers? I'm not sure how we could get those stories out but I would be willing to help. For example, I take my mountain bike to Dunedin and there are lots of great things to do there.*

The *teachers'* focus group spent more time talking about electronic access to NEMP information. They considered it essential to have NEMP information online. However, they still argued that there was a need for hard copies of the NEMP reports, as their presence acted as conversation starters amongst groups of teachers. It was noted that individual teachers (at least the younger ones) were more likely to do their planning on the computer and to hyperlink to numerous websites. However, awareness of such hyperlinks to the NEMP website from TKI was not realised by some members of one of the focus groups (see http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/two/tools_e.php). One teacher indicated that if NEMP tasks could be provided in Word document format, teachers would find it easier to adapt the tasks for classroom use. It was currently considered rather time consuming to

photocopy and do 'cuts and pastes' to use a task in the classroom and then on top of that find or make the accompanying resources.

Advisors noted that the NEMP reports had improved since their inception. One advisor referred to the more recent reports as being more 'funked up' with colour images and having a wider range of tasks. He also noted that, given the busy setting of schools, the dense text of the reports continued to be problematic:

> *Some schools find the NEMP reports too big, yet we need robust, well-articulated information. I don't think we should reduce the reports to the lowest denominator. I would like to see advisors promoting the NEMP material by including summaries of the reports alongside readings for schools to foster discussions about next steps in teaching.*

Having both written reports and online replications was deemed particularly useful by one advisor, who offered this advice:

> *... while people could say leave out the hardcopy and just have online, I say we need to have both. The NEMP reports need to be accessible so that they can sit on our knees and our thumbs flick through the pages. I can ask schools to have their teachers bring NEMP reports to the staff meeting. This saves me carrying around class sets.*

Another advisor added:

> *... a mix of electronic and hard copy is still relevant, but there needs to be more focus on the electronic. Most schools sit down with a laptop when they start to plan for units, assessment tasks and school assessment for the year.*

One of the advisors expressed concern about how education was being talked about in New Zealand. This person considered NEMP had an important role in modelling good assessment practice but needed to take an extra step by providing examples of how schools use the NEMP findings. Government agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office similarly needed to place a higher value on school comparisons based on NEMP findings. This advisor said:

> *I was really concerned when one school used NEMP for its annual analysis of student achievement and was knocked back by the local office of the Ministry of Education for using NEMP … The new curriculum asks schools to concentrate on progress and achievement. Schools are required to reference achievement back to national tools. NEMP has a history of being able to go back in time for a range of curriculum areas, unlike the other tools.*

Lecturers agreed that the TAs and TMs were a crucial group for disseminating and using NEMP findings. They acknowledged that these teachers were drawn from all over New Zealand and needed to have involvement beyond their initial NEMP contract. Lecturers suggested that these teachers be brought back together before the reports were officially released so that they could be prepared to work with schools as they interpreted the NEMP findings. The lecturers considered that a 'cohort of NEMPies' with ongoing links with one another and the NEMP office could be expected to work with a cluster of schools, including their own, to help teachers discuss and apply the findings to their own work. This group, the lecturers thought, had more potential than school advisors, who were reportedly working with fewer schools each year.

One lecturer thought that the distribution of the NEMP reports was wasteful in its quantity. This person suggested that *Forum Comment* and regular updates to the *Teachers' Choice* kit would be a better way to spend money.

The lecturers also wanted more visual material to support the NEMP findings and to have the current NEMP videos updated. Several suggested preparation of a new video featuring what schools

could do with the information and using practical examples from schools. Two lecturers admitted to describing NEMP as a 'taonga' to their students and definitely did not want to see it diminish in importance relative to the other national assessment tools. Instead, they wanted to see the future of NEMP enhanced, as it kept New Zealand teachers focused on all aspects of the curriculum rather than on increasing the focus on aspects of literacy and numeracy.

DISCUSSION

This final section of the report discusses the interview findings in terms of their alignment with the existing empirical research findings mentioned in the literature review. The discussion reconsiders Cochran-Smith and Lytle's teacher knowledge taxonomy cited by Wood (2007) and introduced on page 11 of the literature review. This framework allows consideration of actions relating to roles for outside experts (knowledge-for-practice), teachers as reflective individuals (knowledge-in-practice), and teachers working closely with significant others (knowledge-of-practice).

Knowledge-for-practice is needed to remind teachers of the principles underpinning effective assessment. The NEMP reports provide that information to teachers with exemplars of effective task design and reporting that highlight successes, achievement trends over time, and areas where progress needs to be made.

Our findings revealed that many of the existing NEMP resources and publications remain unknown and unused by teachers despite the NEMP team's efforts. We found that teachers did not automatically know about the *Teachers' Choice* kit, the access task resources, NEMP probe studies, the *Curriculum Map*, and articles in journals focusing on teachers' classroom application of NEMP material. All of these resources were received with enthusiasm when we shared them with our interview participants. All were eager to locate copies for their own use. Their lack of awareness of these resources, despite the NEMP office's attempts at disseminating information, indicates that current approaches to resource dissemination are not working.

Knowing these resources had the potential to help classroom assessment was not enough to make a difference to classroom teachers' use of the material. Teachers needed to connect with the material, use it as a framework to ask questions of their own practice, and to reflect on ways they could adapt and apply it to their own contexts. This reflective practice did not happen on its own accord but needed to be part of the teacher learning process initiated and modelled by others in real contexts (knowledge-in-practice). Data from our study showed that teachers started to make connections when they had access to other teachers who made their learning a conscious activity and explicitly shared their questions, experiments, and successful strategies with others. This finding confirmed the findings of Gilmore (2002), Hill (2006), Lovett (2003), and Parr and Timperley (2008).

The remaining teacher knowledge domain of knowledge-of-practice gives credence to teacher learning communities as possible structures for providing the necessary opportunities for shared learning around an agreed focus and to a culture conducive to experimentation, trial, and errors, learning from mistakes, learning from colleagues how to problem-solve, and offering support for a range of possible strategies. Again, this need for collaborative learning is supported by Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008), Lovett (2003), Robertson (2005), Wood (2007), and Zwart et al. (2007), All of these researchers, in their varying ways, advocate approaches that allow teachers to be knowledge users and creators through the tools of peer coaching, reciprocal coaching, quality learning circles, and teachers' learning networks either within or across schools as contexts within which to raise student achievement. Cohorts of NEMP TAs and TMs experience this learning for short periods of time through their intensive training sessions. The results from our study indicate still more could be done to maximise the enthusiasm, knowledge, and practical application skills of these teachers so that they can work with groups of teachers to make the desired links between the NEMP findings and the need for evidence-based assessment data to support decisions about student learning and progress.

Teachers with no formal NEMP roles in our study requested further assistance in knowing how to make better use of the NEMP material. While not necessarily wanting to be TAs or TMs in order to gain that knowledge, they wanted schools to have closer ongoing links to teachers who had received NEMP training. The potential of the TA and TM pool was deemed to be especially important and

worthy of further extension if schools were to better relate the NEMP findings to their own practice. Teachers wanted to learn about NEMP from other practising teachers who understood the demands of classroom life. Schools ideally wanted access to teachers who were knowledgeable about assessment design, reporting, and analysis, and who also understood their work contexts and were from within their schools. If this last requirement could not be met, then schools wanted the teachers to be supported by credible people from beyond the school who would work with them to address individual concerns at the local level. Schools did not want to be left alone to read and act upon the NEMP information. They wanted their teachers to learn from this material alongside other teachers in teacher learning communities and in relation to topics they requested.

Teachers who had been TAs and/or TMs for NEMP could see that, with some additional training, they could work effectively with teachers and schools to report and disseminate the NEMP findings. They also considered they could simultaneously assist teachers to relate this information to their own practice. They considered that the NEMP office and learning community experienced during their NEMP training in the company of other teachers had already served them well and they welcomed an extension of this collaborative learning. This finding was strongly supported by the survey and case study data from the Gilmore (1999) evaluation of TA and TM experiences. We also saw the potential of this TA/TM group when some of the teachers who participated in Lovett's (2003) quality learning circle were invited to participate in the *Curriculum Map* and *Teachers' Choice* kit development (Gilmore, 2001b, 2002). Their inside knowledge of classrooms was crucial to the relevance and acceptability of these resources despite their being little used by teachers.

The key recommendations of this report follow enhanced NEMP office interactions with two groups of people; principals and TAs and TMS.

Recommendations for *principals* include:

- Promoting the 'NEMP experience' as an annual expectation for at least one teacher in their schools each year;
- Creating in-school assessment roles and responsibilities for staff to report and disseminate the NEMP findings amongst teachers; and
- Making meeting time available for teachers to use the NEMP information to guide classroom and curriculum reviews across the school.

Recommendations for *TAs* and *TMs* include:

- Actively promoting the NEMP experience with colleagues;
- Reporting and disseminating the NEMP information to colleagues when the reports are released;
- Helping teachers to access the NEMP resources;
- Conducting collaborative planning alongside other teachers to address the gaps in student achievement identified by the NEMP sampling; and
- Maintaining learning networks with other TAs and TMs to support their own work in schools.

If NEMP is to fulfil its goal of improving classroom assessor knowledge to enhance student achievement, then teachers need to understand how they can use the NEMP information to guide and inform their future teaching practice. This challenge of promoting NEMP needs to be shared by teacher educators, advisors, principals, and teachers and not left solely to the NEMP office. The teaching profession needs to embrace NEMP and explore its potential with other teachers rather than wait for others to determine learning agendas. Teachers should not accept 'victim of change' status but rather see NEMP as a resource that assists them to make informed choices and become 'agents of change' (Fullan, 1993). Teachers have already signalled their appreciation of exemplars and teachers' stories about what works in the classroom. These are the keys to wider use of the

NEMP information. We urge retention of teachers' voice relative to NEMP. If we accept that teachers are the vital link to student achievement, then NEMP needs to maintain and extend this dimension.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER TO TEACHER ADMINISTRATORS/TEACHER MARKERS

September 2008

Teacher
XXXX School
Address
City

Dear [Teacher]

We understand from the Dunedin NEMP Office that you have worked as a **NEMP teacher administrator or marker**. The purpose of this letter is to provide some details of a research study and invite your participation. You would need to also discuss your involvement with your principal.

The findings of our research project will be used to inform future practices for the dissemination, reporting and discussion of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) results to teachers and schools. You will know that the design of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) has included teacher involvement in a variety of ways. We believe that it is now time to review the extent to which the NEMP reports and the Forum Comment summaries are being used by schools and whether there are alternative strategies which could be introduced to better meet the needs of teachers and principals. We invite you to share your views with us.

We are setting up focus group interviews for 6 teacher administrators/markers who work in either Dunedin or Christchurch schools to join us for a one hour interview. As the interviews will be scheduled within the school day, we are able to offer a half day teacher release payment plus travelling expenses for teachers who are willing to be interviewed. The focus groups will include teachers from a variety of schools.

We are planning a series of focus group interviews with other groups. These will include teachers who have not worked with NEMP as teacher administrators or teacher markers, as well as principals, advisors, primary teacher educators in initial education programmes and the Ministry of Education.

No preparation for the interviews is required of you. The interviews will be semi-structured so that you can tell us about the ways they are using the findings of the NEMP reports or Forum Comments, what barriers you have faced in using the reports, and what kinds of alternative materials you think might better support teachers to interpret and use the NEMP findings to inform their classroom practices.

We would assure anonymity and confidentiality for you and your school in the preparation of the research report.

If you would like to talk to me about this request I would be happy to answer your questions or supply additional information. If you are able to assist us with our request please complete the attached form. A prepaid envelope is enclosed for you to either accept or decline our request. Please return this by DUE DATE. Alternatively you may prefer to reply by email with your name.

Thank you for your assistance,

Yours sincerely,

Dr Susan Lovett
Principal Lecturer
University of Canterbury College of Education
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Email: susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone 03 345 8108

NEMP Probe Study: Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results to teachers and schools

Yes I will participate in a focus group interview with other **NEMP teacher administrators and markers**
No I am unable to participate.

Name of teacher:
Current teaching level:
School:
City:
School email:
School phone:

Please list dates which will not suit you for an interview in Term 4 (please refer to your diary to indicate school camps, sports days etc).

APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO PRINCIPALS INVITING TEACHER PARTICIPATION

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

September 2008

Principal
XXXX School
Address
City

Dear [Principal]

I am writing to you about a research project which will inform future practices for the dissemination, reporting and discussion of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) results to teachers and schools. It is now time to review the extent to which the NEMP reports and the Forum Comment summaries are being used by schools and whether there are alternative strategies which could be introduced to better meet the needs of teachers and principals.

We are setting up focus group interviews for 6 teachers who work in either Dunedin or Christchurch schools to join us for a one hour interview. As the interviews will be scheduled within the school day, we are able to offer a half day teacher release payment plus travelling expenses for teachers who are willing to be interviewed. The focus groups will include teachers from a variety of schools.

We would be grateful if you could ask one of your teachers who has not had a formal role as a NEMP teacher administrator or teacher marker to consider this opportunity to inform the next phase of NEMP. We would ask you to nominate a teacher at your school and provide us with name and contact details. Ideally your teacher should have had recent or current teaching experience at the year 4 or 8 level.

We are planning a series of focus group interviews with other groups. These will include teachers who have worked with NEMP as teacher administrators or teacher markers, principals, advisors, primary teacher educators in initial education programmes and the Ministry of Education.

No preparation for the interviews is required of your teacher. The interviews will be semi-structured allowing the teachers to tell us about the ways they are using the findings of the NEMP reports or Forum Comments, what barriers they have faced in using the reports, and what kinds of alternative materials they think might better support teachers to interpret and use the NEMP findings to inform their classroom practices.

We would be grateful for your support in approaching a member of your staff to be interviewed. A separate letter is enclosed for you to give to a teacher explaining the purpose of the study and the requirements for participants. We would assure anonymity and confidentiality for the school and the teacher in the preparation of the research report.

If you would like to talk to me about this request I would be happy to answer your questions or supply additional information. If you are able to assist us with our request, please complete the attached form by [DUE DATE]. Alternatively you may prefer to reply by email with the name of your teacher.

Thank you for your assistance,

Yours sincerely,

Dr Susan Lovett
Principal Lecturer
University of Canterbury College of Education
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Email: susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone 03 345 8108

NEMP Probe Study: Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results to teachers and schools

Please return this form in the pre-paid envelope

Name of teacher:
Current teaching level:
School:
City:
School email:
School phone:

APPENDIX 3: LETTER TO TEACHERS

September 2008

Teacher
XXXX School
Address
City

Dear [Teacher]

We have written to your principal requesting the name of a **teacher** to participate in a focus group interview with 5 five other teachers from schools in your area. As you have had teaching experience at year 4 or year 8 we are particularly interested in meeting you for an interview. The purpose of this letter is to provide some details of our proposed study so that you can decide whether you will accept our invitation to be involved.

Our research project will inform future practices for the dissemination, reporting and discussion of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) results to teachers and schools. You will probably be aware that the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) has made a deliberate effort to share the results from national monitoring each year with classroom teachers. We believe that it is now time to review the extent to which the NEMP reports and the Forum Comment summaries are being used by schools and whether there are alternative strategies which could be introduced to better meet the needs of teachers and principals. We need you to share your views with us.

We are setting up focus group interviews for 6 teachers who work in either Dunedin or Christchurch schools to join us for a one hour interview. As the interviews will be scheduled within the school day, we are able to offer a half day teacher release payment plus travelling expenses for teachers who are willing to be interviewed. The focus groups will include teachers from a variety of schools.

We are planning a series of focus group interviews with other groups. These will include teachers who have worked with NEMP as teacher administrators or teacher markers, principals, advisors, primary teacher educators in initial education programmes and the Ministry of Education.

No preparation for the interviews is required of you. The interviews will be semi-structured allowing you to tell us about the ways you are using the findings of the NEMP reports or Forum Comments, what barriers you have faced in using the reports, and what kinds of alternative materials you think might better support teachers to interpret and use the NEMP findings to inform their classroom practices.

We would assure anonymity and confidentiality for you and your school in the preparation of the research report.

If you would like to talk to me about this request I would be happy to answer your questions or supply additional information. If you are able to assist us with our request please complete the attached form. A prepaid envelope is enclosed for you to either accept or decline our request. Please return this by DUE DATE? Alternatively you may prefer to reply by email with your name.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Susan Lovett
Principal Lecturer
University of Canterbury College of Education
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Email: susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone 03 345 8108

NEMP Probe Study: Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results to teachers and schools

Please return this form in the pre-paid envelope

Yes I will participate in the **teacher** focus group interview

Name of teacher:
Current teaching level:
School:
City:
School email:
School phone:

Please list dates which will not suit you for an interview in Term 4 (please refer to your diary to indicate school camps, sports days etc).

APPENDIX 4: LETTER TO ADVISORS

September 2008

Advisor
University of xxxx College of Education
Private Bag xxx
Xxxxxx

Dear [Advisor]

I am writing to you about a research project which will inform the future practices for the dissemination, reporting and discussion of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) results to teachers and schools. It is now time to review the extent to which the NEMP reports and the Forum Comment summaries are being used by schools and whether there are alternative strategies which could be introduced to better meet the needs of teachers and principals. We are also interested in learning about the ways in which you as an **advisor** are able to use NEMP resources in your work and what additional support or changes you would recommend for the future dissemination of the NEMP findings.

We are setting up focus group interviews in Dunedin and Christchurch during Term 4, 2008. These interviews will be with teachers, NEMP teacher administrators and markers, principals, lecturers in primary initial teacher education programmes and advisors.

We are inviting you to join a group of 4-6 advisors for a one hour focus group interview. The interview will be semi-structured allowing you and your colleagues to tell us about the ways you are using the findings of the NEMP reports or Forum comments and to explore ideas for future dissemination and support from the NEMP Office.

Your anonymity will be guaranteed in the reporting of the interview conversations. If you would like to talk to me about this request I would be happy to answer any of your questions or supply additional information. If you are able to assist us with our request, please complete the attached form by the [DUE DATE]. Alternatively you may reply by email if you prefer.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Lovett
Principal Lecturer
School of Educational Studies and Human Development
University of Canterbury College of Education
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
Email: susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone 345 8108

NEMP Probe Study: Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results to teachers and schools

Please return this form in the internal mail to Susan Lovett

Yes I would be pleased to join a focus group of **advisors** for your research study

Your name:
Advisory focus (curriculum or assessment):
City:
Email:
Work phone:
Mobile phone:

Dates to avoid for an interview in Term 4:

Thank you

APPENDIX 5: LETTER TO LECTURERS

September 2008

Lecturer
University of xxxx College of Education
Private Bag xxx
Xxxxxx

Dear [Lecturer]

I am writing to you about a research project which will inform the future practices for the dissemination, reporting and discussion of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) results to teachers and schools. It is now time to review the extent to which the NEMP reports and the Forum Comment summaries are being used by schools and whether there are alternative strategies which could be introduced to better meet the needs of teachers and principals. We are also interested in learning about the ways in which you as a **lecturer** are able to use NEMP resources in your work and what additional support or changes you would recommend for the future dissemination of the NEMP findings.

We are setting up focus group interviews in Dunedin and Christchurch during Term 4, 2008. These interviews will be with teachers, NEMP teacher administrators and markers, principals, school advisors and initial teacher education lecturers.

We are inviting you to join a group of 4-6 lecturers for a one hour focus group interview. The interview will be semi-structured allowing you and your colleagues to tell us about the ways you are using the findings of the NEMP reports or Forum comments and to explore ideas for future dissemination and support from the NEMP Office.

Your anonymity will be guaranteed in the reporting of the interview conversations. If you would like to talk to me about this request I would be happy to answer any of your questions or supply additional information. If you are able to assist us with our request, please complete the attached form by the [DUE DATE]. Alternatively you may reply by email if you prefer.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Lovett
Principal Lecturer
School of Educational Studies and Human Development
University of Canterbury College of Education
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
Email: susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz
Phone 345 8108

NEMP Probe Study: Dissemination, reporting and discussion of NEMP results to teachers and schools

Please return this form in the internal mail

Yes I would be pleased to join a focus group of **lecturers** for your research study

Your name:
Advisory focus (curriculum or assessment):
City:
Email:
Work phone:
Mobile phone:

Dates and time slots to avoid for an interview in Term 4, 2008

Thank you.

APPENDIX 6: GENERIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview schedule : Please circle target group for interview

Principals TAs/TMs/ Teachers Advisors Lecturers

Reporting (take copies of a NEMP report to the interview)

1 How do schools (teachers and principals) use the NEMP Reports of Findings and the Forum Comment?
2. What features of the reports are useful; easy to interpret?
3 What features are difficult to understand? Not useful? Irrelevant?
4 What features/information/resources/reports would schools like to be available for their use and/or information?
5 In what format? Electronic? Hard copy? Mix? Other?

Dissemination

1. To what extent are the NEMP Reports of Findings and Forum Comments available for teachers to read and use in schools?
2. What are the barriers to teachers making a fuller use of the reports?
3. How might these be overcome?
4. What kinds of alternative materials (e.g. discussion questions, DVD of children's achievement on tasks etc) would facilitate a better understanding of the reports? Use of the resources?

Promoting professional discussion

1. What opportunities are there/have there been for professional discussions around NEMP in schools?
2. How might staff professional discussions be facilitated by the NEMP team in the way of support materials? Alternative reports? Other mechanisms? (e.g., discussion questions, DVD of children's achievement on tasks etc).

Alignment with other national assessment tools, information and approaches to assessment/curriculum

1. How well do the NEMP reports and resources align with other assessment/curriculum/instructional practices in schools?
2. In what ways do they contribute usefully?
3. In what ways *might* they be able to contribute usefully?

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