

## **Implications of School-Based Assessment for the Pacific**

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*The paradigm shift in education from a traditional approach to constructivist approaches has paved the way for the emergence of a variety of assessment methods under the umbrella of school-based assessment. Teacher assessment can be considered an integral part of school-based assessment. Many institutions, world wide, slowly but surely are incorporating one or other of these forms of assessment in their educational services. In the Pacific, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is one of the premier institutions to take a lead in this regard. IBO's Suva International Secondary School practises a broad range of modern assessment forms as an alternative to school examinations. Until students reach the public examination at the end of schooling, teacher assessment alone sets, maintains, and monitors the curriculum and performance standards at all levels. Focusing on the assessment practice in this Suva school, this paper discusses implications of such a system for Pacific educational management and teacher education.*

### **The shift to replace examinations with modern assessment methods**

#### ***Transitional considerations***

The 'paradigm shift' in education from traditional to constructivist approaches has paved the way for the emergence of a variety of forms of assessment under the umbrella of school-based assessment (SBA). Teacher assessment in an institution could be considered an integral part of SBA. One of the key characteristics of teacher assessment is that it is progressive, or continuous (Maxwell, G. 2004).

The shift in assessment purposes away from selecting individuals for further education, training and employment and towards learning seems to have begun from educational concerns over observed changes in society and its worldviews. *Using* information rather than *having* information, developing sophisticated technologies, and electronic problem-solving seem to have challenged traditional learning styles. As a result, learners in schools are made to acquire generic competencies such as retrieving, analysing, creating and constructing in the domains of information-processing, problem-solving

and communication. Therefore, learning is not just viewed as providing students with opportunities and increasing their chances of individual success, but as an integrated system in a holistic education (Torrance, H. and Pryor, J. 1998: 1).

“Learning involves changes in knowledge, skills and the sophistication of strategies employed by the learners” (Izard 2004:2). Periodical changes in knowledge, skills and the use of sophisticated strategies can be attributed to formation of and progression in learning. At any given point in the learning process, teachers’ reflections on students’ accomplishments, on what knowledge, skills, and strategies they have learned and how they have learned them, is formative assessment (Hein and Price 1994). Students’ continuous self- or peer-involvement process in learning tasks is considered as active- or action learning. Action-learning is a cyclic process of (a) reflection on past actions or experiences, (b) exploration into or /diagnosis /identification of patterns in experience, (c) formulation of plans, and (d) testing action-plans in new experience (McGill and Beaty 2001: 16).

In the United States, the focus of student learning and assessment seems to have greater inclination toward ‘authentic’ approaches. ‘Authenticity’ in learning is attributed when students get involved in self-learning and meaningful activities, such as exercises of performing or producing. In the United Kingdom, with the establishment of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), the focus moved towards extended and open forms of learning and assessment – demanding tasks of investigation, problem-solving, report writing and so forth.

The examinations, which GCSE replaced, made varying, though steadily increasing, use of coursework but it was to become one of the defining features of the new examination. As expressed in *Better schools* (DES/WO, 1985a) the changes in assessment practice were very clear: ‘by comparison with existing examinations, the [GCSE] national criteria place a new emphasis on oral and practical skills and coursework’ (p.30). Syllabuses across all subjects, with few exceptions, were required to make provision for a minimum 20 per cent of the credit available to students to come from work done during the course and assessed by the students’ own teachers...In some subjects, notably English, syllabuses with 100 per cent coursework assessment were devised, approved and widely used by schools (Daugherty, R.1994: 102).

In Australia, a variety of SBA practices are used. For example, in Queensland there is usually no external school-leaving examination; where there is one, statistical moderation is used. In New South Wales, the Board of Studies introduced a greater measure of SBA in 1990 to provide students, parents and employers with more detail concerning achievement. SBA has been an ongoing practice in Australia for more than 30 years (Broadfoot 1994).

### **School-based teacher assessment in practice**

#### ***The school***

In the early 1970s, the International Baccalaureate organisation established international schools in Fiji in corroboration with an association of business people and parents in Suva and Nadi. The assessment in these institutions is school-based. The Suva school caters for students from Reception to Year 12 (Class 1 to Form 6) and offers three programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for Reception to Year 6; the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for Years 7 – 10; and the Diploma Years Programme (DYP) for Years 11 and 12.

#### ***Primary Years Programme (PYP)***

The Primary Years Programme caters for the educational needs of students from the age of 5 to 10 years. The curriculum at this stage provides an opportunity for the learners to construct meaning, principally through concept-driven inquiry. The academic concept-focus is drawn from the pupils' social, physical, emotional, cultural and academic needs. The ongoing assessment process of the PYP is presented in Table 1, which depicts the range of assessment methods that are used by the teachers to assess their students. The teachers manage and monitor student performance and progress through individual files, progress files, sample folders and portfolios. The PYP leads on to the MYP.

**Table 1: School Assessment in the Primary Years Program (Reception to Year 6)**

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<b>Formative assessment</b>	<b>Daily activities:</b> <i>Language:</i> guided reading, writing <i>Mathematics:</i> daily observations, individual conferences, daily tests, quizzes, games, keep in trim tests <i>P.E/ Sports:</i> ongoing observations, checklists <i>Trans-disciplinary:</i> written reports, recounts of experiences, oral discussion reports, presentations, show and share times, anecdotal notes
<b>Summative assessment</b>	Takes place at the end of any unit and includes: <b>acquisition</b> of knowledge or data, <b>synthesis</b> of information/putting the concepts together and producing a well thought out idea, <b>application</b> of knowledge and processes
<b>Performance assessment</b>	A progress file is kept by each teacher and passed on from one teacher to the next level teacher as the child moves up. It includes: work completed, writing sample, mathematics keep in trim test papers, running reading resources, anecdotal records
<b>Process-focused assessment</b>	Performance assessments are related to specific goals and tasks. E.g. running reading records
<b>Open-ended tasks</b>	Students formulate questions and or are given an idea and are asked to research their own answers, or design a solution. E.g. craftwork, designing, model making
<b>Portfolio</b>	Each child in the school is provided with a display folder in which selected work is placed that will reflect progress, achievement and thinking.

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***Middle Years Programme (MYP)***

The MYP is designed to prepare adolescents for their future adult life in the community. It focuses on the community values and opportunities required for the development of critical thinking and judgment. The academic foci of the programme are the competencies of learning and discriminating. As the MYP demands a thorough study of the various academic subjects, it also accentuates their inter-relatedness in a holistic view of knowledge. Through its pedagogical framework, the MYP fosters intercultural awareness to promote better understanding of and respect for other cultures, as well as concern for international issues. The programme also emphasises the importance of communication through a command of one's own language, foreign language acquisition, and the appreciation of different modes of thinking and expression.

In line with the above academic intent of the school, assessment procedures in relation to grading and certification are institutionally organised. How the academic programme of years 6-10 is monitored is presented in Table 2 below, which shows the various methods of assessment in the specific subject areas carried out during the secondary school years 6-10. All these are performance tasks. Their assessments assist in certifying the students for the final year of the Middle Years Programme.

**Table 2: School-based assessment in the Middle Years Academic Programme**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Group 1	Language A (English)	essay writing, poster, argumentative writing, poetry analysis, performance, poetry, expository writing, tests, creative writing
Group 2	Language B French, Japanese	writing, speaking, role play, listening quiz, reading comprehension, end of unit tests
Group 3	History Geography	report writing, research, essay, quizzes, exam
Group 4	Sciences	project, practical test, posters, design and conduct experiment, essays, brochures, modeling, data analysis, topic tests

Group 5	Maths	2 tests each term, investigation, formative tests at end of each topic, written assignment
Group 6	Arts	public performance, research project, creative project
Group 7	Physical Education	theory test, skills application mastery, inter-house athletics competition, inter-house swimming competition
Group 8	Technology	practical project, research project, topic tests

### ***Diploma Years Programme (DYP)***

The DYP is a rigorous pre-university course of study which has 50% SBA and 50% external examination at the end. The DYP is a comprehensive and demanding two-year curriculum, available in English, French and Spanish. International Baccalaureate diploma holders are admitted to universities in more than 110 countries around the world. All the assessments in the various subject areas are compulsory for the awarding of Diploma to the graduating students. Table 3 shows the programme structure and assessment composition at this level.

**Table 3. Assessment Composition in the Diploma Years Programme**

Group	Subject	External Assessment	Internal Assessment
Group 1	Language A English	Examination – 50%	2 oral activities – 30% 2 written assignments – 20%
Group 2	Language B French/ Japanese	Paper 1 text handling – 40% Paper 2 written task – 30%	2 oral activities – 30%
Group 3	History	Essays – 80%	Historical investigation – 20%
	Geography	Essays – 75%	Field work and 2 reports – 25%
	Business Management	Examination – 75%	Research project – 25%
	Information Technology	Examination – 50%	Portfolio – 20%, Project – 30%
Group 4	Experimental Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)	Paper 1 – 20% Paper 2 – 32% Paper 3 – 24%	Practical work – 24%
Group 5	Mathematics Methods	Examination – 80%	Portfolio – 20%
	Mathematical Studies	Examination – 80%	Project – 20%
Group 6	Visual Arts	Studio work – 70%	Research workbook 30%
	Music	Listening Paper – 30% Musical investigation – 20%	Public performance – 30% Solo or group – 20%

There are two distinct features of this programme. Firstly, the students have to write an end of the course external examination marked and graded externally; and secondly, there is a minimum weighting of 30% – 50 % SBA towards the final grade in the external examinations. This is in contrast to the MYP which has entirely SBA.

### **Pointers to education in the Pacific**

#### ***Examination-driven to learning-driven systems***

Generally, twelve years of school education in Pacific Island countries (PICs) is structured around two tiers. The first tier constitutes Year 1 to Year 6 or 8. The second tier is between Year 7 or 9 (Form 1 or 3) and Year 13 (Form 7). Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have public examinations at the end of Class 6 (upper primary education). Nauru conducts two examinations at its upper primary level (Year 6 and Year 7 Examinations). There is a series of examinations at the secondary and tertiary levels of Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Tokelau has just one examination at Form 5 level in its entire 13 years of school education. Nauru holds two examinations at Form 4 and Form 6 levels. In a four years range between F4 and F7, there are three examinations in Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, and Solomon Islands.

The relatively high number of public examinations in these countries does not seem to be causing much concern. The major functions of these examinations should be selection, promotion, establishing bench marks of student accomplishment, measuring achievement and recording student progress over time, improving classroom pedagogy, and providing effective feedback to school systems (Heinemann 1988: 197 – 220). Examination systems in PICs, however, cater only to selection and promotion to subsequent levels, ignoring other significant examination functions. Hence, education in PICs is restricted (Pongi 2004). Generally, the continued impact of such high-stake examinations is reflected in (1) exam-directed subject prescriptions, (2) exam-oriented teaching processes, (3) stereotyped learning styles, (3) exam-based assessment approaches, and (4) result-bearing schools. Almost all PICs are facing the effects of social promotion (promoting students to the next level when they do not fulfill the promotion criteria at the lower level or the admission criteria of the upper level). Classes become, in effect,

multi-grade and teachers have the additional responsibility of ‘stair-casing’ their socially promoted students’ learning and monitoring their progress (Pongi, 2004: 16-17).

Kings (2000:17) states that students’ scores from the tests and examinations lead to conditioning tendencies of measuring academic success by the results in the form of percentages or overall number of marks. Such practices enhance the expectations of pupils, parents, and teachers. In fact, many parents in PICs are of the opinion that achievement in examinations either elevates their family prestige or increases their family shame. Thus exam-based teaching-learning-assessment cycles get perpetuated, raising the high stakes. Added to these, the recent issue of ‘ethnic-discrimination’ seems to be affecting policy-makers and other stakeholder communities. An example of this kind is the Government of Fiji’s policy: Affirmative Action for Fijian Education. The implementation of this policy aroused nation-wide debate. People of other ethnic groups saw it as way of marginalising them from equity and access to educational provisions and services. According to Sundaram (2004), “...it is important that political parties look at the broader picture, rather than just focus on specific issues such as ethnic differences or racial inequalities”.

For any country to move with changing trends in the field of assessment, continued review and reform of the existing system are essential to meet the needs of diverse individuals and prepare them for life-long learning. In this regard, PICs need to incorporate a spectrum of assessment procedures and broaden them to ensure that students (a) acquire a range of valued skills, (b) avoid the boredom of repetition of stereotyped assessment procedures, (c) experience different ways of learning, such as action-learning and (d) are offered more ways of succeeding, such as achieving mastery in technical, vocational and creative arts.

### **From traditional learning practices toward learning approaches**

In PICs, teachers seem to limit their assessment practices to the forms with which they are familiar. Generally observed assessment practices are a variety of norm-referenced tests that encourage parrot learning and reproduction of factual knowledge. A considerable amount of time in a student’s day is spent on formal assessment procedures, such as teacher-

made, text-generated, and public examinations. The amount of time that students spend on testing increases with the grade level of the students. Teachers use traditional items such as true/false and multiple choice questions in weekly, term-end and mid-term tests. Teachers also use factual information in constructing traditional test items rather than procedural or problem-solving skills (Madaus and Kellaghan 1992 cited in Ward and Ward 1999:5).

With Australian assistance (AusAID), the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA), in its member countries, such as Kiribati, Samoa and Nauru, has introduced the concept of 'assessment for learning', refocusing attention on the use of assessment to improve learning rather than promote ranking for selection. This is currently in the trial stage. The project is the SPBEA's most recent venture to empower teachers and students to improve teaching as well as student learning. With high-stake examinations likely to remain a crucial part of the assessment framework of each country (Pongi 2004), the proposed assessment system allows free-choice use of assessment procedures by the teachers. Currently, there is 50-50 weighting allocation for SBA and external examination at each level.

### **Supervisory style to partnership teacher training**

The purpose, philosophy, pedagogy, organisation and curricula transactions of teacher preparation courses are different from those of other professional courses, such as medicine, law and engineering. In any teacher preparation programme, student-teachers benefit from both theoretical and practical inputs, internalise the process of generating and transacting instruction, conceptualise the professional roles and remain contextually proactive. These learning and practising processes are not only meta-cognitive and dynamic, but are also personalised mechanisms in operation (Lakshmi 2001:1-5). Corresponding to the implied and generic teacher competencies, several teacher education institutions, including the University of the South Pacific, Fiji College of Advanced Education, Lautoka Teachers' College and Corpus Christi Teachers' College, organise two modes of pre-designed experiences, viz., (a) institutional-based theory courses and (b) simulated and school-based practical experience. The transformation of content-based knowledge skills into classroom instructional process skills that amounts to an internalising process seemed to have been universally assumed.

Globalisation, the worldview of emphasising individualist and competitive orientation advocated by most developed countries, and indigenisation, the integration of local beliefs, knowledge and skills with globalisation, are two major phenomena that are impacting on teacher preparation programmes all over the world (Chalam 2002: 2). Because of the paradigm crisis between the two, there has been continuous strife in some communities. In PICs, globalisation is compelling Pacific policy-makers and their ways of thinking to conform to global worldviews. The Pacific views of education in terms of curriculum, teaching-learning processes and assessment are dominated by the power and authority of other world cultures. Konai Thaman (2000:1) lists four basic assumptions about teacher training in the Pacific.

1. The content, processes and contexts of teacher education in Pacific Island countries are almost entirely western.
2. Most teacher educators, both past and present advocate(d) approaches to teaching and learning suggested in books and articles aimed at (cultural) contexts that are (were) different from those that are (were) common in Pacific Island Societies.
3. Tertiary education is inherently Eurocentric and most academic staff believe in the superiority of their own ideologies, value systems and worldviews.
4. In a university environment, scientific ways of thinking are assumed to have higher validity and western processes of knowledge analysis and transmission are pursued without question and with almost fundamentalist zeal.

In view of this, it is crucial that PICs put in place policies that reflect their own ideas of teaching and learning, policies that will serve their own interests and needs.

### **Implications from research focus on alternative assessments**

Research interest in the area of teacher assessments seems to have gathered momentum during the past decade. The research focus of several researchers has been on the feasibility and implementation of different methods of assessment, their strengths, weaknesses and successes. Two major

ones are the researches of P.R Aschbacher (1993) and B. H. W. Yung, (2001, 2002).

Aschbacher (1993) conducted a major action research for the National Centre for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing with the purpose of better understanding the process, barriers to innovation, and facilitators of change. This large-scale project focused on exploring fundamental questions of assessment implementation in a variety of school contexts. The results can be summarised as follows:

- (a) barriers that teachers and administrators faced in developing and implementing alternative assessments:
  - \* teachers focused on assessing learning activities rather than student outcomes;
  - \* they experienced difficulties in specifying criteria for judging student work;
  - \* they experienced assessment anxiety in terms of lack of time to learn, plan, practise, use and reflect on assessment procedures;
  - \* they needed training and ongoing support;
  - \* they were reluctant to change; and
  - \* they lacked long range implementation plans.
- (b) factors that facilitated the development and implementation of alternative assessments:
  - \* teachers' commitment to innovative assessment and instruction;
  - \* team membership; and
  - \* sustained administrative and technical assistance.
- (c) the impact of using alternative assessment procedures:
  - \* positively in teachers' reflections on their teaching practices, professional interactions around educational goals and methods, students' multiple modes of expression; and
  - \* negatively in the amount of time and externally-provided professional development efforts; lack of assessment supporting instruction; and much ever-wanted ready-made recipes rather than ideas: "they wanted innovations made easy and simple, not elaborate and time-consuming".

Yung (2001, 2002) observed teachers' classroom practices in the implementation of a Teacher Assessment Scheme (TAS) in Hong Kong. One of his concluding remarks is:

...assessment innovation is a necessary but not a sufficient, mechanism for changes with our educational system. The role of the teacher is challenged by the new assessment scheme — the co-existence of assessment and learning requires a significant change in the teachers' pedagogy. For teachers to implement the new programme, their existing understanding and beliefs concerning assessment must be challenged and opportunities provided for them to come to terms with the philosophy of the new assessment scheme. Most importantly, the teachers themselves must undertake such a learning process.

Aschbacher's barriers, facilitators and impacts could well be mirrored in the Pacific. These context specific needs need to be streamlined through teacher training and orientation programmes toward alternative assessments that focus on learning outcomes rather than learning activities, on how to specify criteria for judging student work, on providing continued training, and on collaborative team involvement of teachers. Sharma, cited in Thimmappa (2002:37) expressed similar views on teacher training in the Pacific.

Yung's research is also very significant from the point of practitioners' professional development, not only in the areas of education and school-based assessment but also in teachers' own philosophy of education. There is a need to programme these human attributes when implementing teacher assessment in Pacific Island Countries.

### **Overall implications**

The teacher assessment practices observed in Suva's International School suggest the way forward for other schools. As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, the SPBEA has taken initiatives to implement school-based assessments through advocating common assessment tasks (CAT) in its member countries. The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), in Fiji has also been periodically reviewing its curricula and introducing corresponding Internal Assessment Tasks. Until 2002, only selected technical and vocational courses were offered

with 50 % internal assessment. Major changes in the FJC curriculum in the form of compulsory course subjects, optional subject groups, and core requirements, began taking shape during 2002 (Education Forum 1999). Currently, there is an ongoing re-structured FJC programme with 50 % internal assessment and no examination at Form 3 and 50 % exam only at Form 4. This trial program which began in 2003 with 47 pilot schools was extended to another 16 schools in 2004. In 2005, this piloting internal assessment program is expected to be extended further to another 50 schools.

Interestingly, the SPBEA common assessment tasks and the Fiji CDU internal assessment tasks seem to have certain commonalities; such as, (a) prescribed *assessment tasks* for core subjects, (b) supplied *marking schemes* for prescribed tasks, and (c) supplied *capture sheets* for teachers in assessing and recording students' performance in the specified tasks (CDU 2004). The nature of assessment tasks includes paper and pencil tests, oral and practical tests, and performance tests.

Although these measures seem to be constructive and developmental, the crux of the issues of teacher readiness and on-the-job training for a variety of assessment skills remain to be prioritised and appropriately addressed. Since teachers' commitment to implement alternative assessments for better learning needs continued support on a long-term basis, and demands for overarching changes in their curricular transactions and pedagogies, there is a great need to develop appropriate data bases in the areas of assessment knowledge and skills. Since a majority of teachers tend to remain largely passive and reactive 'technicians' rather than active and pro-active 'professionals' towards any educational innovation and implementation (Yung 2002:113), they remain calcified for most of their teaching career. This could be because of the lack of serious organisational efforts to bring in teacher awareness and exposure to professional knowledge and research. There is an urgent need to bring about a change in these areas. The curricular reviews undertaken in Fiji and common assessment tasks introduced in some PICs seem to have ignored these human inputs. The way forward in this regard could be definitely teachers' professional training and development. As Anderson and Michener (1994) indicate, the potential for improving the quality of teachers and of education lies not so much with the pre-service teacher education as with the professional development of in-service teachers and their practice.

The authors of this paper are of the view that, if the education reforms in the Pacific region are to lead to success, the following recommendations need be considered. Firstly, because renewing teachers' assessment skills is a difficult, complex, and long-term process, measures should be put in place to develop regional and local databases in the areas of assessment knowledge and skills. This can be done by networking in collaboration and partnership with institutions and organisations. Secondly, action-research is a growing field which recognises 'that change requires change in self'. In this regard, teachers at primary, secondary and tertiary levels need organisational, academic and research support, involving participative inquiry and practitioner-research. Thirdly, the regional universities and teacher-training institutions such as USP could develop needs-based and skill-based assessment courses and train in-service teachers in conducting and undertaking action-research. Lastly, as the current research trends are in favor of developing reflective, inquiring, and researching teachers, the responsibility of in-service teachers' professional development rests with supportive leadership and empathetic managements. In this regard, there is a need for balanced and flexible blending of networking organisations in the region and for research and development, focusing on teachers' personal attitudes and approaches.

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