

Chapter 3

Nauruan Perspectives of Assessment Learning Through Assessment Use



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Abstract The focus of this chapter is on Nauruan teachers' views of how classroom assessment is understood in the context of their Pacific pedagogy. The discussion focuses upon how they use classroom assessment strategies, how they respond and learn from this, and how they believe students benefit from their practices. The Republic of Nauru offers a centralized education system where teacher-made tests are administered mid and end of year across year groups in the primary sector. This small case study incorporates teachers' commentaries about how this assessment information is used to both inform their learning about their students and as part of their day-to-day planning and teaching.

Keywords Classroom assessment · Nauru · Pacific pedagogy
Teacher agency

Introduction

Recognizing how classroom assessment actions influence children's learning, and how this impact can cause teachers to modify their teaching actions as they also learn, is central to changes in teacher practice. Some education stakeholders view classroom assessment as simply measuring student achievements. In contrast, others understand classroom assessment to be a means of enabling teachers to view students' understanding, provide feedback, assist in making informed decisions concerning the next steps to take in the teaching/learning sequence, or as a component

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within the sequence of classroom activities. In this chapter, we show how some teachers in Nauru have been learning to move from the first perspective toward the latter one. In other words, rather than seeing classroom assessment as a summative process conducted through tests and exams following a teaching sequence or period of time, some teachers in Nauru have had the opportunity to extend their understanding and use of assessment into more formative approaches. These include eliciting students' prior knowledge about curriculum topics, engaging students in ways that encourage questioning and peer evaluation, and using assessment information collected prior to teaching a topic to differentiate teaching for differing needs. We consider these pedagogical activities to constitute classroom assessment and explore through Nauruan teacher perspectives, how they are using such practices in their teaching, and learning about them, assisted by professional development and undertaking new teaching qualifications.

At the turn of this century, the *Education for All* (UNESCO 2000) review rated the need for teacher education and appropriate teaching qualifications as a first priority for Nauru. Prompted by this, the Republic of Nauru Department of Education performed a review of their system and national educational needs. As a result, the Nauru Department of Education called for tenders for a university partnership to assist in upgrading teacher qualifications, resulting in the Nauru Teacher Education Project (NTEP) in 2013. In establishing NTEP, "The Government of the Republic of Nauru provided funding for the establishment of a local initial teacher education program, with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and New Zealand Aid" (Sullivan et al. 2017, p. 40) through the University of New England (UNE) in Australia.

Available only to Nauruan citizens, NTEP is a collaboratively designed and governed project that provides an Associate Degree in Teaching (Pacific Focus) aligned with the Nauru Department of Education syllabi. Both in-service and pre-service Nauruan teachers can complete this associate degree and it also provides a pathway to a Bachelor of Education (Pacific Focus) through UNE. Thus, in this chapter, the case study teachers were also students who have recently completed the associate degree. The blended delivery approach to study occurred through online units and intensive ongoing face-to-face support from two in-country and two online full-time UNE support lecturers. There were also supplementary visits from some of the UNE unit coordinators. The units of study included learning, teaching and assessment theory, specific subject content and pedagogy, e-learning, and bilingual education.

This chapter first describes the Nauru context, the Nauruan educational setting, and the NTEP project before moving to explore perspectives of assessment in schooling. The case study research context and approach is then described, followed by the major findings: teacher's views of classroom assessment, the actions that the teachers have taken as a result of their professional learning, and the teacher's perceptions about the consequences of their actions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of key considerations.

The Nauru Context

The Republic of Nauru is a Micronesian island nation with a local population of 10,084 (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2011), including 3340 enrolled, Nauruan school-aged children. Compulsory schooling begins at age 5. Six hundred and twenty-two students aged between 5 and 7 are enrolled at either one of the four government infant schools for their pre-school or prep classes, or the nongovernment Catholic school (catering for students from pre-school through to year 8). Four schools provide for the following year levels:

1. Years 1–3—973 enrolled students,
2. Years 4–6—766 enrolled students,
3. Years 7–9—578 enrolled students,
4. Years 10–12—361 enrolled students (Nauru Department of Education 2016, p. 1).

There is also a school for 40 children with special needs. The focus of the case study reported in this chapter is on the practices of primary teachers in Year 1–6 classrooms.

As a nation, Nauru has a unique history of occupation by German, Japanese, British, Australian, and New Zealand nationals, all wishing to capitalize on the strategic positioning of the country and, in particular, the mining, processing, and exporting of phosphate, a substance which has greatly influenced the country's economic foundations. The highs and lows of the economic impact can be read elsewhere (Anghie 1993; Davidson 1968). What remains today is a comparatively small-scale mining operation that exists within a ravaged island interior, and the ongoing legacy of colonization. Nauru is also an overseas processing center for people seeking asylum in Australia, so, more recently, there has been a small change in the school population as refugee and asylum-seeker children entered the schooling system.

The impact of colonization is evident in the continuance of ongoing educational aid projects, generally from Australia and New Zealand and, since the 1980s, the presence of expatriate teachers in the classrooms. As Serow et al. (2016) identified, “education, and especially teacher education, is understood as a key cultural strategy in sustaining Pacific Island culture” (p. 18). Therefore, it follows that the nature of teacher education can act to strengthen cultural identity and, in doing so, ameliorate the ongoing effects of colonization. Thompson (2013) argued that “educational interventions of any kind would stand the greatest chance of success if they had undergone a systematic form of ‘cultural translation’ from source to target settings” (p. 53).

While culture can be defined in many ways, we draw upon the words of Pacific researchers who describe culture as “a shared way of life of a group embracing knowledge, understanding, skills, values, histories, myths, art and dance – expressed through language” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2009, p. 16). The centrality of language to the preservation and maintenance of culture is undeniable. The challenges this presents in Nauru are articulated in the Pacific Education Development Framework (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2009) which acknowledges that there is a

need to “develop language policies that both enable all students to progress through the education system and provide a framework and mechanism for the maintenance and expansion of Pacific languages” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2009, p. 16).

Nauruans speak in a vernacular and there is not an accepted format for written language (Barker 2012). The search for consistency is ongoing in Nauru, resulting in a lack of an accepted Nauruan language dictionary. Until this occurs, children in Nauruan primary schools learn to write and read in English, while speaking Nauruan. As a result of a local teacher shortage, many classes have expatriate teachers, so the reality is that schooling has occurred in English medium for many children. The *Nauru Language Syllabus, Prep-Year 10* (Nauru Department of Education 2012) documents that in infant school, the language of instruction will be 90% Nauruan and 10% English. As each year of schooling progresses, the language of instruction in Nauruan decreases, so in Year 1 this changes to 80%, Year 2 to 70%, Year 3 to 60%. Then, in Years 4–6 the language of instruction is 50% Nauruan and 50% English, in Years 7–9 it is 20% Nauruan, and in senior secondary schooling, Years 10–12, the language of instruction is 100% English.

Nauru has a Nauru Quality School Standard Framework 2011–2020 (Nauru Department of Education 2011), developed in collaboration with an aid-funded ministerial adviser. It is against this that schools are assessed. The framework is viewed as strategic in enhancing and facilitating continuous improvement of student achievement and the performance of schools through a process of review (Nauru Department of Education 2011). This framework has four standards: quality school governance, positive school environment, effective school management, and quality learning outcomes (Nauru Department of Education 2011). This fourth standard “relates to an assessment of the quality of the educators and the education process that operates within the school to achieve an improvement of learning for each and every student” (Nauru Department of Education 2011, p. 37). Each standard is then divided into four components, in the case of Standard Four; these specific components are

1. Teaching and learning,
2. Teacher professionalism,
3. Assessment, and
4. Curriculum.

These four components are then further elaborated into four indicators. For example, Standard Four (Quality Learning Outcomes), Component 3 (Assessment) indicators are provided below:

- Indicator 4.3.1 The school has a program and process to identify the learning outcomes across the whole school;
- Indicator 4.3.2 Each teacher implements effective classroom assessment and evaluation techniques and processes;
- Indicator 4.3.3 Effective reporting of all student’s learning outcomes exists in the school;
- Indicator 4.3.4 Student learning outcomes and results are used to inform whole of school strategic learning focuses (Nauru Department of Education 2011, pp. 42–43).

Each indicator has a list of evidence statements against which teaching practices are assessed and reviewed. A challenge in this context is that these standards and indicators have been largely derived from Western education systems. For example, evidence statements for indicator 4.3.2 describe aspects of practice which are considered by the Department of Education (2011) to support child-centered teaching and learning. But, as Schweisfurth (2011) identified, child-centered education can be a demanding change for teachers:

because of the profound shifts required in teacher–learner power relations ... Policy rhetoric and implementation plans consistently belie the magnitude of the task at hand, and the *Realpolitik* of governments’ desire to be making visible, positive, modern changes drives policy forward at a pace which practice cannot match (Jansen 1989; Dello-Iacovo 2009). (Schweisfurth 2011, p. 427)

In addition, Dimmock (2000) explained how it is “largely Western (Anglo-American, Australian, New Zealand) ... ideas, policies and practices which have come to dominate the globalization process ... with professional development ... assuming a Western perspective” (p. 12). Underlying this Western perspective is the assumption that the educational practices that are promoted will be “equally relevant to other ... very different cultures” (p. 12). Dimmock identified the paradoxical situation that occurs as “the more that education policy becomes globalized, the more important it becomes to take cognizance of each society’s culture” (p. 13). As Alexander (2000) pointed out, “cultural borrowing happens” (p. 508), and it is sometimes difficult to explain why some educational ideas and practices become embedded in new cultural settings while others do not.

It is within this globalized education context that the NTEP project is situated. NTEP enabled teachers to gain an internationally recognized teaching qualification whilst remaining in their community. The opportunity to study in their home country, through the NTEP project, afforded a major advantage for the pre-service and in-service teachers as they continued with their busy home and community lives. As teachers commenced the program they studied part-time, however, after the first trimester they were released from their classroom teaching responsibilities to study full-time and complete their associate degree in seven trimesters. As part of their study in education, the teachers undertook practicum days with other teachers in Nauru. They were also offered an additional 20-day practical experience in schools in Armidale, NSW, to learn alongside Australian supervising teachers and see the theory, about which they had been learning, in action.

The Pacific focus aspect of the teachers’ associate degree study takes into account the complex interplay of home, school, and community life that forms the Nauruan identity. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) recognized this connectedness, stating that it “demonstrates the value of cultural and social capital that students bring with them” (p. 68). During their professional learning, the teachers are challenged to bring their Nauruan knowledge and values to make their own meaning of concepts that are introduced. “Such intentional inclusion of students’ backgrounds becomes a direct demonstration of the distinction between difference and deficiency. In other words, difference does not imply nor translate as deficit” (p. 68). The NTEP approach enabled

teacher agency. Although NTEP was the conduit of particular approaches that may be different from those the teachers are familiar with, their contextual knowledge of Nauruan cultural practices was activated when they reinterpreted their learning to implement classroom actions. Smith (2016) reinforced this perspective as, for these teachers, “learning takes place in a specific context created by the culture, the history of that culture and of the learner, and other participants” (p. 741).

Thaman (2009) has long called to the people of the Pacific to maintain the integrity of their own cultures amidst the influences of colonization and globalization. She stated that

As cultural mediators, Pacific teachers occupy an important but culturally ambiguous position. Whilst their professional training commits them to the rationale and practices of a Western-derived school curriculum, their personal identities, together with those of their students, are rooted in their own cultures and traditions. (p. 3)

Classroom teachers are charged with the responsibility of delivering local curriculum through pedagogy that reflects the cultural basis of the students’ community. While their planning and preparation reflects the content prescribed in national syllabus documents, they make responsive decisions, moment-by-moment, regarding the focus and direction of their classroom interactions. As Charteris and Smardon (2015) argued, “teacher agency is fundamental to processes of teacher learning” (p. 115) and, in this context, agency involved teachers’ capacity “to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 971).

The case study explored in this chapter is concerned with the professional learning of teachers participating in the NTEP program and we align with Mockler’s (2013) description of professional learning as “the processes that teachers engage in when they expand, refine and change their practice” (p. 36).

In the course of their NTEP studies, teachers designed and planned assessment for different purposes, with an emphasis on assessment for learning. We follow Klenowski’s (2009) description of assessment for learning (AfL) in that it “is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (p. 264). In describing the role of the teacher in classroom assessment, we align with Booth et al. (2016) in that this involves teachers in using “their curricula, pedagogical, and subject matter knowledge to notice, recognize, and respond to students’ learning needs as they arise” (p. 5) and, we add, in a manner that affects students’ learning. In the Nauruan context, classroom assessment practices combined assessment for both summative and formative purposes. Throughout their study, teachers have been learning to prioritize assessment for formative purposes. Marshall and Drummond (2006), in discussing teacher actions that promote what they call the “spirit of assessment for learning,” identified that the ways teachers conceptualize, sequence, and organize lesson tasks that students are to engage with, “affects all subsequent interactions within the classroom” (p. 147). Teachers broker policy and, as a policy conduit, are positioned agentially in their learning and classroom implementation. Having backgrounded the context of schooling in Nauru, we now turn to focus specifically upon assessment in this context.

Assessment in the Nauruan Context

Key staff in the Nauru Department of Education recognized the importance of assessment, both as a classroom practice and as a tool for scrutinizing shifts in the system. Conversations between the NTEP team and members of the department focused on the importance of the summative assessment regime the nation has developed. While it is not the intention of this chapter to discuss the summative assessment system in Nauru, it would be remiss to ignore these summative assessment mandates, as the classroom assessment practices of teachers are influenced by these requirements to the extent that teachers spend time and energy gathering the information for reporting. For our purposes here, we draw upon Sadler's (1989) description of summative assessment in "that it is concerned with summing up or summarizing the achievement status of a student" (p. 20) and tends to occur at an end point.

At the national level, Nauru has previously participated in the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) (Secretariat for the Pacific Community 2014). This initiative was instigated by the Pacific Island Forum Ministers of Education in 2010. According to the Executive Summary, PILNA was administered in 2012 "across 14 Pacific Island countries for the purpose of setting the regional baseline as well as country positions for Literacy and Numeracy achievement of pupils in the Pacific region who have completed four and six years of primary education" (Secretariat for the Pacific Community 2014, p. 4). Nauru elected not to participate in PILNA 2015 as they had developed their own national syllabus documents and benchmark testing system, at the key transition points in schooling, which is at the end of Prep, Year 3, Year 6, and Year 9. This benchmark testing is collated by each school, then cumulatively by the Department of Education. The results enabled the achievement of respective cohorts to be examined, meeting summative purposes as opposed to influencing classroom practices. There was a prevalence of testing, with formal written testing a key part of primary schooling, where each year group had mid and end of year exams, designed by the teachers in those year groups. These predominantly served summative purposes and were used for twice-yearly reporting to parents.

However, both the department and the NTEP team also recognized the place of day-to-day classroom assessment practice as part of the learning and teaching process. This understanding is also documented in the *National Quality School Standards Framework, Republic of Nauru 2011–2020*. Standard Four: Quality Learning Outcomes, Component 3, Indicator 4.3.2 states that "each teacher implements effective *classroom assessment* [emphasis added] and evaluation techniques and processes" (Nauru Department of Education 2011, p. 42). Thus, it was within this context that the case study teachers were working as they were also learning about and trying to implement AfL classroom practices.

Inquiry Methods

The data for this chapter were collected through two different processes. First, to set the scene for teacher learning, Department of Education staff and teachers were invited to talk about their expectations for classroom assessment in schools and classroom assessment practices. One Department of Education staff member and four teachers agreed to participate, allowing their contributions to be shared. Over a 12-month period, when Nauruan teachers were participating in professional development workshops that explored student-centered teaching and assessment for learning in mathematics classrooms, the authors talked with these teachers about their assessment understandings and practices. This process is congruent with indigenous traditions of storying in Nauru. As Clandinin and Connelly (1996) note, “stories are the closest we can come to experience, as we and others tell of our experience” (p. 29). Stories involve multiplicities of layered meanings. Geelan (1997) adds to this, cautioning that “stories, too, highlight some facets and hide others - a process of selection is involved” (p. 561). This selection exists here, first, in the choices that the speakers make as they respond in an interview situation and, second, in the choices that the writers have used to share the stories.

Subsequent to these informal conversations, in 2015/2016, two classroom teachers, Myrna and Anne (pseudonyms), were invited to participate in a small case study to assist us to understand more about teacher assessment learning in the Nauruan context (UNE ethics approval granted). Both had just completed the Associate Degree in Teaching (Pacific Focus) over the previous 2 years and had returned to classroom teaching in a school near to the NTEP study center, and this accessibility was the reason for their selection. Myrna teaches children at the Year 1 level, while Anne teaches a Year 3 class. Both teachers have over 40 students in their classes. While both studied for their degree through an Australian context, they were challenged to recontextualize the content to their Nauruan classroom, culture, and community.

The process of data collection included the following:

1. An initial recorded and transcribed interview where the teachers talked about their beliefs and classroom assessment actions, including what they were now implementing in their classes.
2. A classroom observational visit where teachers’ talk and actions were recorded in the form of field notes to support the subsequent interview.
3. A second recorded and transcribed interview immediately following the observation visit, where the teachers explained what they were doing and why, discussed the actions of the students and their responses and talked about how they had made decisions about their classroom assessment and planning. The teachers’ plans for further changes were also discussed.
4. Informal follow-up conversations with the chapter authors regarding what they were noticing as a result of actions they were taking after the second interview.

Setting the Scene for the Case Studies

As described above, prior to the case studies, Mere (pseudonym), the person from the Department of Education with an overview of assessment in schools, was invited to talk about the expectations for classroom assessment in schools. She articulated these expectations as she discussed her perceptions of what happens in classrooms, highlighting the desire to shift to more student-focused learning environments yet recognizing the prevailing teaching and learning practices in schools that require modifying.

We hope to have ... teachers who have some understanding of what students need in the classroom to learn best. Because we're still used to the old-fashioned style of learning - teachers that are still putting up notes and just leaving the kids to learn from the notes. They are not challenging students enough to explore and find out more about things... We're trying to get teachers to get their students more engaged in ways that they really need to [be]. [The teachers] really need to know what it is that makes students want to learn. ... They're not really getting into the students' mind and trying to find out what it is that might help them learn.

She continued, discussing concerns regarding the need for accountability in teacher practice, both in their planning preparation for teaching and their contextualizing of syllabus content to ensure relevance for the students.

There's no accountability and I think that's where the failure is. The beauty of teaching is that you get a chance to explore what it is that students might need and you're the person who thinks "oh, if I do this, if I prepare this like this then my students will be happy to do the activities." If we get attitudes like that from teachers, I think that's where success comes in and achievement. Everybody is happy, the students are happy, the teachers are happy, the department is happy. A lot of our kids have skills. They enjoy practical things. So, because of the topics and the subjects, the teachers don't really know how to use everyday situations in their teaching. I think that's the biggest problem because then the kids go out and they can't use what they've learnt in the classroom in their everyday lives.

The four teachers also talked about the ideas Nauruan teachers saw as progressive, just prior to conducting the case studies reported in the next section of the findings. One teacher of Year 7 students (aged 12–13 years), we have called Q, shared her experiences when reflecting on end of semester common tests (those administered to all students across the year group) and compared this type of assessment with classroom-based activities with different items for different ability groups.

The things that I teach in the classroom, that's what I assess them on when it comes to the exam. In the classroom they were happy, they really enjoyed doing the activities, cause they were always getting it correct. They were doing the right thing, but when it comes to the exam, it's a totally different thing, and when they receive their score, it's a total let down on their part and then we have to start all over again because when we start a new topic, they just have no confidence ... they don't want to try the activities, but when I gave them like a topic test, I usually like a topic test with different levels. A topic that is for this level and this level and this level. They look forward to receiving that result compared to the actual standardized testing.

Year 6 teacher, R, with 6 years teaching experience, had been focused on assessment for learning as a component of her mathematics teaching/learning sequence

from the first workshop she attended. R described how she provided a range of assessment items targeting an outcome at various levels of understanding. Her rationale for this approach being:

Cause it's no use giving a test they can't do, for example, a baby who cannot chew food, give them chunk of food to chew...cause they will not be able to chew it...So it's the same as those low achievers when they see what they have no understanding of ... So, I try to simplify it but I aim for the same outcome for all of the students, but theirs is in a simpler form.

When asked to describe assessment in her classroom R commented:

Mmm, assessment. I would say that, by monitoring the students while doing the work, and evaluating their answers and how they understand the lessons...usually I give them some sort of, not all the time, a short test, but say, mental computations and on Friday morning we do short activities, a short quiz just on a recap on a week's work.

Although she did not collect work samples, she went on to explain that she was keeping some notes on her observations of the lower achieving students.

I write notes and I keep results and a few assessments of those low achievers and, there are those special individuals that need attention.

Another teacher (S) voiced her enthusiasm for “hands-on” mathematics tasks. It is interesting to note that this teacher commented on students' development that she observed whilst they engaged in classroom activities. This teacher then trialed an activity which involved a take-home task to be completed by the students. The aim was to reinforce the learning that occurred in the classroom and as a form of communication between school and home contexts.

I asked the students to pick any three items that will measure up to 30 centimetres and I saw that most of them could estimate that just a piece of chalk and a rubber and a pencil could ... none of them got something bigger than 30 centimetres. I saw that they can now visualize the length of something in centimetres. There is another activity where I told them to go home and measure maybe three things, that one maybe 8 centimetres and other about 10 centimetres. We estimate before we went, then they went home and see if those items actually about that length.

Teacher T considered how to communicate student progress to parents through using work samples to compile a student portfolio. She saw this as a valid form of evidence for making informed decisions about students' levels of achievement.

At the end of semester one, I thought of now getting all the activities together and the assessment tasks, thus compiling the work so that if they're not here, you have evidence [to] show the parents what their child had done in the school, this is what they've learned, you know, this and that and these evidences. So they're going to take it home with them if they're not doing it here, and for most of them it would be something that they'd be proud of it.

These discussions with Nauruan teachers during the mathematics curriculum-development process illuminated the ways in which they were changing their teaching practices over a 12-month period. Before commencing these integrated workshops, most teachers had been focused on assessment issues related to the national semester

tests. The teachers were developing an understanding of the concept of formative assessment and how these assessment practices relate to the context of Nauruan schools.

Case Study

Following the 2 years of NTEP study described above, both case study teachers articulated a constructivist approach toward classroom assessment that linked to using informal classroom assessment approaches to elicit information about what their students know and/or can do in order to provide direction for their teaching.

Anne: To me it means understanding what the child knows and does not know, like their assessments are things that you do to find out the child's strengths and weaknesses. So, in my classroom, when I [start] a new topic, I would find out first what they know about that topic.

Myrna: It's finding out if the students have been learning from what you have been teaching them as well as finding out what they know, already know at the beginning of the term or the year and you give them a pre-assessment task. It's for the teacher to know what to teach them, what they need to learn during the year and how they are progressing throughout the year. So, to me, that's what assessment is all about.

However, Myrna also spoke of her difficulties in being able to work in the way that she wanted because of the size of her class. Due to a teacher shortage in Nauru, and no substitute teachers, classes are combined. Myrna had 60 children in her class for many weeks at the commencement of the year. With so many students present in the classroom, it was observed that Myrna found it difficult to move among them, adapting her feedback and interactions as students had to approach her. Although she had planned a sequence of writing experiences for children that would involve them working cooperatively using peer assessment strategies, the reality was that, with the resources available in her classroom and working with a large number of students, she was unable to provide the program she had planned, and had to modify this.

The first week was supposed to be the week that they were doing a [writing] draft and then the next week, they would polish it. The week after I was going to get them to talk with each other on improving what's missing from their own reports. [Working in groups] is a challenge for Nauruan kids. It's sometimes a hassle, there are so many of them.

The teachers in the same year level had planned together at the beginning of the year so that if anyone was away they would be working at a similar place in the topics that were being taught.

If we want the program to progress and for the students to keep going and not go back and have to repeat what they missed out. The way we plan the program or the topics is that if one teacher is missing, that that class is distributed and the other teacher is teaching the same thing.

Myrna discussed how only a few of her students were writing in English and that she supported them to construct sentences through developing a pattern in the writing routine.

After we do the oral and sentence making in the pockets they go and write their own sentences using the word for the day, they have to use that word in a sentence.

On the classroom walls, Myrna had nouns and verbs displayed to assist the writers. She worked flexibly between explaining in Nauruan and in English to support learners' understanding, identifying that most students are having trouble with English as many of the Year 1 students had not previously attended prep or pre-school classes and this was their first exposure to learning English. To establish engagement with the children, Myrna had her students think about the writing topic.

Usually I introduce my topic with a question. I'll get them to think about the topic.

The system required that teachers assess students in mathematics and literacy at the ends of terms two and four. Myrna described how she and the teachers at the Year 1 level had put in place a more systematic way of collecting products of student writing so that she could use this to support student learning.

Well, I have criteria, like what we're looking for and what they would like to learn. So, I have the whole of that written out, but I'm looking for the writing of capitals, full stops, commas, question marks, things like that and the grammar and the spelling as well and the words they use.

Myrna explained how she and the students used their writing samples to inform teaching and learning.

They have a piece of paper and a topic to write about. They check what they have there [from the criteria] there is also [time] where the students assess each other. They read to each other what they wrote and [say] you're missing that and they have to rewrite it again and present it to the class at a later time.

Anne used information that she gained from assessing students by considering what students cannot do at this point in time, and working with them at that level. She acknowledged that this may not be the expected level of work for their grade level.

I always look at what they are unable to do. Some of my kids won't be able to do anything that has to do with grade 3 work. So, if they do not know how to identify numbers, they do that. That's a step [on] from where they are at.

The Australian-based practical experience was significant for Myrna who had previously to find her own ways of working and admits that when she first began teaching, she worked directly from the provided syllabus without recognizing the different learner needs in her classroom. She realized the need to differentiate learning for all students to progress.

When I started I was just given syllabus to follow. This is what needs to be taught but then they didn't tell me that [and] I didn't realize that there were different levels in the one class. There is a difference between getting these people up to standard and the ones that are already up to standard that need to go up farther.

Myrna had never had the opportunity to watch other teachers and her own experiences had previously formed the basis of the approach she used in her class. She recognized that her professional learning was transforming the way she taught and had “opened her mind.”

Well, because when I started [teaching] I never got to observe anyone. I just liked to do it on my own. What I learned, I tried to get the kids to learn. So I kind of felt that with this UNE studies that I’ve been doing, it kind of opened my mind and it showed me some new things, new techniques, new strategies of teaching and even managing the class, I was really happy with that.

Myrna spoke of the benefits of working with other teachers, to study and share learning experiences with, during the Australian practicum. A consequence of this was that she now fostered a collaborative learning community within her school, and teachers had worked together to plan the overview of the program and events for the following term.

From what I learnt, the overview is like what we call a timeline. Having someone who was in the same course as me, we knew what we were talking about and we had the resources as well. So, we shared that with the other teachers and we planned out the whole term, excursions and visitors and everything.

As a result of their professional learning, they have implemented a more learner-centric approach to the teaching and learning in their classrooms. In developing this approach to teaching founded on constructivist learning theory, they started with the students’ prior knowledge. Myrna set up the learning environment in her class by talking with the students about what they were learning, a key tenet of assessment for learning and one that was reinforced through observing teachers in action during her Australian practical experience.

I introduce what we are learning for that week or for that day. I tell them the topic, and why it’s important to learn. Sometimes they ask questions about that too: “what ifs” and/or “why.” So, I try to explain to them why they need to learn that. Like [asking] why do we need to learn numbers? They tell us that we need to count our money ... when we go to the shops. So, that’s a good reason: what else, why else? We need to know how many people are there, so that we can feed them, or how much money we can spend on how many things...So, I brainstorm first. I always get them to think or get them to give me what they know first.

Anne talked about how she had changed her approach using her science teaching as an example of how she set up activities for children to explore ideas in a more inductive manner. She noted that with her changed routine the children were able to provide their own definitions. As Marshall and Drummond (2006) indicated, this changed sequencing of student engagement in the task created “an environment in which learning is socially constructed” (p. 147).

I’m trying to implement student-centred activities. For example, instead of giving students the definition they find out their own definition. For our science, we’re doing animal groups, classification... My usual routine, for how I teach them animal groups, is I give them the definition for each like mammals, birds then they just find out what mammals they know. But now I’ve asked them to think about all the animals and how are they different. Like some animals have hair and fur. Then I write it down and some animals have feathers, beaks and

tails and then we write that. They do their own definition instead of me spoon feeding them with a definition and tell[ing] them this is a mammal and this is a bird.

Teaching in this way, where students' prior knowledge was ascertained, led to Anne being surprised about what her students already know.

Actually, they already all know them, but it's just the scientific words like mammals and carnivores and omnivores. But they know, they understand.

As a result of this learning, Anne introduced the specific scientific vocabulary and information that supported the development of the children's understanding. Likewise, Myrna identified that her teaching practices had previously been more transmission focused and that she now engaged the children in hands-on activity to support their learning.

I find that all the strategies that I've been learning about are new. To let the students do their own learning, student-centred activities. I'm more used to the transmission kind of teaching where I give the kids my knowledge. But with [my] reading and [studying] that's getting the kids to do hands-on activities, I find it's better than me doing all the talking.

The teachers articulated how their changed actions were influencing their ongoing teaching practices. In Anne's case, she realized that she knew more about the students in her class and that they had capabilities which she did not acknowledge in her previous teaching approach.

It really helped me because it makes me understand what they already know and it's also exciting for me because it's something new and when I did that to my students, oh I should have done that a long time ago, because instead of me telling them, trying to drill the concept in their minds they actually find it out themselves which is really, really good.

Like Myrna, who noted that her professional learning through her NTEP studies had "opened her mind," Anne recognized that her changed teaching practices have altered the ways in which she views her teaching and the children in her class.

It has opened up my eyes and it's, how do I say it? Like it's given me different things to do and understand [regarding] how the children learn.

Anne talked about her thinking processes and the impacts she was noticing in her changing classroom practices. She related the strategies she was implementing. Rather than responding to all student questions by providing answers, she encouraged the students to think more deeply.

I usually just expand more. If a group is finding it hard because it's a very new method that they aren't used to [and they ask] "What should I do, teacher, what should I do?" I try to give them questions, give them back the question and I say what should you do if want to, you know...? I act as a helper and help them expand their mind instead of just telling them what to do I help them up more to explore.

This changed practice, however, has consequences that Anne recognized and grappled with in her teaching context. In their Nauruan family life, children are directed in their actions and follow the directions they are given (Gaiyabu 2007). Making decisions and having autonomy in choice making is a Western education

view linked closely to constructivism (Vygotsky et al. 1978) and perspectives of the child as a self-managing entity (Tabulawa 2003). Anne admitted that it was not only the teacher–learner power relations (Schweisfurth 2011) that exist in the classroom space that are affected, but also the cultural expectations that exist outside of the school gates.

It's very hard because sometimes, I just don't know what else to say. I'm a Nauruan. I know in the community and everywhere you go, children ask what they do and you have to tell them what to do. You don't tell them, oh you find out yourself or you try and do it yourself, you know, things like that. So, it's very hard, sometimes I find it hard to, help a child to expand on their own when they keep on coming and saying, "what should I do?" ... At the start, it was really hard but I think they have got the hang of what I'm like, how I teach and they understand what they should be doing now and trying out things. So, I think there is a big change.

In considering the learner-centered strategies she is implementing, Anne talked about the ongoing consequences for children in the ways they are perceived in the community and how the changed learning and teaching strategies go beyond the walls of the school.

Honestly, I think that it will be hard for these children... the students will play two roles. When you go in the community, they cannot change because it's our cultural belief and values. You cannot talk to your parents, you have to listen. I think the children are taking up two roles, but they will make a change when they grow up and become parents themselves because they were given the opportunity, during school. So, in this time there will be no change, but they themselves will have a big change when they grow up because they get to ask questions, get to find out that thing [in that way].

Myrna talked about how she was deliberately using Nauruan stories and legends as a context for integrating the Nauruan way of life into the children's learning.

I tell them Nauruan legends that we used to be told. Those are the ones I break up into sentence strips and they have to rearrange them, although they're in English, but the stories are in Nauruan. The characters and the names I use Nauruan and their way of behaving. It's normal for Nauruan families to have more than four kids, they get up to 10. So, they get to learn from the numbers as well, counting in English and Nauruan. ... Also, to bring back the culture of respecting older people and listening to others... I tell them stories about how the Nauruan people behaved, how they looked after this place, how they lived.

In summary, both Myrna and Anne had learned through their studies, and were incorporating in their classroom assessment practice, strategies to elicit students' prior knowledge. They were using exemplars, involving children as peer assessors, and differentiating teaching based upon the information they gained. This supported them to guide student learning by adapting the curriculum, incorporating relevant contexts, and becoming more collaborative professionals. The twice-yearly assessment in literacy and numeracy seemed to sit at the periphery of classroom assessment practices. As Myrna indicated, she had sought alternative ways to collect evidence of children's day-to-day learning that would not only inform her teaching but also meet a similar purpose to the current testing regime and be used as the basis of reporting to families.

Discussion

The intention of the case study was to examine how teacher's professional learning and classroom assessment practices were influenced by their university study, how teachers applied their learning to their day-to-day classroom interactions, and how they mediated the pedagogical differences between Australian-based content and their Nauruan context. As a small, qualitative case study, it is not possible to generalize, but these findings do provide insights into the experiences, actions, and classroom assessment learning of the two teachers as they worked through a process of change. In using "narrative vignettes", we are also conscious that there is complexity of meaning, context and experience that underpins the teachers' stories. This is further elucidated by Clandinin and Connelly (1996) when they consider the source and motivation of individual's stories.

We view these professional knowledge landscapes as exceedingly complex places with multiple layers of meaning that depend on individuals' stories and how individuals are positioned on that landscape, as well as the landscape's own narrative history of shifting values, beliefs, and stories. (p. 29)

Teachers can be agentic in their actions when they use discretion in determining what works and what to experiment with in their practice in their specific classroom contexts. Both teachers articulated that as they learnt about the students' needs from their classroom interactions, they recognized that they were modifying the classroom curriculum to meet these needs. We view these teacher practice movements as inherent to their developing classroom assessment processes in a more child-centered manner. This differs from their past practice of working from the curriculum level specific to their class year level. This also reflects their growing responsiveness to the differing needs of students as they enact classroom assessment. However, the reality of large classes, brought about by a local teacher shortage, inhibited the teachers' ability to adapt their teaching as much as they might have wished. To address these issues, the development of collaborative planning and professional learning communities became an exciting prospect. Central to the teachers' collaborative planning decisions, and in response to the teacher relief shortage, was a determination to benefit the students in their classes. As children moved between classes at the same level, they could engage in familiar content as well as benefit from the teachers' shifts toward more child-centered pedagogies.

Student-centered assessment approaches and cooperative learning strategies are new domains of practice for the two teachers in this case study, and central to their developing classroom assessment. Both teachers spoke of how they utilize questioning as an assessment strategy in ways different from their previous practice. What these teachers are negotiating in their classrooms is coherent with Nauruan documentation such as the *National Quality School Standards Framework* (Nauru Department of Education 2011). We are cognizant, however, that this document is deeply influenced by, and developed in response to, external, globalized trends. While the influence of imported Western pedagogies alongside existing Pacific pedagogy cannot be ignored, there is a danger in viewing this as a binary relationship, where

the two underpinning philosophies may be seen to be mutually exclusive. Myrna spoke of the decision she deliberately made to use Nauruan stories as the context through which her young students learn and to embed mathematics and literacy, as well as cultural values, in this way.

We are also mindful of the role that teachers play as, according to Thaman (2009), they are the cultural mediators brokering the ideas and philosophies that they experience through their professional learning, with the children in their classrooms and the wider Nauruan community. The teachers were aware of the barriers and enablers that existed within the sociocultural contexts beyond the school spaces and, as Anne reflected previously, the students would “play two roles.” The use of the word *play* instead of *have* may well have been accidental, yet it confirmed that these students were seen to have a future role in their culture. Are perhaps, then, Nauruan children, more than ever before, adopting the role of intergenerational cultural-change mediators, treading on the boundaries in the space between their own Pacific culture and the globalized? The challenge for Nauruan teachers is indeed the maintenance (and modification) of cultural identity within a schooling system where English is the language of instruction and Western educational ideas are strongly influencing the educational policy context.

Conclusion

Classroom assessment and teacher practices changing as a result of professional learning will always be defined by the cultural contexts, the landscapes, in which teachers exist. This is not confined to the classroom; it extends beyond to the community. These teachers had the cultural capital; they exercised agency in contextualizing the pedagogy they were exposed to through their study. They demonstrated some cognizance of the implications of the practice shifts that they made, for the children, as they moved beyond the boundaries of the school.

In the midst of perceived tensions “in” and “out” of the classroom, these teachers remained prepared for change. They viewed this as necessary if an amalgamation of student-centered learning, inclusive of assessment for learning, was to occur. To this end, one of the teachers viewed the children she taught as “change agents,” and herself as the catalyst for the merging of the pedagogical knowledge acquired, into the Nauruan schooling context. While teacher resourcing and system-wide assessment regimes remained the focus of many discussions, there was also an emerging shift toward teacher collaborative learning opportunities and viewing assessment as a tool that can be used to look forward, not just to sum up learning each semester.

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