Exposing the divide between assessment and the point of learning through student voice

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Abstract

National Standards were introduced in New Zealand primary schools in 2009 heralding a new focus for teachers on the assessment of year 4 and year 8 students’ achievements in reading, writing and mathematics with the potential to link these assessments to judgments about the performativity of schools. This research set out to explore year 4 and year 8 students’ views about their learning in the early mandatory introduction of National Standards in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the findings showed that after three years of its introduction the students had little awareness and understanding of National Standards. However, the young participants attended to something more pertinent to them, and the research broadened to include their accounts of the point of learning rather than the assessment of their learning. Five inter-related themes emerged around the point of learning and combined, they highlight an important distinction made by the children between learning as it is assessed and learning as they experience it. The findings show that if National Standards focus on a narrow aspect of the curriculum children will continue to see a gap between their perceived point of learning and the assessment of their learning; an important distinction for these children. However, if teachers focus on students’ perceptions of the “point of learning” and listen to student voice more intentionally, the assessment or “measurement” agenda that has less meaning to students may be countered and an achievement agenda supported.