

## **Towards theorising assessment as critical inquiry**

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01 **Chapter 5**  
02 **Towards Theorising Assessment**  
03 **as Critical Inquiry**  
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07 **Claire M. Wyatt-Smith and Stephanie Gunn**  
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12 **Abstract** In this chapter it is argued that there is a need to explore the theoretical  
13 underpinnings to assessment in the 21st century against the backdrop of increasing  
14 interest in large-scale, standardised teaching for accountability and reporting pur-  
15 poses on the one hand, and on the other hand, an interest in formative assessment for  
16 improving learning. A framework of assessment as critical inquiry is proposed based  
17 on an approach to assessment as ‘meaning making’ (Delandshere, *Teachers’ College*  
18 *Record*, 104(7), 1461–1484, 2002). The framework is based on the proposition that  
19 when assessment is understood as critical inquiry, the practices and processes of  
20 assessing—social and cultural acts of doing assessment in actual contexts—can be  
21 considered in relation to four main lenses: (1) conceptions of *knowledge*, including  
22 the nature of the knowledge domains and the related capabilities to be assessed;  
23 (2) conceptions about the alignment of *assessment, learning and teaching* and  
24 how teachers enact their conceptions in practice; (3) *teacher judgment* practices,  
25 especially as these relate to standards, moderation opportunities, requirements of  
26 assessment tasks and expectations of quality performance; and (4) the *curriculum*  
27 *literacies* required to participate in and contribute to knowledge domains, including  
28 those represented in formal curriculum. Each of the four elements of the framework  
29 is thought of as a lens that enables particular characteristics of enacted assessment  
30 to come to the fore. Collectively, it is argued that these interrelated lenses work  
31 to reveal what is at play in how student achievement is evaluated and therefore  
32 valued. The framework is a construct that builds on and is supported by research  
33 insights from published work in assessment, some of which has been incorpor-  
34 ated into practice and policy. This research, set in Australia, has clear international  
35 generalisability.  
36

37 **Introduction**  
38

39 Throughout the past two decades assessment has operated on two fronts. First has  
40 been the continuing interest in large-scale, standardised testing, which affords gov-  
41 ernments and countries data for accountability and reporting purposes. Second has  
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01 been the increasing interest in assessment within a learning culture (Shepard, 2000).  
02 Broadly speaking, this has concentrated on formative assessment for improving  
03 learning and has generated a proliferation of phrases seeking to highlight vital  
04 connections between assessment and learning (for example, ‘assessment for/as  
05 learning’). Each of these fronts can be understood as giving priority to particu-  
06 lar assessment activities and contexts. In the case of standardised testing, usually  
07 undertaken to generate data for systems purposes, the context is necessarily con-  
08 trolled, with variables such as time and place fixed and regulated. Priority is given  
09 to common conditions for taking the same test, for example. Where assessment  
10 for learning occurs, there is more scope for a range of assessment opportunities,  
11 and usually the teacher can tailor these for individual students and circumstances.  
12 Assessment opportunities can extend, for example, to include feedback from others,  
13 with tasks being completed over an extended time and, at least in part, outside the  
14 classroom. Against this background, we seek to progress the argument that there  
15 is a need to take theorising assessment practices across a range of assessment con-  
16 texts into the 21st century. To this end, we propose a framework of assessment as  
17 critical inquiry and discuss its application in an Australian study. The framework  
18 is prompted by the lack of a general theoretical position that connects assessment  
19 to ‘meaning making’ (Delandshere, 2002), including concepts of knowledge, learn-  
20 ing and language. It serves to raise a suite of issues around the nature of quality  
21 assessment, the factors that underpin and motivate how assessment is developed  
22 and enacted, how the option of teacher assessment for summative purposes might be  
23 adopted with confidence, and how we understand, interpret and use the evidentiary  
24 base that assessment practices call forth, in system and local school contexts.

25 In contributing to current debates about the nature and purposes of assessment,  
26 the chapter is written in three parts: first, it presents three main issues of direct  
27 relevance to the present educational context in Australia. These set the scene for  
28 part two, which presents the framework of assessment as critical inquiry within an  
29 assessment, teaching and learning nexus, the aim being to generate new conversa-  
30 tions about the factors shaping how assessment is planned for, and implemented,  
31 with evidence interpreted and given value. The third part considers the framework  
32 in relation to what is known already, and possible education and assessment futures.

### 35 **Part One: Setting the Scene**

37 The development of this chapter has been motivated by consideration of three  
38 main issues. First is the relationship between students’ social backgrounds and  
39 their performances on tests, as evidenced in international comparisons provided  
40 by the PISA<sup>1</sup> data. Second is the predisposition in some education settings in  
41 Australia to conflate socio-economic disadvantage with educational disadvantage,  
42

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44 <sup>1</sup> PISA—the results from the Programme for International Assessment undertaken by the Organi-  
45 sation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2004, 2006).

01 with underperformance in schooling being accounted for in terms of the expected,  
02 inevitable influence of students' social backgrounds. The third is the all-too-obvious  
03 observation that, currently in Australia, standardised testing continues to gain  
04 strength in public policy priorities, with policy firming around the necessary con-  
05 tribution of large-scale external testing for public accountability and credible  
06 reporting.

07 In relation to the first issue, analyses of the PISA data have consistently con-  
08 cluded that, overall, Australian school students perform at high standards in com-  
09 parison with that of other countries. In relation to subgroups of students, however,  
10 the data show a key nexus between social backgrounds and educational perfor-  
11 mance in the country. The report of the steering committee for the Council for  
12 the Australian Federation (Dawkins, 2007) addressed the PISA data as it relates  
13 to equity in Australian school education. The writers made the useful distinction  
14 between results that show high quality and those that show low equity. They indi-  
15 cated that, in the case of reading, 'disadvantaged students in Australia do better than  
16 those in Germany but they are significantly behind their counterparts in Finland and  
17 Canada' (Dawkins, 2007, p. 11). In elaborating, they stated that:

18 Australia's results in reading are high-quality but are low-equity. The challenge for Australia  
19 is to match the performances of countries like Finland and Canada (and Japan, Korea and  
20 Hong Kong-China) which are high-quality and high-equity. (p. 11)

21 While there may be some who would wish to discount this use of the data as reliant  
22 on a limited data sample, it is not easy to dismiss the following:

23 Domestic evidence shows that Australia has not been making any progress on this [improv-  
24 ing the balance between equity and quality] front. Data from the 1975 survey of literacy and  
25 numeracy levels of Australian students, and subsequent Longitudinal Surveys of Australian  
26 Youth (LSAY), show that differences in social background had as much impact on differ-  
27 ences in educational achievement in 1998 as they did in 1975. This should be of concern to  
28 all Australian governments as well as to the Catholic and independent school sectors.  
29 (Dawkins, 2007, p. 11)

30 In the extract above, the clear challenge is to strive to re-balance quality and equity  
31 in educational outcomes, the aim being to achieve high quality and high equity.  
32 Moreover, the clear message is that the responsibility for redressing the balance  
33 should fall to all governments and sectors.

34 The second main issue is the dangerous predisposition to conflate socio-economic  
35 disadvantage with educational disadvantage. Teacher expectations are key in this  
36 mix. There is ample research evidence suggesting that teachers' assumptions about  
37 students' backgrounds and their communities are carried forward to classroom prac-  
38 tice, impacting on the learning opportunities provided to students. A study that  
39 explored literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic urban com-  
40 munities in Queensland, Australia (Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995), for example,  
41 showed how teacher expectations were lowered in accordance with what they knew  
42 about students' social backgrounds. It was found that sites of poverty offered cog-  
43 nitively less demanding opportunities to learn and to demonstrate achievement.  
44 Similarly, a study of teacher judgment practices (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005)

01 showed that some teachers adjusted their sense of standards with what they knew  
02 of the community surrounding the school, and more specifically, with the socio-  
03 economic status of the area, as well as their reported knowledge of individual  
04 students. The potentially more serious insight, provided by teachers informally, was  
05 their reported perception that relative to the weight of influence that socio-economic  
06 variables can have on achievement in schooling, specifically, poverty and family  
07 contexts, their influence—their agency as teachers—can be relatively weak. This  
08 sense of the inevitable power of social backgrounds to determine schooling out-  
09 comes is a serious concern for those working towards improvement of teaching and  
10 assessment practices.

11 The third issue is the public policy priority given to education, and more specif-  
12 ically to accountability and standards. There can be no doubt about the Australian  
13 federal government's commitment to monitoring systems performance, primarily  
14 through assessment of all students at particular year levels, and to public reporting  
15 of external assessments of students in state and national testing programs. What we  
16 are yet to see is how teachers respond to these moves as they face the competing  
17 demands in their classrooms. On the one hand, there are the imperatives to develop  
18 and implement assessments that have high 'site validity'.<sup>2</sup> Characteristic of such  
19 assessments are the teachers' efforts in establishing connections between in-school  
20 and out-of-school knowledges, ensuring that school activities are relevant to the  
21 demands of contexts outside schooling (Cumming & Wyatt-Smith, 2001). On the  
22 other hand, as McClay (2002) highlighted, there is increasing downward pressure  
23 to rehearse standardised testing conditions, to make students 'test-savvy' and to  
24 demonstrate quality assurance. These pressures can lead the teacher to adopt narrow  
25 forms of assessment that are likely to have high system validity.

26 Against the backdrop of these three issues, we propose a way of thinking about  
27 assessment as critical inquiry that connects assessment to concepts of knowledge,  
28 learning and language. This move towards an expanded theorising of assessment  
29 and meaning making opens a way of thinking about assessment as a key element in  
30 leveraging educational improvement. The proposition on offer is that the challenges  
31 mentioned above, namely to re-balance equity and quality in education outcomes  
32 and to ensure that teacher agency can affect real improvements, call for a consider-  
33 ably expanded understanding of assessment, how it is enacted in particular contexts  
34 and its dynamics with learning and teaching. In this chapter we propose that assess-  
35 ment be understood as not only being aligned with learning and teaching, but that  
36 it also be foregrounded—'front-ended'—in designing learning and teaching, with a  
37 sharp focus on quality task design.

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40  
41 <sup>2</sup> Validity refers to what is assessed and how well this corresponds with the behaviour or construct  
42 that it is intended to assess (Harlen, 2004). In the case of 'site validity' it involves assessments  
43 that intend to assess the range of skills and knowledges that have been made available to learners  
44 in the classroom context or site. High 'system validity' involves assessments that intend to assess  
45 an often narrower range of skills and knowledges, deemed essential by the particular government  
body or system.

01 Foundational to the proposal is that assessment needs to be understood as gen-  
02 erating an evidentiary basis for teacher and system decision making and action.  
03 The latter centres on quality and how learning is occurring; how learning can be  
04 improved and how standards—when central to classroom practice—can serve the  
05 best interests of systems, school communities, teachers and students. Linked here,  
06 as well, is the understanding that assessment events are inevitably social and cultural  
07 in nature: reflective of a nest of assumptions, often implicit, about knowledge and  
08 what counts as valued knowledge; about the relationship between learning, teaching  
09 and assessment; about teacher judgment practices and understandings about the rela-  
10 tionship between literate capabilities and curricular knowledges. At issue, therefore,  
11 are the dynamics of how classroom assessment occurs—the shaping factors—and  
12 the urgent need to better understand these, if we are to improve outcomes for all  
13 students and especially those most at educational risk.

## 15 **Part Two: Proposing a Framework for Enacting** 16 **Assessment as Critical Inquiry**

18 Delandshere's (2002) notion of 'assessment as inquiry' highlights how 'the call for  
19 change in assessment follows an almost unanimous recognition of the limitations  
20 of current measurement theory and practice' (p. 1461). In responding to Deland-  
21 shere's call and to Sadler's (1989, 1998) orientation towards student empowerment  
22 that focuses on standards, discussed later in this chapter, a four-part framework is  
23 proposed for enacting assessment as critical inquiry within a teaching, learning and  
24 assessment nexus. Essentially, the proposition put forward is that, when assessment  
25 is understood as critical inquiry, the practices and processes of assessing—social and  
26 cultural acts of doing assessment in actual contexts—can be considered in relation  
27 to four main lenses:

- 29 1. conceptions of *knowledge* including the nature of the knowledge domains and  
30 the related capabilities to be assessed
- 31 2. conceptions about the alignment of *assessment, learning and teaching* and how  
32 teachers enact their conceptions in practice
- 33 3. *teacher judgment* practices, especially as these relate to standards, modera-  
34 tion opportunities, requirements of assessment tasks and expectations of quality  
35 performance
- 36 4. the *curriculum literacies*<sup>3</sup> required to participate in and contribute to knowledge  
37 domains, including those represented in formal curriculum.

38 Each of the four elements shown above can be thought of as a lens that enables  
39 particular characteristics of enacted assessment to come to the fore. Collectively,  
40

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42 <sup>3</sup> 'Curriculum literacies' refers to the discipline-specific literacy demands that students meet in  
43 completing set tasks, these typically remaining implicit in teaching, learning and assessment prac-  
44 tices (Cumming et al., 1998; Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2001). Refer to 'Lens 4: Curriculum  
45 literacies' later in this chapter for further detail.

01 the set of four lenses works to reveal what is at play in how student achievement  
02 is evaluated and therefore valued. These lenses are interrelated and interdependent,  
03 each informing the other, and are taken as the desirable considerations and con-  
04 ditions for realising quality assessment. These mutually informing lenses work to  
05 align curriculum and assessment with the potential to inform ongoing pedagogical  
06 work. Focusing the dynamic interaction of these four elements is task design. The  
07 pedagogical outcome of the framework is desired learnings, which should articulate  
08 into improved outcomes for students, particularly those at educational disadvan-  
09 tage. The focus is on identifying and examining the suite of conceptions, values and  
10 assumptions at play in decisions about ways of doing assessment. In this way the  
11 framework has clear implications for identifying and examining the practices used  
12 to establish how quality is judged and reported. As suggested earlier, the framework  
13 is prompted by the lack of a general theoretical position that connects assessment to  
14 meaning making (Delandshere, 2002), including concepts of knowledge, learning,  
15 language and context.

16 In what follows, these four lenses are discussed as separate components of a  
17 framework for enacting assessment as critical inquiry. In practice, the lenses, as  
18 a complementary set, are understood as interrelated and mutually informing. The  
19 framework is necessarily a construct and has been developed as a way to map  
20 and explore the complexities inherent in curricular pedagogic-assessment practices  
21 in diverse pedagogic and geographic contexts. It builds on research insights from  
22 already published work (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2006) in assessment, some of  
23 which have been incorporated into practice and policy. For example, the chapter  
24 draws upon an evaluation study (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008) that investigated  
25 the impact of the alignment of inclusive assessment, pedagogy and curriculum on  
26 students in the middle phase of schooling in Queensland, Australia. This evalua-  
27 tion study was part of a larger Queensland government initiative (federally funded),  
28 which aimed to increase teachers' knowledge, understanding and professional skills  
29 development in literacy and numeracy assessment, curriculum planning and teach-  
30 ing instruction for their school contexts. The aim was to support the development of  
31 teachers' professional capacity to assess and teach explicitly the curriculum litera-  
32 cies and numeracies, in order to respond to the needs of educationally disadvantaged  
33 students and provide opportunities for teachers and schools to work together and  
34 model effective assessment practices and approaches. The initiative, among others  
35 (for example, Lincoln & Neville, 2006), put into practice some of the components of  
36 the framework that are the focus of this chapter and, by doing so, acknowledged that  
37 optimum outcomes for teachers and students rely upon effective communication and  
38 strong connections across theory, research and practice.

39

40

### 41 ***Lens 1: Knowledges***

42

43 This lens brings to the fore the conceptions of knowledge and the assumptions  
44 made about the nature of valued knowledge and learning that inevitably under-  
45 pin acts of assessment. When coming to grips with conceptions of knowledge,

01 Freebody (2006) emphasises the need to consider ‘what schooling is for, and about  
02 what kinds of futures individuals and communities can expect to be put on offer  
03 through schooling’ (p. 2). This includes consideration of ‘the distinctive logical and  
04 content structures of particular bodies of human knowledge and understanding’, or  
05 the epistemological domain (p. 8), along with the connection of ‘learning with the  
06 social, cultural, and economic elements of the surrounding community and “the  
07 world” outside the classroom’, or pragmatic domain of curriculum (p. 15).

08 Despite the influence of such undergirding conceptions and assumptions, their  
09 operation in and influence over what comes to count as assessment evidence is  
10 rarely acknowledged. More than a decade ago, Gill (1993) observed that ‘[a]mong  
11 the many and various articles and books on the quality and direction of American  
12 education, one searches in vain for an in-depth discussion of how knowing takes  
13 place, of who knowers are, and of what can be known’ (p. 1). Drawing on this  
14 observation, Delandshere (2002, p. 1462) asserted:

15  
16 Until we come to grips with, or at least frame the issue of, knowledge and knowing in ways  
17 that can guide education practices (including assessment), the enterprise of education runs  
18 the risk of being fruitless and counterproductive. In its current state, assessment appears to  
19 be a process of collecting data about phenomena or constructs that we have not adequately  
20 defined, to answer questions that we have not articulated, and on the basis of which we draw  
21 inferences about the quality of the education system.

22 Essentially, Delandshere’s argument is that there is some urgency in reconnecting  
23 assessment and, more generally, educational practices to theoretical considerations  
24 as a means of clarifying assumptions made about what counts as valued knowl-  
25 edge, and therefore what should be provided for students in the name of quality  
26 teaching and learning. These two related matters raise a suite of issues around how  
27 knowledges, and more specifically curricular knowledges, are conceptualised and  
28 how different conceptualisations lead to quite different assessment possibilities for  
29 students to demonstrate what they know and can do.

30 In drawing on the work of James (1998), Harlen (2004) concurs with Deland-  
31 shere’s assertion of the importance of a clearly defined and articulated domain of  
32 knowledge as the basis for teaching and assessment:

33  
34 The argument is that an assessment cannot require the use of the knowledge and skills  
35 or other constructs that are supposedly assessed unless there is clear definition of the  
36 domain being assessed, and evidence that in the assessment process the intended skills and  
37 knowledge are used by the learners (p. 25).

38 While interrogation of what counts as valued knowledge was outside the scope of  
39 the Wyatt-Smith and Bridges (2008) study, the researchers worked from the premise  
40 that knowing the learning domain and relevant syllabus materials are foundational to  
41 planning and effective practice. While this may seem to be self-evident in good prac-  
42 tice, within a period of reform and change, time to reflect critically on the knowledge  
43 demands of units of work is often felt by teachers to be an academic luxury when  
44 faced with the challenges of daily operation. Participating teachers were supported  
45 in collaborative networks of schools. Further, they were provided with additional



01 time dedicated to focused and critical planning for learning and assessment. This is  
02 reflected in the following observation:

03

04 . . . so there's a much better knowledge of the syllabus, at least in terms of the units—the two  
05 units that we developed and other needs that we might have had like making things authentic  
06 . . . planning process . . . [has] . . . been a very genuine learning process for everybody . . .

07 (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008, Appendix 1, p. 44)

08

09 A key observation from the study was the need for time to be committed to teachers'  
10 working with domain knowledge. This was beneficial not only in planning for learn-  
11 ing and teaching, but also in regard to teacher knowledge of the assessment demands  
12 that students faced in completing set activities. While the role of the teacher as  
13 designer of in-class assessment tasks was not new, most had not extended this role  
14 to writing up the assessment criteria and standards related to the tasks. By criti-  
15 cally interrogating task demands through the application of assessment criteria and  
16 standards (see Glossary), teachers were asked to question what they were assessing  
17 in classroom tasks, this focus extending to the knowledge and skill requirements  
18 of syllabus materials, as well as literacy and numeracy capabilities. Participating  
19 teachers were asked to develop standards specifications that were locally relevant,  
20 all the while critically reflecting on issues such as task complexity and knowledge  
21 demands.

22 Additionally, the participating teachers in the study were asked to interrogate  
23 and verify the suitability of their assumptions about students' prior knowledges and  
24 capabilities as these related to curriculum, literacy and numeracy. Such assumptions  
25 are not readily brought to the surface, and the teachers reported that they had limited  
26 experience in this type of critical reflection. However, with support, they reviewed  
27 earlier assumptions about student readiness to proceed and how these assumptions  
28 could impact upon student engagement and achievement. This part of the teachers'  
29 work also extended to deconstructing the demands of the task so as to focus on  
30 realistically attainable goals. In these ways, teachers reflected critically upon the  
31 implicit knowledge they brought to curriculum planning. Awareness was raised in  
32 terms of the students' prior knowledge; the physical and cultural resources of the  
33 community in which the school was located, and how this could inform efforts to  
34 connect students' in-school learning with their out-of-school learning.

35 While the impact of the critical pedagogy movement has been felt at the intel-  
36 lectual or 'inside the head' level, participating teachers had limited experience in  
37 subjecting their own classroom practice to examination, either by themselves or  
38 with others. In this study, they were asked to discuss and evaluate their understand-  
39 ing that, as social beings, teachers' bring their personal, sociocultural backgrounds  
40 to classroom interactions. One intention of these discussions was to question the  
41 conventional ways of thinking about 'difference' in terms of student backgrounds  
42 and knowledges and to confront latent connections across difference, social class  
43 and performance expectations. A related intention was for the teachers to consider  
44 what they actually knew and how they knew about the varied learning experiences  
45 their students brought through the school gate.

01 Teachers from different sites and sectors came together around syllabus and other  
02 policy materials to focus on their curricular choices. One outcome of this exercise  
03 was greater knowledge of assessment task design, as this relates to intellectual  
04 rigour, and a greater awareness of students' prior knowledge as a factor impact-  
05 ing upon academic engagement and ultimate success. Consider, for example, the  
06 segment below:

07 . . . probably the biggest learning for a lot of our teachers was the scope of the task that they  
08 were asking their kids to do and just understanding the burrowing down, drilling down of  
09 that was what the biggest learning I think for a lot of our teachers, what they were asking  
10 for their kids to do, from the beginning was just miles too big, we were trying to achieve too  
11 much and for some of our teachers that was the biggest learning they had, the expectations  
12 that they had, their awareness of what the kids knew before . . .

(Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008, Appendix 1, p. 45)

13 Similarly, in a current study investigating standards-driven reform in the middle  
14 years of schooling in Queensland, Australia,<sup>4</sup> one teacher clearly articulated that  
15 potential impact of the opportunity to reflect on issues relating to domain knowl-  
16 edge, the design and complexity of assessment tasks and the relationship of this  
17 to actual classroom practice. In the following extract, the teacher emphasises how  
18 consideration of the centrally developed assessment task was expected to have a  
19 beneficial effect on classroom practice in science.

20  
21 . . . So those discussions they had [about the assessment task] and they came to that same  
22 conclusion that in their class, the textbook that they were using didn't require students to do  
23 that [higher order thinking], it actually didn't value writing and thinking . . . so they actually  
24 started questioning the programs that they were using that were restricting them in the way  
25 that they allowed their students to answer their work [in assessment tasks], and were in fact  
26 deciding that they were going to change the way that they did a lot of the work in class  
27 and get students to have different ways of showing their thinking. So that was a massive,  
28 for me, pedagogical leap that will make a difference down the track . . . and we're looking  
29 long-term, two or three years down the track, to an improvement in student outcomes as a  
30 result of it.

31 The above comment points to the direct carry-forward of domain knowledge to the  
32 teacher's design of assessment tasks. More specifically, it highlights the teacher's  
33 realisation of how assessment can open up (and close down) opportunities for stu-  
34 dents to demonstrate what they know and can do. More than this, the comment  
35 points to the need for teachers to be able to critique the breadth and depth of learning  
36 that students should engage in, and how this articulates with suitably demanding  
37 assessment opportunities. In this case, it was the assessment that challenged the  
38 teacher to rethink the pedagogy—'a massive pedagogical leap'—expected to flow  
39 on to improved outcomes.

40 In summary, the first lens of the framework highlights a need to understand  
41 the relationship between curricula; the sociocultural contexts of members of the  
42 classroom; and the knowledges and capabilities to be assessed. This leads to

43  
44 <sup>4</sup> See <[http://www.griffith.edu.au/education/faculty-education/research/research-projects/  
45 investigating-standards-driven-reform-in-assessment-in-the-middle-years-of-schooling](http://www.griffith.edu.au/education/faculty-education/research/research-projects/investigating-standards-driven-reform-in-assessment-in-the-middle-years-of-schooling)>.

01 further examination of a second lens of the framework for assessment as critical  
02 inquiry—the relationship between assessment, learning and teaching.  
03  
04

05  
06 ***Lens 2: Linking Assessment, Learning and Teaching***  
07

08 In the past two decades, studies of assessment have shown increasing interest in  
09 how classroom assessment can be used to improve the learning experiences and  
10 outcomes of students. More specifically, the emphasis in educational assessment  
11 reform has increasingly been on meaningful, contextualised and purposeful activ-  
12 ity that focuses on demonstrations of what students know and can achieve, rather  
13 than on students' shortfalls in knowledge and failure to achieve (Cumming &  
14 Maxwell, 1999; Gipps, 1994). Essentially, assessment has been reframed in relation  
15 to its role in a learning culture (Shepard, 2000).

16 In the study referred to earlier (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008), the key to  
17 reshaping teachers' conceptualisations of assessment was the issue of 'front-ending'  
18 assessment. The underpinning belief was that being explicit about assessment  
19 expectations would have a focusing effect on pedagogy, facilitating deeper student  
20 learning. 'Front-ending assessment was a process whereby the planned, culminating  
21 tasks for assessment were critically analysed to identify the explicit knowledges that  
22 needed to be built into the unit planning and learning opportunities. This concep-  
23 tualisation of assessment as a driver for curriculum design has been used in other  
24 contexts (for example, Harris, McNeill, Lizotte, Marx, & Krajcik, 2006).

25 Specifically, in the Wyatt-Smith and Bridges (2008) study, the notion of 'front-  
26 ending assessment' was applied by middle schooling teachers across curriculum  
27 domains such as mathematics, literacy, science and studies of society and environ-  
28 ment (SOSE) as well as in units designed as integrated or cross-disciplinary studies.  
29 The teachers employed this notion to place the unit assessment task/s at the heart of  
30 planning. Planning teams critically evaluated the proposed formative and summative  
31 tasks when planning the unit. This evaluative process required deconstruction of the  
32 knowledges, curriculum literacies, numeracy demands and potential blockers for  
33 students at educational risk. This extended to consideration of re-sourcing require-  
34 ments, both human and material, and how these related to student engagement in  
35 and completion of set tasks.

36 The strategy of 'front-ending' helped teachers to align learning and assessment  
37 through the systematic analysis of the assessment demands of tasks. The desired  
38 effect was for an improvement in students' engagement and academic success.  
39 Therefore, by 'drawing attention to the interactivity of their assessment, teaching  
40 and learning, [participating] teachers saw that teaching and learning became fused  
41 with assessment—both formative and summative—as a dynamic process of engaged  
42 inquiry' (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008, p. 47). Further, as shown below, teachers  
43 reported their own shifts away from traditional understandings of assessment as  
44 an end-point activity, with assessment only coming into focus after teaching and  
45 learning has been completed.

01 So basically once you have the assessment firmly in place the pedagogy become really clear  
02 because your pedagogy has to support that—that sort of quality assessment task . . . that was  
03 a bit of a shift from what’s usually done, usually assessment is that thing that you attach on  
04 the end of the unit whereas as opposed to sort of being the driver which it has now become.  
05 (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008, Appendix 1, p. 48)

06 Fundamental and productive changes in learning and teaching practice resulted from  
07 critical reflection on the assessment evidence to be collected, with this reflection  
08 occurring before teaching began. Professional conversations focusing on assessment  
09 as evidence-based practice occurred at the stage of task design, with teachers inter-  
10 rogating the quality and demands of the assessment they were developing relative  
11 to the standards they planned to use in judging quality. Through such a focus on  
12 assessment expectations and quality task design prior to commencing the unit of  
13 work, the teachers reported that they developed a language for talking about qual-  
14 ity in the classroom and gained confidence in the feedback they gave the students.  
15 Additionally, the teachers reported that in many cases the employment of statements  
16 of assessment criteria and standards as teaching tools assisted students to take own-  
17 ership of the learning process and work more independently. Many reported that  
18 such statements or scoring guides supported students to have a clear and shared  
19 understanding of task expectations:

20 . . . I think to a certain extent that we’ve empowered students in the learning process because  
21 there’s not secret teacher’s business anymore in terms of what the expectations are, that  
22 students are becoming very au fait with the criteria and being able to apply them in their  
23 own work.

24 (Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008, Appendix 1, p. 61)

25 Sadler’s (1989, 1998) work on ‘formative assessment’ provided a model for a  
26 teaching–learning–assessment nexus that shows how improvement follows when  
27 students are inducted into assessment knowledge and expertise. This is taken to  
28 include knowledge of standards and how to use them for improvement purposes.  
29 From Sadler’s formative assessment position, the teacher’s ethical practice and  
30 hence, authority as master, follows a guild model, with students taking on the role  
31 of apprentices. For this to be realised in practice, the teacher must possess, first, a  
32 concept of quality appropriate to the task and the student group; second, an ability  
33 to judge the student’s work in relation to that concept and a desire to induct student-  
34 apprentices into the appraisal process; and third, a history of evaluative decision  
35 making developed over time. Moreover, it depends on a critical ability and willing-  
36 ness to facilitate students’ transition from feedback to self-monitoring. For this to  
37 occur, the teacher must already possess the knowledge of what constitutes quality  
38 and must value opportunities for sharing this knowledge. Stiggins (2004) has sim-  
39 ilarly highlighted the importance of student involvement in assessment practices,  
40 suggesting that maximum learning comes from productive interactions between  
41 teachers and students, with both sharing the responsibility for making learning and  
42 assessment effective. Sadler (1998) in particular argued that ‘if teacher-supplied  
43 feedback is to give way to self assessment and self monitoring, some of what the  
44 teacher brings to the assessment act must itself become part of the curriculum for  
45 the student, not an accidental or inconsequential adjunct to it’ (p. 82).

01 While the use of stated assessment criteria and standards to facilitate teacher  
02 and student conversations about quality and learning has been common practice in  
03 the senior years of schooling in Queensland, Australia, this has not been routine  
04 practice for teachers in the early years of school (years 1–10). In recognising this,  
05 Wyatt-Smith (2008) developed a set of reflective questions that explored a number of  
06 features for consideration when developing quality-assessment opportunities. These  
07 included questions about the following features: (1) alignment; (2) intellectual chal-  
08 lenges and engagement; (3) assessment scope and demand; (4) language used to  
09 communicate the task; (5) literate capabilities involved in doing and completing  
10 the task; (6) performance contexts; (7) knowing what is expected both during and  
11 on completion of the task; (8) student self-assessment for improvement; and (9)  
12 intended purposes of assessment information. In part, this was motivated by an inter-  
13 est in enabling teachers to probe for themselves the demands of assessments that  
14 they developed for classroom use. More specifically, the questions enabled teachers  
15 to focus on ‘front-ending’, whereby the planned, culminating tasks for assessment  
16 were critically analysed to identify the explicit skills and knowledges that needed to  
17 be built into the unit planning and learning opportunities.

18 This leads to the third lens regarding the fundamental elements that need to be  
19 in place to ensure confidence in teacher judgment practices within the assessment,  
20 teaching and learning nexus.

### 21 22 23 ***Lens 3: Teacher Judgment Linked to Standards*** 24 ***and Moderation Opportunities*** 25

26  
27 Central to the proposal for a critical-inquiry approach to assessment is the under-  
28 standing that teacher judgment is taken to be nested within a range of decision mak-  
29 ing relating to curriculum frameworks, assessment practices, the school–community  
30 interface and individual student learning needs and goals, as suggested earlier.  
31 Beyond this is the principle that the teacher and students are active in gathering  
32 information about and reflecting on learning and performance over time. Generally  
33 speaking, there is support for this position in the field of educational assessment  
34 research. Sadler (1998) argued that there is strong support for the view that stated  
35 standards can be productive in informing not only judgment, but also teaching and  
36 learning. As mentioned earlier, he advocated that the teacher’s role extend to devel-  
37 opment of students’ evaluative experience by involving them in applying standards  
38 to their own work. For Sadler, standards and improvement were directly connected.  
39 Working from a similar stance, Stigler and Hiebert (1997) presented the cautionary  
40 note that ‘A focus on standards and accountability that ignores the processes of  
41 teaching and learning in classrooms will not provide the direction that teachers need  
42 in their quest to improve’ (p. 19–20). Even though judgment is a routine part of each  
43 teacher’s work, it is difficult to subject it to scrutiny, even by the individual teacher  
44 concerned, unless scaffolded opportunities are provided to do so (Phelps, 1989).  
45 Studies of teacher judgment have shown that individual teachers carry with them not

01 only evaluative experience, but also, more specifically, their own judgment policies  
02 that typically remain private, though they work to shape in powerful ways the pro-  
03 cesses by which judgments of quality are reached (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005).  
04 Moreover, operating within these policies can be evaluation practices that are as  
05 much tied to recollected observations of in-class learning and behaviours as to the  
06 qualities of the piece to be assessed.

07 A way forward is to recognise that *teacher judgment*, in conjunction with  
08 *clearly specified standards* and *opportunities for moderation*, are a linchpin of a  
09 robust assessment culture in schooling. The study reported by Wyatt-Smith and  
10 Bridges (2008) aimed to support sustained professional conversations around matters  
11 including planning for assessment; how assessment activities are designed; how  
12 evidence is collected, interpreted and recorded; what contexts are suitable for under-  
13 taking particular assessment activities; and what standards are in place to assist  
14 teachers in assessing quality. Such conversations were seen as enabling judgment  
15 practices to be de-privatised and judgments made defensible. In effect, these ongo-  
16 ing professional conversations started at the stage of task design and continued  
17 throughout the assessment, teaching and learning cycle. This can be achieved when  
18 judgment practices involve a process of matching work samples to stated assess-  
19 ment standards, with attention focusing on the features or qualities of performance  
20 as these were evidenced in the work. Teacher judgment can therefore be under-  
21 stood as evidence based, with standards playing a useful function in informing,  
22 substantiating and making judgments defensible. In distinguishing this practice  
23 of standards-referenced assessment from judgments relying on direct inter-student  
24 comparison as the basis for judgment, Sadler (1987) stated:

25 The primary function of educational standards is to enable statements about a student's  
26 quality of performance or degree of achievement to be made without reference to the  
27 achievement of other students, which conceivably could be either all poor or all excellent. In  
28 addition, fixed standards enable long-term changes in a phenomenon to be detected. (p. 196)

29 Several writers (Harlen, 2005; Sadler, 1989; Wyatt-Smith, Castleton, & Ryan, 2004)  
30 have emphasised how common standards provide external reference points for  
31 informing judgment and are pivotal in achieving comparability and confidence in  
32 teacher judgments. Further, opportunities for teachers to integrate 'judgments of  
33 students' responses to the various modes with those of other teachers' judgments  
34 are essential (Wilson, 2004, p. 11). Such opportunities for sustained professional  
35 conversations to support teacher judgment are defined as 'social or consensus mo-  
36 deration' and described as a 'form of quality assurance for delivering comparability in  
37 evidence-based judgments of student achievement' (Maxwell, 2007, p. 2). Maxwell  
38 highlighted two functions of moderation, namely quality assurance and compar-  
39 ability. The former he linked with the status of the assessment as high (or low) and  
40 comparability with common standards:

- 41
- 42 • *Quality assurance* refers to methods for establishing confidence in the quality  
43 of procedures and outcomes. Confidence is seen as a matter of degree with  
44 more stringent quality assurance and greater confidence required for high-stakes  
45 assessment.

- 01 • *Comparability* ‘requires assessment against common characteristics or criteria,  
02 such as provided by a subject syllabus or other frame of reference’ and ‘requires  
03 consistency in the application of common standards so that all achievements  
04 given the same grade or level of achievement have reached the same standard’  
05 (Maxwell, 2007, p. 2).

06 Here, social moderation is considered key to standards-referenced teacher judg-  
07 ment, whereby the frames of reference (standards, scoring guidelines, assessment  
08 criteria, etc.) are defined and disseminated to allow for common interpretation  
09 (Maxwell, 2007). This calls for clear recognition of the social nature of modera-  
10 tion, whereby teachers interact with one another, sharing judgments of student work  
11 samples. Such sharing is an act that necessarily involves an openness to making  
12 available information about interpretations of the standards; disclosures that may  
13 otherwise remain private and unarticulated.

14 In order to achieve high reliability while preserving validity, it is important for  
15 teacher assessors to develop common understandings of stated standards and reach  
16 ‘similar recognition of performances that demonstrate those standards’ (Maxwell,  
17 2001, p. 6). This is especially the case where standards are written as verbal descrip-  
18 tors and as such remain open to interpretation. Sadler (1989) argued that exemplars  
19 or samples of student work provide concrete referents that can be used to illustrate  
20 standards that otherwise remain abstract mental constructs. He made the point that  
21 the stated standards and exemplars work together to show different ways of satisfy-  
22 ing the requirements of say, an A or C standard. Smith’s (1989)<sup>5</sup> study of standards  
23 in senior English curriculum in Queensland, Australia (years 11 and 12 as the final  
24 2 years of schooling) showed the utility of exemplars in the form of student work  
25 samples, together with an accompanying commentary, in illustrating standards and  
26 how they apply at particular levels. In particular, Smith showed how the commentary  
27 could make available insights into the teacher’s cognitive processes in combining  
28 or *trading-off* strengths and limitations of the work relative to the required char-  
29 acteristics of the standards at various levels. In short, annotated exemplars and  
30 commentaries can show the processes of formulating an overall or on-balance judg-  
31 ment. In the absence of such materials and, in particular, the commentaries, the  
32 treatment of compensatory factors and the complex features of teacher judgment  
33 necessarily remain unarticulated. More specifically, a final grade recorded on a  
34 student piece of work bears no trace of, or resemblance to, the complex decision  
35 making involved in arriving at a grading decision.

36 While standards and commentaries such as those discussed can serve to make  
37 clear expectations of quality, they do not necessarily account fully for the factors  
38 that shape teacher judgment. In a large-scale Australian study of teacher judgment in  
39 middle schooling, Cooksey, Freebody, and Wyatt-Smith (2007) reported high levels  
40 of variability in teachers’ notions of quality and also unearthed the range of factors  
41 that shape how judgments are reached. While this study pointed to the need for the  
42 promulgation of stated standards to include exemplars, it also opened a vital space  
43

44 \_\_\_\_\_  
45 <sup>5</sup> Smith—now writing as Wyatt-Smith.

01 for consideration of social moderation as focal in quality-assurance processes at  
02 local and systemic levels. Specifically, it suggests how social moderation can act as  
03 a context or social space for teachers to make available for scrutiny to themselves  
04 and others the bases of their judgment practices and their use of standards in those  
05 practices. It is in this context that the legitimacy of the mix of factors impacting  
06 judgment can be opened for scrutiny.

07 Several conditions for successful implementation of social moderation have  
08 been described in the literature (for example, Daugherty, 1997; Harlen, 2005;  
09 Matters, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; Wilmut, 2005; Wilson, 2004). These include the  
10 development of quality assessment tasks; an element of commonality among assess-  
11 ments such as responding to a common set of assessment tasks, standards or criteria;  
12 provision of guidelines and procedures; acknowledgement of the various referents  
13 upon which teachers draw in the judgment process (for example, teachers' personal  
14 knowledge of students and context); establishment of 'social' protocols (for exam-  
15 ple, working collaboratively, negotiation and trust); and the need for professional  
16 development in moderation processes and expectations. While moderation is one  
17 part of a robust assessment culture, it is an essential element for maintaining teacher  
18 and public confidence in a standards-referenced assessment model. An ongoing  
19 challenge in securing such confidence is, of course, the vital and continuing work  
20 of inducting the teaching profession, including successive generations of graduates,  
21 into the underpinning understandings about standards-referenced assessment and  
22 related moderation.

#### 23 24 25 ***Lens 4: Curriculum Literacies***

26  
27 This fourth lens draws on a new conceptualisation of the literacy–curriculum inter-  
28 face that emerged from a national study of the literacy demands of curriculum in  
29 senior schooling (Cumming, Wyatt-Smith, Ryan, & Doig, 1998). For the purpose  
30 of the study, literacy was defined as including reading, writing, listening, speaking,  
31 viewing and critical thinking and was recognised as a major determinant of success  
32 in education. The literacy demands of assessment were also viewed as providing 'a  
33 filter for or enabler of student success in all areas' (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003,  
34 p. 48). Hence, while the study focused on literacy demands of the curriculum, the  
35 interactions with assessment were also a focus. Based on the finding that cross-  
36 curricular literacy was mainly treated as a generic skill with minor adaptation for  
37 different subject areas, the researchers developed the term 'curriculum literacies',  
38 where 'curriculum' is deliberately used as a noun, rather than the adjectival 'curric-  
39 ular', to demonstrate that this conjunction represents the interface between a specific  
40 curriculum and its literacies, rather than literacies related to curriculum in a generic  
41 sense, or a single literacy that can be spread homogeneously across the curriculum'  
42 (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003, p. 50). Building on this work, Wyatt-Smith and  
43 Cumming (2003) argued the need to explore the coherence of literacy demands  
44 that students encounter in managing their learning in different contexts, and for  
45 the need to incorporate these demands explicitly in instruction and assessment.



01 Their reconceptualisation of curriculum literacies challenges current constructs of  
02 assessment and calls for the domains of assessment to be expanded to include both  
03 curriculum knowledge and epistemological domains that take account of diverse  
04 ways of working with and in semiotic systems. In a framework of assessment as  
05 critical inquiry, curriculum literacies are therefore central. It is this lens that focuses  
06 attention on the success (or failure) of systems, as well as pedagogical and assess-  
07 ment practices, to enable students to gain increasing control of this combination  
08 of curricular and literate knowledges and the ability to use these productively. As  
09 Wyatt-Smith and Cumming (2003) explain:

10 Our recurrent theme is that to be successful, students need to be able to identify and engage  
11 with these curriculum literacies within each subject, not just for learning, but also for suc-  
12 cessful negotiation of assessment within each subject . . . Overall student academic success  
13 in meeting expected appropriate demonstrations of performance will depend very much on  
14 how well the student can manage to understand, participate in and respond to the created  
15 intersection of the curriculum-literate environment. (pp. 49–50)

16 Cumming et al. (1998) found that ‘an assumption prevails that students have  
17 acquired the abilities to meet the literacy demands of post-compulsory curricu-  
18 lum during their earlier years of schooling’ (p. 10). Further, there were apparent  
19 assumptions that students could develop an understanding of the meta-language of  
20 a subject without explicit instruction, with the gap for assessment tasks appearing  
21 to be even greater. The study confirmed the key role of ongoing teacher assessment  
22 in checking how students are managing the cognitive demands and pace of cur-  
23 riculum delivery, including student understandings of specific subject terminology  
24 or the meta-language of the subject. Moreover, it was found that ‘many students  
25 appeared not to have a clear understanding of expected performance standards and  
26 to be working “in the dark” as to the nature of a quality performance’ (Wyatt-Smith  
27 & Cumming, 2003, p. 53). The study highlighted the need to make the features  
28 of quality performance, framed by curriculum literacies, more explicit. Given this,  
29 assessment requirements need to be written in student-friendly terms while main-  
30 taining the meta-language of the subject. However, the researchers concluded that  
31 the provision of student-friendly guidelines, while a necessary condition, was not  
32 sufficient of itself. They reported a clear need for teachers ‘to assist students to  
33 understand those expectations so that they can use such knowledge to self-assess  
34 and monitor learning over time’ (p. 54). The researchers concluded that the literacy  
35 environment of school curriculum places highly complex demands on students and  
36 reiterated that:

37 Some students succeed in negotiating these, apparently drawing on resources other than  
38 those that teachers provide. Others may spend their compulsory years [of schooling] in  
39 an environment that is essentially conducted in a foreign language in which they never gain  
40 sufficient proficiency. And students need to be fluent, to negotiate the even more demanding  
41 literacy-bound assessment requirements successfully.  
42 . . . the role and nature of the curriculum-literacies that are in-built in assessment activities,  
43 and which impact upon the students’ performances, should be more explicit . . . Assump-  
44 tions of students’ curriculum literacies is not sufficient. These need to be incorporated in  
45 direct instruction.

(Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003, p. 58)

01 This conceptualisation of curriculum literacies has been played out in both policy  
02 and practice. First, the Queensland government literacy initiative, titled ‘Literacy  
03 the Key to Learning: Framework for Action 2006–2008’ (Department of Education  
04 and the Arts, 2006) focuses on actions to address identified challenges in improving  
05 literacy outcomes for all students in the state. The framework reflects the state’s  
06 commitment to social justice and recognition of the diverse abilities, cultural back-  
07 grounds and life circumstances of the students it is serving, and places as central  
08 to the framework the notion of curriculum literacies, stating that ‘effective learn-  
09 ing entails developing the literacy capabilities needed to learn in the curriculum’  
10 (p. 1). Second, in the Queensland teacher capacity-building initiative discussed  
11 earlier, participating teachers were asked to examine notions of literacy in refo-  
12 cusing curriculum and assessment planning. Essential to the process was the strong  
13 recognition that teachers needed to teach explicitly the literacy demands of assess-  
14 ment requirements and to provide a meta-language for students to use in furthering  
15 their own understandings of the literacy demands of the tasks. While many had a  
16 ‘broad’ understanding of the literacy demands of their curriculum area/s, a critical  
17 unpacking of these demands when designing assessment tasks was not a routine,  
18 familiar practice. Clearly, teachers needed a firm understanding of the nature of  
19 subject-specific literacy demands within their own subjects to ensure continuity of  
20 literacy demands and expectations placed on students. Teachers reported that the  
21 focus on curriculum literacies had enabled direct links to be made between cur-  
22 riculum literacies, teaching and assessment expectations in curriculum areas (that  
23 is, Key Learning Areas—KLAs) and that such work proved to be invaluable for  
24 ongoing teacher learning and ultimately student outcomes:

25  
26 We found focusing on the curriculum literacies increased teacher awareness of the curricu-  
27 lum literacies within the KLA, but it made some teachers more comfortable with teaching  
28 literacies within their KLA . . . sometimes there has been resistance to that, and the students  
29 were able to see clearly the links and the purposes of the activities and the programs that we  
30 were doing.

(Wyatt-Smith & Bridges, 2008, p. 49)

31  
32 Interestingly, there is the mention here of the student being able to see clearly the  
33 links and purposes of activities and the programs. Such seeing resulted from teach-  
34 ers themselves attending in their pedagogy and assessment to ways of connecting  
35 curricular knowledge and language usage.

### 36 37 **Part Three: Lessons Learned and Challenges** 38 **in Shaping Education Futures** 39

40  
41 Assessment policy and practice in schooling are currently being challenged to  
42 review the nature of the knowledges and skills being assessed. In addition, opening  
43 for review is the optimum range of contexts and conditions for collecting assess-  
44 ment information about how students work with and reconstitute knowledges. These  
45 two related questions raise a suite of issues around how curricular knowledges

01 are conceptualised and how different conceptualisations lead to quite different  
02 assessment possibilities for students to demonstrate what they know and can do.

03 The assessment-as-inquiry framework proposed in this chapter is underpinned  
04 by reconfigured relations of assessment to knowledge domains, to learning and to  
05 language. As part of this move towards theorising assessment in relation to meaning  
06 making, we suggest that the teacher's claim to expertise may be tied primarily to  
07 how they promote both quality learning and the qualities of learners so that learning  
08 will increasingly be about creating a kind of person, dispositions and orientations to  
09 the world and to ways of working with and reconstituting knowledge as problem-  
10 solvers and collaborators. The reality is that while many teachers have initiated  
11 their own professional conversations around assessment practice, both within their  
12 school and at district level, it is also fair to say that many teachers experience a  
13 sense of isolation as they go about their work as assessors, having no sustained  
14 opportunities for such sharing. A related observation is that the provision and pro-  
15 liferation of standards in themselves do not secure reliable judgments in which  
16 teachers and the community can have confidence. There is a clear and pressing need  
17 to support teacher dialogue around the issues of assessment and judgment, including  
18 standard setting, and how to make available for students useful information about  
19 expectations of quality.

20 This chapter has opened up some of the complexities that can be considered  
21 when critically inquiring into educational assessment. It has proposed a frame-  
22 work in order to realise the interactivity of assessment and related foundational  
23 elements for quality learning. At one level the framework represents an attempt  
24 to see educational assessment in terms of its connectedness to issues of meaning:  
25 knowing, learning, teaching and language. At another level, it is a provocation to  
26 reconsider the divergent assessment priorities and goals of various education stake-  
27 holders, both nationally and internationally, and the pressure on some to follow  
28 short-term imperatives of appearing to be delivering improved results. Deep learning  
29 and improvement take time, however. They also involve new conversations around  
30 what is to be valued both in classroom-based and system assessment policies and  
31 practices. The challenge for the educational community is to be supportive of those  
32 assessment initiatives that focus on providing support for the long-term professional  
33 development necessary to affect change and deliver improved outcomes. As teachers  
34 know only too well, assessment procedures, of themselves, do not necessarily lead to  
35 improvement. Instead, teachers' professional knowledge and judgment practices are  
36 central, if we are serious about improving learning and student engagement for all.

## 37 38 Glossary

39  
40 **Criterion** A distinguishing property or characteristic of any thing, by which its  
41 quality can be judged or estimated, or by which a decision or classification may be  
42 made (Sadler, 1987, p. 164). (From the Greek *kriterion*, 'a means for judging').  
43

44 **Literate capabilities** Refers to reading, writing, viewing, speaking and critical  
45 thinking, as well as text production online, using written, visual and auditory

01 channels of communication. The term extends connections made across everyday  
02 social practices, young people's literate activities and learning inside and outside  
03 schooling, and the critical, evaluative stances they may adopt.

04 **Policy materials** Documents that outline a course of action or a program of actions  
05 developed by the governing educational authority. The term is inclusive of offi-  
06 cial curriculum materials that prescribe a course of study and related assessment  
07 requirements.  
08

09 **Sectors** The various educational authorities governing schools. For example, in  
10 Queensland, Australia, there are three main sectors: state (public), Catholic and  
11 independent (private).

12 **Site** A place where educational activity is occurring, usually a school.  
13

14 **Standard** A definite level of excellence or attainment, or a definite degree of any  
15 quality viewed as a prescribed object of endeavour or as the recognised measure of  
16 what is adequate for some purpose, so established by authority, custom or consensus  
17 (Sadler, 1987, p. 164). (From the Roman *estendre*, 'to extend').

18 **Syllabus** A document that outlines course objectives, prescribed learning, resource  
19 materials and assessment requirements. It specifies the course of study and refers to  
20 the content or subject matter of an individual subject as well as required resources.  
21 Syllabi are usually developed (and at times mandated) by a governing educational  
22 authority.  
23

24 **Task** An assessment activity undertaken by students to provide information on  
25 what students know, understand and are able to do. Tasks can be written for a range  
26 of modes.

27 **Teacher judgment** Involves teachers assessing and awarding a grade to student  
28 work. It involves considering the qualities of performance evidenced in the work  
29 being assessed.  
30

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01 **Chapter-5**

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