Using Exemplars for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) External Assessments:

Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers

By

Karen Scott

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Leadership and Management
Unitec Institute of Technology
2018
Declaration

Name of candidate: Karen Scott


Principal Supervisor: Martin Bassett
Associate Supervisor: Carol Cardno

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

• This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
• The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2018-1007

Candidate Signature: [Signature] Date: 3/11/2018

Student number: 1351861
Abstract

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) publishes exemplars of student work following the external National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) examinations each year. These are provided as a resource to aid teachers’ and students’ understanding of the externally assessed achievement standards. However, there is a paucity of literature on the use of these exemplars by secondary school teachers of NCEA subjects in New Zealand.

The aim of this study was to investigate what secondary school teachers believe is the purpose of these exemplars, how teachers use these exemplars in practice, and whether they perceive any challenges to be associated with their use. I adopted an interpretive approach as my epistemology because I was interested in the experiences and perceptions of secondary school teachers, and this knowledge was held in the minds of the participants. In this qualitative study, 50 secondary school teachers who were currently teaching NCEA subjects completed an electronic questionnaire, which was designed to elicit their perceptions of the use, value and challenges of exemplars for external assessments.

Using an interpretive approach, findings of this research revealed that secondary school teachers have a clear understanding of the purpose of the exemplars for NCEA external assessments. The findings also indicate that these exemplars are used in a number of different ways by teachers. These findings also suggest that the nature of the achievement standard and the style of the assessment task are important factors in influencing how frequently the exemplars are used by teachers during teaching. It appears that there are some distinct subject specific differences in perception of the values and use of these exemplars, which is an area that could be explored further.

This research emphasises the need for targeted professional development which is subject specific and designed not only to improve understanding of the interpretation of the standards but also to enhance the confidence and assessment capability of teachers overall.
Acknowledgements

Completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of a number of significant people to whom I am forever grateful.

Firstly, a special acknowledgement to Martin Bassett, my principal supervisor for his expert advice and continuous encouragement. I would not have been able to complete this journey through distance learning without your support. I always enjoyed our regular skype meetings and for giving up your valuable time to meet with me on my visits to Auckland. Thanks also to my associate supervisor, Professor Carol Cardno for her thorough and insightful feedback and for always challenging my thinking and pushing me to explore further, throughout the MEdLM courses.

I would like to acknowledge NZQA for promoting ongoing learning within the organisation by providing support, both financial and with the luxury of study leave at crucial stages of the process. This enabled me to complete my studies whilst working fulltime.

Finally, to my husband, John, I cannot thank you enough for your patience and understanding. I could not have achieved this without you.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Aims</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Organisation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards Based Assessment and NCEA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value and Use of Exemplars</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges with Using Exemplars</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Selection</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Method: Questionnaire</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Subject Area of Respondents</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Exemplars clearly indicate the grade for the standard</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Exemplars enable me to be clear about the criteria for achievement at each grade</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>The use of exemplars can help students learning so that higher quality outcomes are produced</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>I use exemplars to differentiate learning for my students</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Exemplars can encourage copying</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Exemplars can stifle creativity</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The use of exemplars narrows the curriculum</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Overall, exemplars are a valuable teaching tool</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA</td>
<td>National Certificate of Educational Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZQA</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIRLS</td>
<td>Progress in international Reading Literacy Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>Standards Based Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMSS</td>
<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOGA</td>
<td>Tertiary Overview Group Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction
This chapter introduces the study and my research interest related to the use of exemplars for external National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) assessment by secondary school teachers in New Zealand. Exemplars are often used by educators to illustrate and explain the quality of work required to meet assessment standards and criteria. Whilst there is an abundance of evidence in the literature about the use of exemplars in tertiary settings there is a lack of specific evidence-based research in the secondary sector. The focus of my dissertation is to examine the perceptions New Zealand secondary school teachers have about the value and use of the exemplars for the external NCEA assessments that are published on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) website following the external examinations each year. This dissertation sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on exemplar use by examining the beliefs and practices of currently practising teachers of NCEA in a variety of different academic specialties. This section describes the study rationale and significance, outlines the research aims and provides an overview of the dissertation.

Rationale
The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is a crown entity which was established in 1990 under the Education Act 1989. Amongst other roles, NZQA is tasked with the administration of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and oversees the assessment and moderation of this qualification. I work for NZQA as a National Assessment Facilitator. In my role, I am responsible for managing the dual processes of producing and marking NCEA external examinations. It is essential to ensure that the quality of these examinations is maintained. The integrity of the NCEA qualification is contingent on ensuring that all assessments are both valid and reliable and that the New Zealand education system, as a whole continues to be highly regarded both nationally and internationally.
NZQA publishes exemplars of candidates' work, with detailed annotations, following the external examinations each year. However, very little is known about how secondary school teachers use these exemplars in practice. There is a substantial body of evidence in the literature which supports the use of annotated exemplars in higher education as an effective and accepted practice in teaching and learning (Carless & Kennedy, 2016; Handley & Williams, 2011; Newlyn, 2013; Sadler, 2002, 2010). Newlyn (2013) states that “Exemplars should be seen as a piece of the entire package of tools needed to assist students. Exemplars can provide information, skills, content and messages in a way no other teaching methodology can” (p6). This is reiterated by Hipkins, Sheehan and Johnston (2016) who believe that annotating NCEA exemplars is crucial in allowing secondary school teachers and students to interpret the standard correctly. However, researchers such as these also caution against the potential pitfalls and challenges associated with their use. As Hounsell (2008) succinctly surmises, exemplars may also encourage “unthinking mimicry, rather than thoughtful emulation” (p7).

NCEA is a high stakes assessment system and as such comes under intense scrutiny in the public arena. Following on from some adverse publicity in the media (Collins, 2017), relating to the alleged plagiarism of exemplar material by a student, concerns were raised in relation to authenticity and the use of exemplars. This highlights the relevance of this topic and why I wished to conduct this research. There has been little research conducted on how exemplars are used in the secondary school sector in New Zealand, and whether teachers value these resources. If, as espoused in the literature, exemplars are the key to improving student outcomes in standards-based assessments, there needs to be evidence based data which underpins these assertions. There appears to be a significant research gap in this area and therefore it is timely to conduct the proposed study. This dissertation aims to provide a window into the reality of the use of exemplars in teaching practice, by gathering rich descriptions from a group of secondary school teachers from a range of academic specialty areas. The beliefs and perceptions teachers hold about external assessment and the value of exemplars is likely to influence their teaching practice, and it is this knowledge I wish to access.
The findings from this research will benefit NZQA as an organisation by providing evidence which may inform future decision making. Teachers and students will also benefit as evidence of good practice may be forthcoming which could improve teaching and learning.

**Research Aims**

The aims of this research were:

1. To identify the purpose of NCEA exemplars.
2. To examine the ways in which exemplars are used by secondary school teachers.
3. To examine issues that may arise from the teacher use of NCEA exemplars.

**Research Questions**

The research questions were:

1. What is the intended purpose of NCEA exemplars?
2. How do teachers use exemplars?
3. What are the issues of teacher use of NCEA exemplars?

**Thesis Organisation**

*Chapter One*

This chapter introduces the research topic of exemplars and their use in standards-based assessment in New Zealand secondary schools. A rationale for the study, and the historical context and setting, are presented along with the research aims and questions.
Chapter Two

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature. Background information on NCEA assessment is described. The definition and purpose of exemplars for standards-based assessments in general are described. The value of using exemplars for teaching and learning is examined along with the challenges associated with their use and the impact this may have on the validity and reliability of external assessment is explored.

Chapter Three

This chapter provides the outline of the research methodology and the rationale for the chosen interpretive approach. Rationales for the use of a questionnaire for data collection and means of participant selection are provided. The process for data analysis and its validity are discussed. Ethical issues are also considered.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents the analysed findings of the research. The findings from the questionnaire are presented in relation to the key themes, and subthemes which were identified from the literature.

Chapter Five

This chapter analyses the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the themes from the literature in Chapter Two. The discussions are presented under the headings: purpose of exemplars, use of exemplars, and challenges with using exemplars. The conclusions of the findings along with some recommendations are also presented in this chapter. The strengths and limitations of this study are discussed, as are potential areas of further research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature focusing on standards based assessment and the use of exemplars is critically examined and discussed. The review of the literature is presented under the following headings: Standards based assessment and NCEA, the value associated with using exemplars; the application of exemplars to practice, and the challenges associated with using exemplars. A review of the literature relating to assessment exemplars was conducted by searching a range of academic databases such as Emerald and Ebsco. This revealed a fairly large body of knowledge relating to exemplar research within universities. Whilst the literature also revealed some research on the use of annotated exemplars in formative teaching in New Zealand secondary schools (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Price, Smith and Berg, 2017), this was not specifically related to the NCEA external assessment exemplars, which was the focus of my research. Due to the paucity of literature around the use of NCEA external assessment exemplars in New Zealand secondary schools much of the literature used in this review comes from these tertiary settings. Therefore, aside from New Zealand, the literature predominantly originates from Australia, and the UK.

Standards Based Assessment and NCEA

At the heart of any education system, the overarching aim is to provide quality education outcomes for all students. Since the implementation of Tomorrow’s Schools in the late 1980’s, education in New Zealand schools has been through a number of revolutionary changes. At a national level policy was driven by the need to support and enhance New Zealand’s economic competitiveness on the world stage, by increasing the numbers of appropriately skilled workers. The socio-political context that existed at the time resulted in successive governments pushing reforms in the education sector which were strongly influenced by free-market policies. At the same time, it was acknowledged that ideals of social justice needed to be incorporated to address the increasingly obvious disparities in student achievement. This mirrored
widespread international attention and debate given to major reforms in curriculum and assessment in a number of countries, where the focus increasingly pointed to a move away from norm referenced assessment where large numbers of the population were labelled as ‘failures’ to assessing against criteria and standards (Strachan, 2002). An increasing concern in a number of countries was the fact that, this cohort-referenced ‘ranking’ approach to assessment did not give sufficient information about what students could actually do. These concerns were mirrored in the New Zealand context and Shulruf, Hattie & Tumen, (2009) sum up the ideological reasoning behind this shift when they state “This change was a result of a lengthy reform process influenced by arguments that the norm-based assessment system had, for example, disadvantaged students from certain ethnicities, particularly Maori and Pacific and students from lower income families” (p16). A growing desire for a coherent and coordinated qualifications structure resulted in the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which was designed to include and recognise equivalence of both vocational and academic qualifications (Strachan, 2002).

One of the most significant changes in the secondary school environment was the shift, beginning in 2002, from the previously norm referenced national assessment system to the implementation of standards based NCEA. This developed from the desire to abandon ranking and scaling, together with increasing concerns surrounding the demotivating effects of academic failure of students. This shift in thinking towards the view that standards based assessment has a more robust pedagogical basis than norm based further supported the advocacy for change at this time, not just in New Zealand but internationally as well (Strachan, 2002). The NCEA system is now well established in New Zealand state secondary schools, and many private schools, having been through a series of refinements over the intervening years, and corresponding changes in teaching practice.

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for making the policy decisions which impact nationally on curriculum and assessment. However, these decisions are not made in isolation. In addition, there are overarching global influences which impact on the policy decisions which are made at a national level. As a country, we want our education system to be highly regarded on the world stage compared to other nations. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
Development (OECD) is internationally recognised for conducting large scale research in a number of key areas, including education, and promoting policies which aim to improve the lives of people throughout the world (OECD, 2016). Through gathering large amounts of information from member countries, this data, with its global perspective provides a benchmark by which we can draw comparisons and make inferences about how well the member countries are performing over many economic and social indicators. Education is one of these important measures and the international comparative testing results from studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in international Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are commonly used as benchmarks when judging the performance of the education system in New Zealand against others in the education sphere. Results in these research studies have had a strong influence, at a macro-level, on the direction of our national education policies by successive governments (MOE, 2017a). In addition, the results gained are frequently given more widespread public awareness and interest through media reports. Increasingly we have seen New Zealand educational policies responding to the global trend of demanding improved outcomes for all students and holding teachers accountable for this. NCEA results are seen by the general public, government and internationally as a gauge of the success of our education system overall.

NZQA is a crown entity which was established in 1990 under the Education Act 1989. It has the unique role of maintaining the NQF which is monitored by the MOE. Amongst other roles, NZQA is tasked with the administration of NCEA and oversees the assessment and moderation of this qualification. A key outcome focus of the organisation is that New Zealand qualifications are increasingly valued as credible and robust, both within New Zealand and internationally (NZQA, 2016). The previous norm referenced system of secondary school assessment, ranked a student’s achievement against others in the cohort. It also involved the scaling of results which, although giving the appearance of consistency, also had the intentional consequence of failing a large percentage of those who were assessed (Haque, 2014; Hipkins, Johnston & Sheehan, 2016). In contrast, NCEA measures learning in relation to expected levels of performance or achievement standards. These standards are assessed either internally or externally and every standard has clear and explicit achievement criteria.
which are reinforced by accompanying explanatory notes. In addition, exemplars of student work for both the internal and external assessments are provided to assist teachers in understanding the quality of work required for Excellence, Merit and Achieved for each standard (Fountain, 2017). One of the great advantages of standards based assessment therefore is that it gives schools greater agency to adapt internally assessed tasks to meet the needs of diverse learners whilst still assessing the standard (Hipkins et al, 2016; NZQA, 2016; Wylie & Bonne, 2015). This characteristic also aligns with the intent of the New Zealand curriculum (NZC) and its emphasis on assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning (MOE, 2007). The new curriculum introduced by the MOE in 2010, was followed by a successive realignment of NCEA standards which were fully implemented in 2013. NCEA achievement standards assess learning goals which are derived from the New Zealand curriculum so there are now much better links between NCEA and the curriculum as a result of this realignment (Hipkins et al, 2016; Wylie & Bonne, 2016). These authors note that the publication of assessment exemplars have been essential tools to assist teachers in clarifying the intent of the new standards.

NCEA gives equal weighting to both internal and externally assessed standards, and credits gained from both are required for subject and course endorsements. Internal assessment takes place in the classroom, close to the point where learning takes place. These assessment tasks are not only set by the classroom teacher, but also marked by the same teachers. A proportion of internally assessed student work is externally moderated by NZQA to ensure the standard is being applied correctly, and to check that consistency across schools is maintained. Internal assessment processes, therefore, rely heavily on professional teacher judgements with focus on Assessment for Learning unlike standards-based assessment in other countries, which rely on national testing (MOE, 2011). On the other hand, external achievement standards are assessed, usually by written examination, or by portfolio submission, at the end of the school year. As the agency responsible for producing NCEA external assessments each year, NZQA manages the writing and marking of these examinations, as well as ensuring the assessments are valid and reliable. Each year around 150,000 students are entered into a wide range of NCEA and Scholarship external examinations (NZQA, 2016). Subject specialists, the majority of whom are experienced practising teachers are contracted by NZQA to develop and mark the
external assessments. This is overseen by National Assessment Facilitators (NAFs) who have assessment expertise, and systematically monitor and check the quality and rigour of both the development and marking processes of each examination. There are multiple checking processes in place to ensure not only the accuracy and quality of these external assessments, but also the inter-year consistency and comparability of the results. In addition, another layer of quality assurance overlays the whole marking and results process by the Tertiary Overview Group Assessment (TOGA) who closely monitors the results, outcomes, and trends. These multiple quality assurance processes allow NZQA to ensure rigour and validity of assessment is maintained, and also to monitor the overall picture of achievement, which helps to ensure national consistency. Implementing a standards-based approach to assessment, such as with NCEA relies on clarity of expectations for the assessment tasks, and guidance as to the quality of responses expected. New Zealand is unique in that we are the only country in the world to return candidates work once marked and, after each exam round, NZQA publishes resources in the form of assessment schedules, examiners’ reports, and exemplars of student work. This not only promotes a great deal of transparency around the marking process, but also serves to support the interpretation and teaching of each standard which is assessed. (Hipkins et al, 2016; NZQA, 2016; OECD, 2016).

NCEA is a complex system that has evolved considerably over the past 15 years (Haque, 2014, Hipkins et al., 2016). These authors agree that progress has been at times challenging and contentious but overall there is now confidence that NCEA can be promoted as an effective assessment system that is underpinned by a rigorous and well embedded system of quality assurance and as Hipkins et al., (2016) summarise:

NCEA was set up as a flexible, standards-based, high-stakes assessment model that was inclusive of all students, including those who had previously been excluded from gaining qualifications and for whom the schooling process was typically an alienating, negative experience. In this regard NCEA has been an undoubted success (p198).

This view is supported by the OECD (2016) whose independent evaluation concluded that as well as aligning with the government’s major assessment policies, the characteristics of NCEA secondary school assessments have a high level of reliability
and credibility. A key characteristic of NCEA has always been the transparency of the results, (Shulruf et al., 2009) and because of this many issues regarding performance of subgroups of students, the perceived quality of the system and comparison with other assessment models have been vigorously debated and critiqued. Wylie and Bonne (2016) surmise that NCEA results are used by the government as a means of evaluating how well the education system in New Zealand is doing overall, a characteristic which is also reflected in public perceptions. Targets set in place by the MOE have included the drive to meeting specific pass rates and improve the number of subject and course endorsements particularly for Maori and Pasifika students (MOE, 2017a; NZQA, 2016). Each year NCEA qualifications are a form of quality assurance for national outcomes and authors such as Haque (2014) and Hipkins et al., (2016) point out that inevitably such assessment for qualifications is often considered to be high-stakes for all involved.

Every assessment system is faced with its challenges and critics and NCEA assessment is no exception. Coupled with the pressures of meeting government targets to raise student achievement, it seems inevitable that an environment of high stakes testing will often drive curriculum content and the delivery and focus of senior school programmes. (Christodoulou, 2016; Haque, 2014; Hipkins et al., 2016). Teachers must manage the duality of both the espoused focus on assessment for learning, and the reality of assessment for accountability. Wylie and Bonne (2016) claim that the ‘weight of assessment’ is a pressing issue for teachers and students as these dual tensions play out in schools and classrooms. Preparing students for success in external assessments is reliant on a sound understanding of the assessment criteria and clarity around the expectations of quality within each standard. The use of exemplars of student work, provided by NZQA following the external examinations, is one of the strategies teachers can use and it is this aspect I wish to focus on.
Value and Use of Exemplars

The implementation of a qualitative standards based assessment system has presented both challenges and opportunities. Each standard describes the knowledge, skills or understanding that a student is required to demonstrate in order to meet the standard and achieve at a predetermined qualitative level. A student’s performance is judged against written criteria. As Carless and Kennedy (2016) suggest, one of the inherent difficulties is that interpretation of the intent of an achievement standard, as well as the qualitative steps between the grade boundaries within the standard, can prove problematic for both teachers and students. Only by having a clear understanding of these criteria will students know what success looks like and whether they are meeting the requirements (Sadler, 2010). Several other writers (Haque, 2014, Hipkins et al., 2016) agree with these tertiary researchers and acknowledge that it is crucial, when considering any NCEA achievement standards in any discipline, that a consistent and common understanding of the qualitative steps between grades is well understood. NCEA standards are concerned with specific learning outcomes within a broader subject area and the Ministry of Education (2011) recognises the need for clear and transparent assessment criteria. These criteria illustrate the skills or knowledge that need to be demonstrated by the student to meet the standard and are supported by concrete examples such as annotated exemplars (Hipkins et al, 2016, NZQA, 2017).

What then are exemplars and how are they used? In its simplest construct an exemplar can be viewed as a model or pattern which can be replicated (Newlyn, 2013). This basic definition can be extended and Sadler (2002) described exemplars as “key examples of products or processes chosen, so as to be typical of designated levels of quality or competence” (p 192). He stressed the important distinction that exemplars must be authentic pieces of student work rather than model answers written by teachers. This is also emphasised in the definition proffered by the MOE (2017b):

An exemplar is an authentic example of student work annotated to illustrate learning, achievement, and quality in relation to the levels described in the relevant national curriculum statement. Each exemplar highlights significant features of that work and important aspects of students learning (p 1).
Whilst the literature about the use of exemplars in secondary school assessment appears to be limited, particularly in the NCEA context, we can draw on a substantial body of work from the tertiary education sector, where a number of studies have explored exemplar use at university level. Hendry et al, (2012), comment on research undertaken at universities where it appears that students find written descriptions of standards difficult to understand unless assignment exemplars support their interpretation of the expectations. This finding concurs with the work of others who agree that the use of exemplars promotes a firm understanding of exactly what is required in an assessment, together with the ability to recognise different levels of quality (Carless & Kennedy, 2016; Handley & Williams, 2011, Newlyn, 2013).

Research carried out with university students by Scoles, Huxham and McArthur (2013) clearly indicated that those students who had access to authentic exemplars of previous students' work of different quality performed better in summative examinations than those who were not exposed to exemplars during formative teaching. They argue that emphasis for exam preparation should be on feedforward rather than feedback, and the use of exemplars in this way was indicative of good teaching practice. Exemplars are usually sourced from a previous cohort, so they provide students with a range of responses written by their peers. Students consider this type of work to be achievable (Handley & Williams, 2011; Sadler, 2010), because they are written in language which is familiar and attainable rather than the perceived ‘perfection’ of a model answer. In addition, by showing students what constitutes quality rather than giving a written or verbal description, the benefits are greater. Sadler (2002) sums this key point up succinctly when he says, “exemplars convey messages that nothing else can, by not simply telling students, but showing them what counts as excellent” (p136). The overall tone of the research commentary in the tertiary education context, therefore, is that student achievement is enhanced by using exemplars in a meaningful way during formative teaching, particularly where there is productive dialogue between students and teachers. Students are guided to develop the capacity to make judgements of quality and evaluate their own work accordingly (Carless & Kennedy, 2016; Handley & Williams, 2011; Newlyn, 2013; Sadler, 2010).

If we relate the views of these tertiary researchers to the NCEA secondary school context in New Zealand we can apply the same logic that the purpose of exemplars
for NCEA external assessments is to clarify the intent of the standard, indicate the qualitative differences between grades, and show how the work was marked according to the consistent interpretation of the standard from year to year. This is applicable not only to promote student understanding but to highlight features that teachers need to be aware of to encourage their students and promote learning. NZQA provides assessment resources to aid teaching and learning for both internal and external achievement standards. Each year, during the marking period following external examinations, examples of appropriate student work (exemplars) are identified and annotated by the Panel Leader to highlight aspects of the work which met the criteria and enabled the grade to be awarded. These annotated exemplars are provided as guidance for teachers, and students, as they demonstrate clear examples of evidence to show the complexity required at each grade (not achieved, achieved, merit and excellence). Hipkins et al (2016) raise the concern that difficulty associated with interpreting the intent of the standard can be a source of anxiety for both teachers and students. Similarly, Lipson (2018) points out that the prose descriptors which describe the achievement criteria for achieved, merit and excellence, can be very confusing and open to different interpretations. These researchers maintain that annotating the exemplars to indicate quality differences is crucial, a view that is supported by Adie and Willis (2014) who believe annotations provide teachers with signposts to the features that indicate quality differences, particularly at grade boundaries. The exemplars are valuable to teachers because they show what the qualitative differences are, rather than simply describing them. They are published on the appropriate subject page on the NZQA website along with the assessment task and schedule, so are publicly available.

There appears to be consensus in the literature that for university students, being able to see authentic examples of actual student work represents a more realistic and achievable goal rather than the perceived unattainable high standard as demonstrated by a model answer (Handley & Williams, 2011; Hendry et al, 2012; Sadler, 2002). By seeing not only Excellence, but also examples of work which do not fully meet the criteria of the standard in some way, both university students and teachers can pinpoint areas for improvement. Exemplars therefore, can provide a rich basis for feedback/feedforward during formative teaching. The main purpose of using
exemplars is to support and improve both teachers’ and students’ understanding of the standards required, and consequently enhance learning outcomes, and this ultimately leads to higher achievement. (Adie & Willis, 2014; Carless & Kennedy, 2016). Exemplars are but one component of a range of strategies, including model answers and reviewing past questions, which may be used in teaching to demonstrate a high standard of response and they can be a very powerful means of enhancing understanding and performance (Newlyn, 2013). A strong theme that emerges in the literature reviewed here is that using a range of exemplars in preparation for assessment is regarded as an essential strategy as they clarify the intent of the standard and assessment criteria by enabling students and teachers to visualise success and make judgements about quality.

Challenges with using Exemplars

We have seen in the previous section that standards with abstract criteria become problematic for both teachers and students because they do not have sharp delineating boundaries which are easily conceptualised (Sadler, 2010). Teachers may also differ in their interpretation of the assessment criteria and what constitutes the qualitative differences in performance between grades (Hipkins et al, 2016), particularly if they are only exposed to the work of their own students (Crisp, 2012). Whilst there is agreement amongst educators that exemplars have numerous benefits in improving students’ performance in assessments it would be remiss not to take note of potential challenges and conflicts that may arise with their use.

Firstly, one of the most negative and more undesirable consequences is the possibility of outright plagiarism (Carless & Kennedy, 2016; Handley & Williams, 2011). This is reiterated by Hounsell (2008) who also discusses how exemplars may have this unintended but counterproductive effect when they encourage “unthinking mimicry, rather than thoughtful emulation” (p7). NZQA provides numerous exemplars for every standard assessed. These are typically in a rich context so there is potential for problems to arise when exemplars are not used as intended. As Hipkins et al (2016) signal, authenticity issues come into question when there is chance that plagiarism can take place in the assessment environment. A strength of the NCEA system is that
there is a large amount of assessment material and resources freely available on the NZQA website to assist with interpreting and teaching the achievement standards. However, this transparency also means that the availability of a comprehensive source of exemplar material opens up the possibility of copying. To and Carless (2016) point out, that a dilemma arises for educators when provision of numerous high-quality exemplars results in them being copied rather than used as a guide to quality. Furthermore, authors such as Hendry et al., (2012) and more recently, Lipson (2018) have cautioned that by simply ‘mimicking’ a response, the result is that students are rewarded for the wrong pedagogical reasons, as they have not acquired knowledge or skills in depth. In such cases when performance success does not necessarily equate with deep learning, the performance itself loses its value as a measure (Christodoulou, 2016). Whilst it may be tempting for students to reproduce work that has gained the desired result in the past, Hipkins et al., (2016) suggest that the challenge for those setting assessments is to ensure that the tasks are sufficiently different each time to thwart the ‘copy and paste’ approach. Therefore, for an assessment to be considered valid it must be one where there is limited ability for students to gain success by being able to rote learn and copy the answers from a previous exam.

Secondly, critics have suggested that another negative consequence is the stifling of creativity, especially when students view the exemplar as being the only approach to achieving a high grade (Handley & Williams, 2011). When teachers offer guidance through discussion of exemplars, or via detailed annotations, there is a danger that students believe this one approach will guarantee the best results (Newlyn, 2013), and teacher voice is heard rather than authentic student creativity. Similarly, Carless and Kennedy (2016) point to the difficulty in balancing student voice in determining their own view of quality in their work against proffering what they believe the teacher wants. The research conducted by Hendry, White and Herbert (2016) with Australian university students signals the temptation that can arise when students are introduced to numerous successful peer exemplars. They suggest that students may be tempted to “closely model their own work on the good examples, and as a result produce a formulaic product that lacks independent thought and/or creativity (p101). The argument presented by these critics is echoed by Hipkins et al (2016) who warn of the inherent dangers when teachers, who are under pressure to meet targets and improve
student NCEA results, resort to ‘coaching’, whereby students are encouraged to follow a rigid template or prescribed response that works. They strongly suggest that “teachers need the courage and persistence to get past the hand-holding instincts that come with the territory of supporting young people to succeed in NCEA” (p174). These ideas are supported by the work of Wyse, Hayward and Pandya (2016) who postulate that one of the foremost drivers that underpins teaching and learning programmes is less to do with sound pedagogical rigour and idealism and more grounded by the fear of the consequences surrounding the issues of teacher accountability for student results. They suggest that for many teachers working in a high stakes assessment environment, such as NCEA, student performance “is the paramount goal of their efforts, no matter how much they might also consider the potentially distorting effects on their students’ learning” (p 714). The quandary that confronts teachers is how to guide, model and encourage creativity without raising ethical concerns (To & Carless, 2016) as authenticity concerns again come into play if we can question how much guidance teachers are giving students.

A third challenge is the suggestion that by using exemplars, the curriculum is narrowed especially if teachers are “teaching to the test” and focusing on a limited range of criteria in an attempt to secure good results for their students. When assessment for learning is replaced by credit collecting to achieve qualifications, or when NCEA results are used to judge performance of teachers and schools, the wash back effects on what is taught in the classroom may be profound. For example, Lipson (2018) noted that government targets, such as the 2012 Better Public Services goal that 85% of 18-year-old New Zealand students would achieve NCEA level 2 by 2017, unsurprisingly incentivised behaviour by schools, teachers and students to prioritise credit gathering over cohesive courses and true learning. Many other researchers agree that when high-stakes are attached to exam performance, this can result in several negative, albeit unintended impacts on teaching practice, as outlined above (Christodoulou, 2016, Haque, 2014, Hipkins et al., 2016). Conversely, these researchers also argue that if teachers focus on preparing students for external examinations by teaching the skills that will be assessed and the focus is on application of knowledge rather than rote learning, then teaching to the test is good practice. Therefore, teachers are constantly faced with the face a quandary over how best to manage the results driven expectations from numerous sources, including both
parents and students who demand a recipe for Excellence (Hipkins et al., 2016). Focusing solely on excessive exam preparation can result in fundamental knowledge being neglected and as (Christodoulou, 2016) claims, it is then the exam taking skills which are rewarded with good results, rather than true understanding. In this case real knowledge is gained in only a superficial manner. Similarly, Fountain (2017) cautions that teaching to the test rather than the curriculum is encouraged if an NCEA exam hardly changes from year to year. Assessment for learning and assessment for accountability have to co-exist within the NCEA framework (Crooks, 2011) but when assessment results become the target rather than the acquisition of genuine learning, then the assessment stops being a valid measure of that learning. This premise is well known as Campbell’s Law which describes the situation that occurs when a quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making. Inevitably there is a perverse incentive (Christodoulou, 2016) and the process which is intended to be monitored is corrupted instead. This means that increasing exam success and improvement in the attainment of qualifications may be the target (MOE, 2017a) but this may not reflect the wider goal that we really seek i.e. knowledge. This may be prescient in presenting a warning to a teaching profession endeavouring to juggle high stakes assessments where the accountability agenda is being vigorously pursued.

This chapter on the research literature has presented an overview of NCEA assessment and has demonstrated the importance of exemplars as a tool for improving teaching and learning within the tertiary teaching environment, as well as highlighting potential challenges and issues associated with the publication and use of exemplars. This provides the background to the research questions and provides a framework for this research project. The following chapter examines the methodology and describes the research method adopted.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with an explanation of the rationale underpinning the epistemological position I have taken for this research project followed by an examination of my selected research methodology. My research adheres to an interpretive approach which aligns with a qualitative methodology (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The data collection method used is an online questionnaire which I discuss along with the core principles used in the selection of participants for this method. Following this, factors related to data analysis are presented. To complete this chapter, validity, and ethical considerations relevant to the study are examined.

Epistemology

I selected an interpretive epistemology because I was concerned with examining multiple viewpoints and explanations from different participants. The purpose underlying my research was to assess the participant experiences of using exemplars in their current teaching practice and gauge their perceptions of the value of these resources. When accessing this knowledge in my research, the data gathered took the form of written words which the participants used to describe their thoughts and feelings about their experiences with exemplars. It was highly likely that these “truths’ or experiences would differ between individuals, a characteristic that Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2011) acknowledge is fundamental to an interpretive stance. The research was designed to interpret the different realities of each individual experience (Cresswell, 2014), which Cohen et. al., (2011) suggest “are likely to be as diverse as the sets of human meanings and understandings they are to explain” (p18). This is because perceptions are not tangible constructs, but as Bryman (2012) notes, are ephemeral and related to thoughts and ideas. Qualitative analysis is therefore a more fluid and interconnected process (Bryman, 2012) rather than being prescriptive and quantifiable.
The analysis of these written accounts required me to adopt an interpretive approach to describe and understand the problem. In addition, this type of qualitative research strategy is inductive, as I set out to generate explanations from the data collected, as opposed to testing a predetermined theory. As the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection (Merriam, 2009) I was solely responsible for collecting this information, as well as analyzing and interpreting the data. Davidson and Tolich (2003) suggest that qualitative research such as this may elicit useful insights into a particular social situation and as Bryman (2012) notes, taking an interpretive stance may also result in some ‘surprising findings’ (p31) from the sample population. This qualitative research tradition therefore relies on the use of tacit knowledge which is both intuitive and centered around feelings (Cresswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

**Methodology**

The methodology that aligns most closely with an interpretive standpoint is qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Cresswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). By its very nature, qualitative research provides us with insights into a research problem by examining the comments, explanations and perspectives of the participants. Cohen et al (2011) suggest that qualitative researchers emphasise the more subjective and inherently value-laden nature of inquiry as they seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is constructed and given meaning. This view is supported by other researchers such as Davidson and Tolich (2003) who believe that qualitative researchers provide ‘appropriate and useful insights into social situations” (p 46) or Cresswell (2007), who adds that qualitative researchers set out to reveal the implicit meanings in a particular social situation, from one or more perspectives. The intent of qualitative research is to understand how people experience and make sense of their world (Merriam, 2009). This contrasts with the positive approach, which characterises quantitative research, and adheres to the premise that human behaviour is measurable and generalisable (Bryman, 2012; Cresswell, 2007). The value of qualitative research, therefore, is to capture the highly subjective and more nuanced aspects of human behaviour, to generate models and theories, rather than following a quantitative approach where the emphasis tends to be on testing a theory (Bryman,
2012). Lichtman (2013) concurs with this viewpoint and notes, these insights cannot be generated by quantitative statistics.

I decided that it was appropriate to use a qualitative methodology to conduct my research because the data gathered was highly subjective. A key focus of any qualitative research study is to gain an understanding from the participants’ own perspective rather than the view taken by an outsider (Merriam, 2009), because people construct their own social realities and interpret them in different ways (Cresswell, 2014). The qualitative data gathered provided insight through the comments, opinions and explanations provided. The aim of this research was to explore secondary school teachers’ perceptions of the purpose, use and challenges associated with the exemplars for NCEA external assessments. The questionnaire gave me an in-depth understanding of the use and value of these exemplars based on the opinions of those who currently teach in a variety of learning areas.

**Participant Selection**

A salient feature of qualitative research is that participants are purposefully selected to enable rich data to be gathered from those who have real knowledge and experience of the issue (Cresswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The samples are not drawn randomly (Davidson & Tolich, 2003), but deliberately selected from ‘theoretically important units’ (p35) who will be informative about the topic. This is fitting as qualitative studies, such as my research, are often small-scale, providing a snapshot of what is real for that small sample, and cannot be generalized (Merriam, 2009). In my research, purposive sampling was appropriate as I intentionally sought to gain information from participants with certain characteristics who suited the purpose of the study. Currently practicing secondary school teachers, were chosen to be the participants as these people should be familiar with the exemplars published on the NZQA website for the externally assessed achievement standards in the secondary school context. These exemplars are readily available on the subject pages and are intended as a resource for teaching and learning. In addition, schools are advised by circular when they become available, so we would expect that subject specialist teachers would be aware of the exemplars for their own specialist teaching area(s).
Therefore, those invited to participate were deemed to be in the best position to help me understand the issues and respond to the research questions in a manner which could elicit rich descriptive data (Cresswell 2007, Merriam, 2009). This strategy was also useful as I had limited resources and time to complete the study, so I actively and intentionally sought to gather pertinent and useful information from those people who had the greatest potential to provide it.

I purposively selected practicing teachers from a range of differing subject areas and gained access to the participants by contacting subject specific teacher associations, networks or cluster groups. Subject associations have a unique role in the education landscape in New Zealand as they are independent of government and are voluntary networks which are ‘run by teachers, for teachers’ within subject specific domains (PPTA, 2016). Their websites promote all aspects of their professional subject area and practice as well as providing a forum for teachers to discuss concerns within the subject community. Not all teachers belong to their specialist subject association, but many are actively engaged, so tapping into these networks was a good way of reaching the target population in a range of different subject areas. By using this strategy, I was faced with a possible sample of hundreds of teachers, which was far too large for the purposes of this study. I did not want to send an open invitation to all members of the teacher networks I approached, as the amount of data that could be gathered was potentially unmanageable. To mitigate this challenge, and gain access to these potential participants, I adopted a “convenience sampling” approach to decide which networks to contact. Bryman (2008) reasons that this type of sampling “is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility” (p201). I approached eight different teacher networks, explained the purpose of my research and asked them to invite teachers to participate on my behalf. Six of the people contacted agreed to promote and advertise my questionnaire on their website, online newsletter or Facebook page. My contacts provided the background information, invited those interested to participate, and provided the link to the online survey, to a limited number of participants (n=10) each. Effectively I chose these people to act as ‘gatekeepers’, which was a strategic measure I adopted to ensure a good match between the research questions and the interest of the participants (Bryman, 2008. Whilst I acknowledge that the responses are not representative of all relevant teachers, I was interested in generating feedback from a diverse range of teaching
contexts. I adopted this strategy for two main reasons: firstly, it was very difficult to ascertain the number of potential participants in total as there was possibly a very large pool of teachers to draw from in each subject area. Effectively this was also a “snowball” sampling technique whereby those who chose to participate may recommend others. Lichtman (2013) notes that this method can be used when trying to gain access to “hidden or hard to reach participants” (p192). Secondly, because the respondents had effectively “self-selected” as they have knowledge, experience and interest in the issue, and are willing to participate, they were more likely to complete the questionnaire fully and communicate their beliefs and feelings in an articulate and considered manner. The responses were completely random as I had no control over who chose to participate, from the initial sample population.

RESEARCH METHOD – QUESTIONNAIRE

The scope of any research project and choice of research method is often determined by time constraints and the availability of resources such as people and finances. Although there are numerous ways in which data can be gathered, in any research scenario the researcher must decide on the best way of reaching the target groups and gaining the information required. Researchers are free to choose data gathering methods that they are comfortable with, and will afford them rich information (Lichtman, 2013). This is supported by Cohen et al (2011) who put forward the idea that the method must be fit for purpose and they encourage researchers to decide what method will work best to provide answers to research questions. My research questions were developed with the intention of finding out as much about exemplar use as possible from the teachers who use them, and I felt that using a questionnaire would be the best way of achieving this, given the number of participants involved and the time available for data collection. A questionnaire is a research instrument that is commonly used for collecting data. Usually questionnaires are made up of a series of questions or statements with other prompts, with the purpose of gathering specific information from the respondents about the topic of interest (Bell, 2007). Furthermore, Krosnick and Presser (2009) believe that the authenticity of survey results is intrinsically dependent on the script within the questionnaire that facilitates the conversation. My questionnaire was designed to collate answers to the research
questions and gain insight to the overall aims of my research. I created and administered the questionnaire using google forms which had the advantage of providing a template that was both attractive and very user friendly which Bryman (2008) contends are important considerations during the design process.

The questionnaire was structured into three broad sections, which mirrored my research questions. The first section was crafted to explore teachers’ ideas about the purpose of exemplars. The initial statements used a six-point Likert scale to gauge responses on a continuum to predetermined questions. The even-numbered scale was chosen deliberately to avoid the neutral central point (Bell, 2007). This helped to focus the respondents’ attention on the key theme. These were then supported by giving candidates space to answer more open-ended questions which were designed to elicit deeper, more thoughtful and personalized responses. The same format was used to address my remaining two research questions, namely: how teachers use exemplars, and what challenges (if any) they identify. The same questions were given to all respondents, in the same way, thus reducing bias. There are numerous advantages to using questionnaires which are familiar and comfortable to most people, so obtaining a representative sample is likely. By using an on-line questionnaire confidentiality was ensured by allowing the respondents to remain anonymous. This characteristic is important as by ensuring privacy, respondents are likely to feel more at ease and comfortable in answering truthfully. There was no pressure to complete the task within a certain time-frame, so respondents could take their time in considering their responses (Bell, 2007). Further pragmatic considerations were also taken into account, such as the feature of online questionnaires being inexpensive to develop and administer, and also the fact that I could survey many people relatively quickly. These factors were particularly relevant to me as my participants were geographically spread out and it was not feasible to interview or gather together a focus group.

There are, however, several disadvantages in using questionnaires which were considered when designing the instrument and selecting the target groups. Firstly, care was taken in constructing questions or statements to avoid differences in understanding or interpretation as there was no one present to explain and ensure that everyone participating had the same understanding. Unlike interviews, I was
unable to check back on answers, or follow an interesting, albeit unintended direction, as can occur during an interview, so flexibility was reduced. Questionnaires can only ask a limited amount of information without any support information, so data gathered tends to be broad rather than deep as the researcher cannot probe further (Bryman, 2012). Many of these issues can be eliminated or reduced if care is taken during the questionnaire design phase to construct quality questions which are unambiguous and fit for purpose (Bell, 2007; Bryman, 2008). As these authors suggest, I spent time crafting quality statements and questions which could draw out the information I was seeking. My focus was on addressing the key themes and ideas that had emerged from the literature, whilst avoiding leading statements. I was also mindful of the need to avoid ‘questionnaire fatigue’ which, as Krosnick and Presser (2009) caution, can result in the situation where questions are either rushed through, or missed out altogether in order to finish.

Bell (2007) recommends that a group, similar to the target group, completes the questionnaire and provides feedback. This pilot study enables the researcher to identify practical problems and address them before the main study commences. Careful consideration of the instrument design and testing through piloting were crucial components of the reliability process (Bush, 2002). Therefore, after ethical approval I trialed the questionnaire with a small group of colleagues (n=4) who are all national assessment facilitators with NZQA. This group was appropriate as they all have had previous teaching experience in the secondary school sector and are familiar with exemplars for NCEA external assessments. Feedback from this group was valuable in illuminating potential pitfalls such as whether the questions were too complicated, confusing, or inappropriate. Some (minor) changes were made at this time, and most notably I changed the order of some questions to encourage a more logical flow of ideas from the participants.

Perhaps the most well-known and frustrating disadvantage of using a questionnaire is that it is notoriously hard to get a good response rate (Cohen et al., 2007). I received a good initial response from some subject areas, for example ten teachers of visual arts had completed the questionnaire within three days of it being advertised on the subject Facebook page. At this point I closed the survey to any further responses from this community as I wanted to survey the opinions of teachers from a range of teaching
specialties, rather than having a skewed sample drawn predominantly from one or two subject areas. In contrast, I only received two responses from Science teachers initially, but a reminder email sent out after two weeks, to my ‘gatekeeper’, resulted in a further four submissions. I felt that this strategy was important to ensure that I achieved the diversity of responses I was seeking in the make-up of the target 50 responses required for analysis.

A copy of the Questionnaire used for this research can be found in Appendix (A).

**ANALYSIS**

In a qualitative research study, analysis is a process in which all the raw data collected during the study are gathered together and sorted into ‘findings’ (Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland, 2006). According to Cresswell (2012), this sorting and organizing of data is critical, because, a feature common to most qualitative studies is that a large amount of data is collected over time. The data are not numerical, so unlike quantitative research, there is no standardized approach to the analysis. Rather than testing a hypothesis, this type of analysis is an ongoing process which is inductive and driven by the data themselves (Lofland et al., 2006), and as a result can be ‘labour intensive and time consuming’ (p196). There does, however, appear to be general agreement in the literature that the overall goal of the analysis is to identify common themes (Lichtman, 2013; Lofland et al., 2006; Mayan, 2009; Flick, 2009), and whilst there are several different strategies which may be employed to facilitate this, these researchers all recommended that a systematic approach is taken, where the researcher carries out the data collection, analysis, and interpretation themselves. Making sense of a great deal of disparate data is essential to answer the research question (Lichtman, 2013). The process of organizing data into categories so that it becomes meaningful is called ‘coding’ (Lofland et al., 2006), whereby data is thematically analyzed by assigning codes which “emerge from the data via a process of reading and thinking about the text material” (Lichtman, 2013, p248).

By using google forms to construct the online questionnaire, some initial data analysis was also generated by this tool, however I was interested in going beyond basic
statistical data to a deeper analysis by looking at emerging patterns and insights as well as any unusual or conflicting ideas. I took a thematic approach to the analysis of my data by coding the information obtained from the questionnaire responses, then looked for common themes and perspectives which appeared. I set up a word document for each survey question and copied the responses into these documents as they were submitted. This was carefully read through to identify commonalities and differences. I was able to track emerging themes by colour coding key words and phrases, adding notes and then re-organising the text to combine 'like' codes into broader categories. As Lichtman (2013) points out, this was an iterative process which continued as long as data was being collected and reviewed. The idea of thematic analysis like this is that the initial codes “knit together larger chunks of data” (Lofland et al., 2006, p201), which then become subsets of larger categories of information (Lichtman, 2013), and these eventually lead to a higher level of integration (Mayan, 2009). Finally, these categories can be used to identify key concepts, which relate back to the research aim. Conducting this systematic, iterative, method of analysis resulted in a conceptual reduction of a large amount of my subjective data, into a more coherent framework of thematic ideas about the data. As the analysis progressed, and more survey responses were submitted, it started to become apparent over time, which ideas and concepts became common threads or interesting perspectives. Lichtman (2013) describes these ideas as “appearing richer and more powerful than others” (p 254), thus, as Lofland et al (2006) point out, these key ideas became central to my analysis. The crux of my qualitative analysis process therefore, involved revisiting the text many times to pinpoint the emerging patterns and anomalies, with the intention of establishing meaning from the data and providing answers to the research questions. This method aligned well with my interpretive epistemology.

VALIDITY

In qualitative research, internal validity is essential as the outcomes of the research must be authentic and a true and fair representation of the data gathered. This is the cornerstone of rigour, which assures the quality of the research. The integrity of the data is the key measure of validity (Cohen et al; 2011) and this is addressed through the “honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data” (p181). When the proposal,
methodology and analysis are well supported by good processes and practice it can be considered robust and can stand up to critique. Therefore, the management of the whole process is the measure of quality in qualitative research rather than the quantitative ideals of method standardization and controls (Flick, 2009). My research aim demanded a qualitative methodology which addressed conceptual knowledge and the understanding of unobservable perceptions held by the participants, so by clearly defining a research problem and adopting the most appropriate methodology to address the problem, rigour, was applied to the process from the outset. The factual accuracy of the accounts, along with correct meaning and interpretation of the data, ensures that the researcher has represented the participants voices fairly and fully, and does not seek to generalize, which also adds to the quality or rigour of the study. Validity can be strengthened in several ways. In my study, this was achieved firstly by purposively choosing the sample population and providing information to them beforehand about the study so that the process was completely transparent. This also aided in reducing the amount of bias. By gathering data from multiple sources, researchers such as Cohen et al (2011) believe that the researcher can be confident that data collected are “not simply artefacts of the data collection method” (p195) which may distort the picture.

Whilst the initial literature search served as a guide to the key ideas which may be important during this study, the themes that emerged through the analysis of the data, also form part of the validity trail. As Mayan (2009) points out, gathering information from key stakeholders, in this case teachers who are familiar with exemplar use, is essential if validity of the results is to be ensured. An analysis of the findings and gaining a clearer understanding of the reality of practice rather than rhetoric may highlight relationships or issues not previously thought about. Data based decision making is an essential element of continuous quality improvement, and the difference between rhetoric and reality may influence future decisions that NZQA makes.
ETHICS

The obligation to respect and adhere to ethical standards and values is part of the responsibility of all researchers, and as Bryman (2012) notes “evidence of ethical consideration is required as one criterion when assessing the quality of the research” (p144). Cresswell (2007) believes that these considerations go beyond obtaining permission or approval to conduct the study, and the researcher needs to have an ongoing awareness of any ethical issues which may arise so that “ethical decisions are threaded throughout the study (p51), from the initial development of the research questions through the choice of methodology, and finally interpretation of the findings. Bryman (2012) supports this view and adds that by having this awareness, researchers are better placed to “make informed decisions about the implications of certain choices” (p133), thus the moral integrity of the researcher influences the perceptions of trustworthiness and validity of the study. A good qualitative research study is ethical (Cresswell, 2007), and conversely, as Bryman (2012) surmises, an unethical study is one which has either been poorly designed, or, does not contribute in a useful way to a body of knowledge because it lacks sufficient quality.

The cornerstone principles in ethical research are: do no harm, obtain informed consent, avoid invasion of privacy, and avoid deception (Bryman, 2012; Mayan, 2009) These key considerations are important as not only are we asking permission to access personal knowledge from the participants in the study, which requires trust, but we are also asking for an investment of time from them (Cresswell, 2007). Harm to participants does not refer to physical harm alone but also to their mental and emotional welfare, especially if some aspects of the study or findings are confronting. Harm may also involve deception (about the purpose of the study), disadvantage, or an invasion of privacy (Flick, 2009). This can be avoided by adhering to ethical principles whereby the protection of, and respect for, the rights of participants is the primary concern.

Informed consent entails giving sufficient information about the intent of the study to the participants in advance, so that they participate freely and without coercion (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2009). However, before this can occur permission needs to be obtained from the ‘gatekeepers’ to gain access to these people (Bryman, 2012). In
my study participants were recruited from a large pool of practicing teachers via subject associations and other teacher networks. By carrying out this process in which the aims of my study were clearly explained before sending the questionnaire I ensured that due process was followed to maintain the ethical safety of the research participants. In addition, when participants completed the questionnaire, they were implying tacit consent, for their responses to be used.

The issue of privacy is linked to both anonymity and confidentiality (Bryman, 2012). Anonymity refers to the concealment of all participants’ identities throughout the research and confidentiality is concerned with who has the right of access to both the raw data and findings of the research. This principle is particularly important for this research due to the possible perceived authority and “power” attributed to my professional role with NZQA. Participants needed to be assured that they could feel safe when responding and commenting openly and honestly. I ensured that the survey settings did not save computer internet protocol (IP) addresses, so all email addresses and any other identifying information was unavailable when the questionnaire was submitted by the participants. In addition, all data was stored securely to maintain privacy. Throughout the study care was taken when writing up the findings and final report to ensure that the participants, or schools, could not be identified at any point.

Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency. Conflict of interest may arise when a researcher’s personal interest influences the objectives of the study and therefore the fairness of judgements and relationships can be put at risk. Bryman (2012) cautions that although the focus of ethics is centred around the participants, professional self-interest of the researcher should also be a concern. Researchers need to reflect on their own position and clarify any potential bias they may bring to the study (Cresswell, 2014), and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided they should be acknowledged and made explicit. Again, this aspect was relevant in my research study, as I am involved in the production of exemplar material and for this reason, I needed to be completely open in declaring my position with NZQA as a national assessment facilitator, with a specific interest in the research topic.

The foremost concern is always to respect the dignity and rights of the participants, so an understanding of, and sensitivity towards the ethical issues pertinent to my study
were integrated into the entire research process. As Flick (2009) surmises, these considerations are intrinsically linked to the quality and credibility of the research.

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have described my chosen research methodology and provided a rationale which underpins the interpretive epistemological stance I have taken throughout the research process. Reasons for the choice of a questionnaire as my data collection method and the rationale for selecting the participants were explained. Steps taken to analyse the qualitative data gathered, along with considerations of the validity of the research were discussed. Finally, ethical considerations were addressed. In the next chapter I will present the findings of my research.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION
This chapter presents the findings gathered from 50 New Zealand secondary school teachers who responded to my questionnaire on the use of NCEA external exemplars in their teaching practice. This research focused on examining the teachers’ perceptions of the purpose of the exemplars for external assessment; if and how, they use these exemplars in practice; and if they identify any issues associated with their use. The experience of the teachers who completed the questionnaire was varied.

The key findings are presented under the headings; teacher background, purpose of exemplars, use of exemplars and challenges associated with the use of exemplars, which address my research questions. The data gathered from the questionnaire was consolidated and the findings were organised to reflect the themes which were evident from the literature review together with the subthemes which emerged from the data gathered. The chapter concludes with a short summary of the key issues which emerged.

Teacher background
Predominantly the views expressed in this questionnaire were from teachers with considerable teaching expertise in their specialist fields with over half (62%) of the respondents having more than 15 years’ experience. Within the remainder of the group, 26% had been teaching for 10 – 15 years and only 12% were relatively new teachers, having been teaching for 1- 5 years. We can conclude, therefore, that most of the teachers surveyed were very familiar with NCEA assessment and could comment from a position of informed personal experience of the system. The respondents had specialties in a range of different curriculum areas which are summarised in Figure 1.0 below. Gathering data from teachers with backgrounds in a range of different subject specialties allowed me to examine the perspectives from both the individuals and broader subject areas.
Figure 1.0 Subject area of respondents

The respondents could be grouped into eight broad curriculum areas. Analysis of this data, enabled me to identify some similarities and differences between subject areas, as well as eliciting some unexpected and interesting insights. In order to maintain anonymity, I have coded the individual teacher responses firstly with an indicator of the subject area, followed by the number of the questionnaire respondent, as indicated in Figure 1.2 below: For example: AT8 = arts teacher, respondent number 8; MaT43 = maths teacher, respondent number 43.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>MuT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>SST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>MaT</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>TT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.2 Coding
Purpose of exemplars

The first section of the questionnaire sought to discover what teachers believed was the purpose of the exemplars. Teachers were asked firstly to rate their perception of each statement on a six-point Likert scale. The options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree through to 6 = strongly agree. Each bar graph below summarises the responses of the fifty teachers surveyed.

![Bar Graph](image)

Figure 2.0 Exemplars clearly indicate the grade for the standard

The first statement asked teachers to what extent they agreed with the statement that “exemplars clearly indicate the grades for the standard”. Figure 2.0 reveals that most teachers (88%) agreed or strongly agreed with this view. A similar number (84%) agreed with the statements that the exemplars clarify the achievement criteria for each grade, as shown in Figure 2.1 below.
Several of the teachers who did not agree with either of these statements expressed some concerns about the quality of exemplars available commenting that:

*they should help to clarify the standard but often are of poor quality and don’t* (ET33)

*they can be confusing if they are not particularly good ones with vague commentary or are or outdated* (SST35)

However, the findings demonstrate that majority of teachers surveyed felt that they understood that the main purpose of the exemplars is to clarify the intent of the standards and to indicate how the grades were awarded in the marking of the assessment. Figure 2.2 presents the perceptions of the respondents to the idea that the use of exemplars can improve student outcomes.
The statement elicited the same range of responses as previously indicated, with 42/50 in agreement.

To ensure that these findings could be accurately interpreted, teachers were then asked, in an open-ended question, to provide further details on their thoughts on the purpose of exemplars. Most of those surveyed perceived that the main purpose of exemplars is:

_to provide clarification of the standard requirements (MaT45)_

Almost half the teachers directly referred to the main purpose being to help with teachers’ understanding of the assessment criteria of the various standards, as the following comments show:

_A guide to help teachers understand the requirements for each grade, and the qualitative differences between them (ET19)_

_To illustrate the qualitative differences between the grades A, M, E for each standard (ST26)_
Feedback to teachers so we can understand what typifies a piece of work that meets the standard at each grade (AT14)

Furthermore, the following comments reflect the view that was put forward by several teachers about the importance of exemplars in a wider context:

To assist students and teachers to ensure that they understand where the NATIONAL standard lies irrespective of their own particular sample or cohort (AT4)

To allow teachers to view the same standard, taught in a different context and how they have been graded - to help understand the achievement criteria (AT8)

Overwhelmingly the respondents revealed the need for exemplars to ‘show’ teachers and students what is expected. The views expressed below demonstrate that teachers believe that one of the main functions of exemplars is to provide examples of student evidence which visually demonstrate the standard at each grade.

They are authentic examples of student work which indicate to teachers and students what each grade “looks like” in practice (ET20)

Visual tools to demonstrate the requirements of the standard (TT13)

Students need to see that they can be successful in their own projects through looking at what others have done, they need to have something to reference (AT15)

Respondents frequently used terms such as “helping”, “guidance”, “promoting understanding”, “clarifying” and “showing” when describing what they felt was the purpose of exemplars. One English teacher summed up all these impressions well with the statement:

By seeing authentic examples of students work they help teachers unpack the requirements of a standard in a practical and relevant way, so they are really a guide to understanding the standards better (ET36)
Similarly, a science teacher commented that:

*They clarify the differences in quality of responses at A. M. E and indicate why the grades were awarded. To show what students write in their own words rather than the textbook answer (ST41)*

Purpose of exemplars - Key Findings

The majority of teachers surveyed have a clear understanding of the purpose of exemplars. They strongly voice the idea that exemplars should support teaching and learning by providing examples of student work which act as a visual reference point to clarify the standards and to illustrate how the student work was marked.

The use of exemplars

The second section of the survey explored how teachers used exemplars in their teaching practice. Teachers were asked if, and how often they used exemplars in their teaching practice. Responses to this question were quite varied.

Twelve teachers reported that they did not use the exemplars at all or did so very rarely. Reasons given included:

*Not at all recently – probably more when they were first introduced (MaT43)*

*Exemplars are useful when standards are new or have had changes….otherwise I don’t use them (ST41)*

*The assessment schedules are very clear so (exemplars) are not needed. Also, they can be misleading in that there are so many variations of answers (BT41)*

Eighteen teachers indicated that they used exemplars a few times each year. In most of these instances they were used as a revision tool prior to school mock exams or external NCEA exams:

*As a revision activity prior to the NCEA exams. We look at a few examples in class and decide what the grade would be based on the evidence given (BT39)*
By mock-marking during revision, students can see how to improve their answer from A to M to E (ST26)

Some teachers noted that they do not actively use them as a teaching tool but direct students to their availability.

I don't use them in my lessons, but they are freely available on the NZQA website for students to access so I do let them know where to find them for revision etc (ST48)

Conversely, others reported that they were more for teacher use and interest rather than as a tool to use with students. Underpinning these statements were the desire for these teachers to upskill by examining the exemplars and their commentaries to ensure they had a secure understanding of the standard.

I don't use them in my teaching, but our department reviews them when they become available and we compare them with our own students’ scripts, so that we can ensure we are interpreting the standard correctly (MaT44)

To double check that I am understanding the achievement standards to ensure I give my students the best possible opportunity of achieving (AT11)

I refer to them myself annually …..and include any new information from the commentaries to my body of knowledge (AT24)

One teacher shared an interesting insight where they have found using exemplars useful with beginning teachers:

I have used the exemplars with teachers new to our department who have not yet seen or marked student work for the external standards. It helps them get an idea of what students write instead of the model answers in the schedule (BT39)

Twenty teachers reported that they used exemplars often or regularly in their lessons throughout the year. Seven from this group, who were all creative arts or technology teachers believed the exemplars were important models to give ideas and guidance for portfolio layouts:

To help students see how folio boards are laid out and what successful folio boards have compared with less successful folios (TT15)
Physical exemplars of a range of previous student folios still seem to be the best way of explaining how a method, technique, concept or use of established practice might be explored (AT24)

Similarly, a further nine teachers, from a range of subject areas, reported that they were used as models to analyse in class particularly when teaching how to develop depth in written (essay style) responses:

I use paragraphs or sections of them to demonstrate good structure and we discuss the lower level exemplars without the annotations to see if my students understand what was missing (ET49)

Use them to develop students writing skills and ensure they appreciate the depth answers need to be written in (SST30)

Using the exemplars enables students to see the differences in quality between them. It can give them an idea of how to improve their own answers (ST50)

Three teachers commented directly on their use as a model to copy:

Students can highlight generic words and phrases that can be used in their own answers (ET34)

To get ideas for layout, development of ideas and subject matter (AT16)

Students can copy a format or essay structure that was successful (ET47)

These comments are as close as any of the teachers came to acknowledging that they felt it was acceptable for their students to directly copy from the exemplars, and this was a part of their normal teaching practice.

In this section teachers were then asked if they agreed with the statement that they used exemplars to differentiate leaning. The results are shown in figure 3.0 whereby there is a full range of responses. Just over half the respondents (27/50) agreeing with this statement to some degree but the remaining twenty-three respondents did not agree to some extent.
Of those who indicated that they did differentiate learning by using exemplars, only four provided any additional comments to support this response. Two teachers, who strongly agreed with this statement provided very specific insights:

*They can help to build confidence and self-esteem by showing my “struggling” students that they can achieve. We focus on unpacking the achieved exemplars first and I get them to work in pairs to compare the essays with their own work and come up with ways they can improve. Even though the contexts are different, the A exemplars are written in a language my students can understand and can use as a model for their own work (SST47)*

*If you don’t have decent exemplars for students, then higher achievement becomes a “secret club”. I have found that bottom range exemplars have been invaluable in motivating my priority learners (NAG/at-risk) because they can see how they can achieve. It can also boost achievement for students who want to do well but sometimes find the criteria cryptic - visual / sound exemplars for students in Arts are invaluable (AT4)*

This observation of inspiring confidence was also noted by others who pointed out:

*To show students that at E level, perfection is not required, just “perceptive” analysis (L2) or “perceptive” critical response (L3). Early in the year, we practise*
giving peer and self-feedback (using exemplars) in a way that is less confronting than students using their own work (ET20)

I use these (exemplars) as a guide, not to overwhelm students but to inspire them and show them what is expected and it is achievable (AT5)

A point noted by several teachers was that in some instances assessment schedules were quite generic, so not accessible to students, whereas exemplars were written in language that students could understand. Conversely, other teachers pointed out that assessment schedules were so detailed that the exemplars were not necessary or useful, for example a comment from an accounting/business teacher was:

All the information is in the assessment schedule and it is very clear where the standard lies so I don’t use the exemplars, I think they have a place in more essay type subjects (BT42)

Use of exemplars – Key findings

Teachers were able to describe a number of different practices and strategies they used in their classrooms. Some teachers do not use exemplars at all, whereas others have come to rely on them quite heavily and use them frequently throughout the year. Others refer to them occasionally for their own information and as a guide to understanding the standards. Many teachers tend to use them with students occasionally as a revision exercise prior to exams. Several teachers also acknowledged that students use them independently, as they are freely available on the NZQA website.

Challenges with using exemplars

The framing of the initial three Likert questions in this section was designed to gather some insight into the teachers’ perceptions of the types of issues that were identified in the literature review. The results revealed a range of responses

Teachers responses to the statement “Exemplars can encourage copying” demonstrated a broad range of opinions as shown below.
Thirty respondents disagreed with the statement citing reasons such as:

*Not a concern in the sciences because the exam questions/content/contexts change from year to year in the external exams, so a student has nothing to gain (ST41)*

*Maths questions change every year so there is no point in students memorising answers as they are just not relevant for the following year MaT43)*

*Our exams are different every year and students must apply their knowledge to the situation they are presented with, so although they may copy a phrase or answer, it will not advantage them (ST1)*

In contrast, twenty teachers indicated that they felt copying from the exemplars was an issue to some extent:

*In exams where the questions vary little from year to year they can encourage students to memorise either the exemplar itself or the structure of it, so they construct their own pre-prepared exam answers which are very close to them (ET49)*

*Definitely a concern – too many exemplars encourages plagiarism, and a lack of critical thinking and reflection (ET19)*
Comments such as these indicate that almost half the teachers surveyed were aware that copying from the exemplars could be an issue in some subjects or standards and this was recognised as a potential challenge as the exemplars are freely available for students use. What was very evident from the comments was that many of these teachers alluded to the fact that they were aware copying occurred, but felt it was more of a student issue rather than teacher directed or encouraged. However, one art teacher did make the comment that:

*I am aware that some teachers asked students to directly copy entire boards (AT9)*

The second issue to be explored was teacher views on the possibility that creativity could be stifled by using exemplars as shown in Figure 4.1. These results show that most did not agree with the statement.

![Figure 4.1 Exemplars can stifle creativity](image)

Of the twelve respondents who did feel this was an issue to some extent, their views were supported by further comments such as:

*Sometimes students think the exemplars illustrate the ‘best’ or only way to complete a task, especially for excellence (ST26)*
Cautiously looking at the point of view that exemplars might stifle creativity. If this was happening, even in rare circumstances, I think it would be helpful to have even more exemplars on the NZQA site. Showing a greater variety of responses (AT32)

Students use exemplars as models for their answers, so this can limit their responses and thinking. I don’t use exemplars with my students, but I am aware they look them up on the NZQA website and copy (MuT3)

The selection (of exemplars) is done to create a cross section of both interesting and current practice. However, the perception may be that this is now the expected method of practice (AT24)

As indicated in figure 4.2 below, a similar spread of results was observed when gauging the response to the idea that use of exemplars could narrow the curriculum.

Figure 4.2 The use of exemplars narrows the curriculum

The majority of teachers (43/50) disagreed with this statement, however none provided any further comments to back up their choice. Although only seven indicated this was a concern to some extent, these seven teachers all raised the same issue of which is neatly summarised in the following comments:
If teachers think the exemplars are an indication of what will be in the next external exam, then there could be an issue of ‘teaching to the test’ but in my view this is just bad practice and will disadvantage students (MaT44)

The resources that I find of dubious value are not the visual images, but the written programmes of work, that if rigidly adhered to certainly can result in a ‘going through the motions course’ and thus stifle both teacher and student creativity (AT32)

As well as the challenges outlined in the Likert statements, several common themes emerged from further teacher comments about the value of the exemplars and how they could be improved. For example, many teachers felt that the usefulness of exemplars could be improved if the annotations were better:

\[
\text{I would love some more direct comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the work (AT5)}
\]

\[
\text{Exemplars are more useful if the annotations are quite specific and clearly explain why the grade was awarded. I think this is an area that they can be improved. Sometimes these are quite generic and only repeat the statements from the standard which is really not that helpful (BT39)}
\]

\[
\text{They are of variable quality and the annotations are fairly brief. We know the standards quite well now, so the assessment schedules say it all really (ST50)}
\]

Several other teachers felt that that a lack of variety is an issue:

\[
\text{More variety in the examples published, for example some standard exemplars and some different fresh approaches (AT10)}
\]

In particular some teachers felt there needed to be more exemplars which are more appropriate and relevant to the use with the classes they teach:

\[
\text{There is not the range of work from different cultures that would be useful in the school that I teach in i.e. not a lot of Pacific, no middle Eastern or African (AT8)}
\]

\[
\text{They are not really digestible by students, so they are not that useful. Also, they are very ‘classical music’ oriented – students don’t relate to the content, so again not that useful (MuT27)}
\]
One often mentioned challenge for teachers was the lack of professional development (PD) which is seen as a major issue for most teachers surveyed. Only two respondents mentioned that they had been introduced to exemplars whilst at teachers’ college. Thirty-seven respondents (74%) indicated they had never received any PD at all and this was a concern:

The lack of PD is an ongoing issue for maths teachers. We need specifically targeted PD which ensures ALL teachers are aware of the intent of the standards, and how we can best prepare our students for the external exams (MaT45)

Very little PD on anything subject related since the demise of the subject specialists (ST50)

Four respondents had gained PD through their involvement on external NCEA marking panels. A further ten respondents indicated that they had gained some understanding informally through discussions at cluster meetings, or by attending Best Practice workshops or other courses:

None personally but have been an NCEA marker so know how to use them (BT42)

I went to a Best Practice Workshop a few years ago which was good, but the focus was on internal assessment only (TT37).

I attended a course on assessment for learning a few years ago which introduced me to the idea of using exemplars in teaching although not specifically for NCEA assessments (ET47)

Challenges with using exemplars – Key findings

Teachers recognised that the potential for students copying, stifling creativity or narrowing the curriculum, although not of widespread concern could be a challenge in some circumstances. These findings highlight the fact that the issues the teachers identified are often related to the style of the assessment task (usually within specific subject domains), some individual teaching practices, or students mis-use. Teachers raise specific concerns about the quality of some of the exemplar material and the
relevance to the students they teach. The lack of professional development opportunities is identified as a major concern.

The final part of the survey asked teachers if they felt the exemplars were a valuable teaching tool. Overall thirty-seven teachers indicated that they agreed as indicated in Figure 5.0.

![Figure 5.0 Overall, exemplars are a valuable teaching tool](image)

However, a number of respondents also cautioned about their availability and the possible unintended consequences of their use. Several of these teachers also suggested that limiting the accessibility of the exemplars could be desirable.

*I wonder if they would be more useful in a secure area where students can’t access them? That way teachers can decide whether and how they are used in class (MuT3)*

An interesting theme that was woven through several of the responses, is the concern around how teachers balance the use of exemplars for good teaching and learning with the pressures placed on them to produce results:

*They are not intended to be exemplars of ‘best practice’ in terms of teaching approach/methodology/theme and or content, or a defining formula. They should encourage teachers to find their own ways to meet the needs of their students and to guide and support their learning. However, with the pressure*
on teachers to ‘perform’ by delivering high grades/pass rates to school, principals, they may fall back on the exemplars as a default way of doing things (AT14)

Some expressed frustration that although the exemplars are intended to be helpful, they can encourage poor practice and one teacher phrased it this way:

*There are so many different ways to demonstrate perception in an essay. And yet all the exemplars for level 2 come back to the creativity stifling, mimic-inducing, beyond the text comparison. This encourages teachers to have their students slavishly trot out formulaic beyond the text comparisons that they learn by rote and add to any answer they produce. I want my students to do something better than this, something that is more in keeping with the concepts that will be rewarded at Scholarship level but am always left doubting that I am selling my students short (ET28)*

These two quotes present an honest reflection on the scenario many teachers face when pressure to produce results can often conflict with the desire to enhance the learning experience.

Finally, teachers were invited to make any additional comments they wished to include. Five teachers further emphasised the need for NZQA to continue to provide high quality well-annotated exemplar for the external assessments whilst eight teachers reiterated the need for quality professional development which is subject specific.

**Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings gained from the analysis of the data which was collected from a questionnaire submitted by fifty New Zealand secondary school teachers. The findings show that on the surface, the purpose of exemplars appears to be well understood by most teachers surveyed and they are viewed by most as a valuable teaching resource. However, there appears to be a diverse range of ways in which their use is applied to practice, which also highlights a few misconceptions and varying degrees of reliance on them for teaching purposes. Teachers also recognised a number of challenges associated with their use and proffered some commentary
about the quality of these resources. The findings also indicate that there appears to be quite distinct subject specific differences, in the way exemplars are used and regarded by those surveyed.

The next chapter discusses these findings in more detail and provides conclusions and some suggested recommendations.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION
This chapter presents a discussion about teachers’ perceptions of the exemplars for NCEA external assessments.

The research questions I investigated were:

1. What is the intended purpose of NCEA external assessment exemplars?
2. How do teachers use the external assessment exemplars?
3. What are the issues of teacher use of the NCEA external assessment exemplars?

The key findings of this study are discussed under three main headings; teacher perceptions of the purpose of exemplars, teacher use of exemplars, and issues with teacher use of exemplars. This discussion focuses on the key findings from chapter 4 with support from relevant literature reviewed in chapter 2. Following the discussion of my findings I will present the conclusions arising from this research, along with my recommendations and some suggestions for further study.

Teacher perceptions of the purpose of exemplars
Findings from this study confirm that all teachers surveyed viewed the purpose of the external assessment exemplars in much the same way. This shared understanding of the purpose was described in various ways, which are consistent with the definitions found in the literature and highlight the key idea that they are a model or a guide to the interpretation of a standard (Newlyn, 2013; Sadler, 2002). They were also recognized as being authentic samples of student work which illustrate the qualitative differences between the grades as stipulated by the MOE (2017b). Teachers perceptions also supported the views of commentators such as Scoles et.al., (2013) who point out that by showing how the assessment was graded, exemplars can be used to improve student performance in examinations.
The findings from this research provided evidence that many teachers value the NCEA external assessment exemplars. In particular, visual arts teachers perceive that these exemplars are among the most useful resources available to them and were one of the strengths of the NCEA system. Almost unanimously, these arts teachers expressed a desire for a wider range of exemplars to be made available to model the required standards expected. This view concurs with that of Sadler (2002) who suggests that teachers often find it difficult to form a consistent understanding of the differences between grades unless they can refer to a range of exemplars of student work which exhibit different contexts and quality. However, this viewpoint was not expressed by teachers of other disciplines, particularly in the sciences, mathematics and accounting/business subject areas, several of whom noted that they found the assessment schedules as, if not more, useful than the exemplars. One could postulate that the reason behind this difference is that assessment in these subjects is more content driven so the assessment schedules which are published are very detailed and specific. In contrast, assessment by portfolio typically measures process or performance which can be difficult to articulate clearly without ‘showing’ examples of visual evidence. Similarly, generic essay assessment tasks, by necessity tend to have less detailed assessment schedules as it is not possible to give detailed evidence of every possible scenario or context that candidates may choose to write about. The prevailing view of the teachers surveyed that the exemplars illustrate how the assessment was marked and clearly demonstrate the quality differences between achieved, merit and excellence grades is a crucial finding which is well supported in the literature (Carless & Kennedy, 2016; Sadler, 2010; Newlyn, 2013). A number of recent commentaries which specifically refer to teachers of NCEA (Hipkins, 2017; Lipson, 2018) echo these findings and also point to the degree of tension and angst that arises when teachers are unsure of the holistic aspects of a standards criteria and need more support in order to understand the marking decisions, as these are not explicit in a generic assessment schedule. The findings indicate that these teachers tend to use and rely on exemplars more often compared to those subjects which have more detailed assessment schedules.

A key finding from this study was that teachers were united in their understanding of the purpose of exemplars as a guide to quality, and whilst the majority of teachers surveyed felt they fulfilled this purpose well, others raised the concern that in some
instances, the examples of student work chosen to be the exemplar, and the quality of the annotations, were not as valuable as they could be. Again, these comments tended to be made by teachers of Arts subjects, where they felt the chosen exemplars did not suit the multicultural make up of their classes, or that the brief annotations did not give sufficient and helpful detail. Such comments are echoed in the literature where researchers such as Christodoulou (2016) comment that to be useful, for example, the annotations should not only illustrate aspects of an essay which qualify the grade to be awarded but should also try to explain why certain essays were better than others. However, I would argue that these explanations should emerge during discussions with students during formative teaching, as several other teachers reported, rather than expect that this information would be provided by NZQA. From this we can tentatively conclude that distinct subject subcultures can be identified wherein the nature and type of assessment within the subject informs the teachers’ perceptions of the value of the exemplars.

**Teachers’ use of exemplars**

The findings clearly show that teachers use exemplars in a variety of different ways, but they can be broadly grouped into one of four main categories:

1. those who rarely or never use them
2. those who use exemplars to inform their own understanding of assessment, but do not use them with students
3. those who use exemplars sparingly as part of a toolkit of resources particularly for use with students during revision for external exam
4. those use them frequently with students as an essential part of their teaching practice.

Furthermore, although the sample population is small, a key finding is that the grouping is dependent on the nature of the external assessment task, and that once again there are definite subject specific differences. The findings indicate that visual arts, and technology teachers use exemplars frequently in the classroom. External assessment in these subjects is by portfolio, with generic and abstract assessment
criteria. Similarly, the findings show that teachers of subjects such as English and Social Sciences where assessment is by a generic essay format also use exemplars extensively in their teaching programmes. In these cases, the assessment schedules tend to be generic rather than specific because the tasks themselves are generic in nature. This is well supported in the literature particularly by Sadler (2010) who discusses the problems associated with interpreting abstract criteria which cannot be conceptualized unless they are ‘seen’. Providing a distinct contrast was the finding that teachers of subjects in which the questions or assessment tasks differ from year to year, for example, Maths, Sciences and Business use the exemplars infrequently, if at all, because the assessment schedules have detailed content, therefore it is very clear how the grades were awarded. These teachers were more likely to report that they used the exemplars as a revision tool, but they were not used as an integral part of everyday teaching. This subject difference is a key finding from my research which has not been well documented in the literature previously.

These findings provide very strong evidence that understanding how the marking is applied, can be a cause of concern for both teachers and students. This tension has been recognized recently by other researchers such as Carless and Kennedy (2016) in the university teaching sector as well as the commentary from Hipkins et al., (2016) who reported that there was a definite level of anxiety reported by both teachers and students surrounding the interpretation of some NCEA standards. It seems that when the standard and assessment schedules are very holistic and generalised in nature there is very little material for teachers and students to ‘pin’ their interpretation to. This in turn seems to lead to a heavy reliance on the exemplar material to inform teaching practice. In these instances, the exemplars are invaluable to teachers as they shed light on how the assessments were marked and what pieces of evidence were required to meet the standard at each level of achievement, in a way that the generic assessment schedules cannot. This group reports that they frequently use the exemplars as models of practice for discussion during formative teaching and feel that this strategy of showing students what constitutes success, is essential helps their students to improve their own work. This conclusion is reinforced in the literature, which has demonstrated that written feedback and practice alone is not enough to improve student outcomes. This type of ‘feedforward’ strategy is supported in the literature by others such as Scoles et al., (2013) whose research indicated that this
constitutes good practice and is associated with improved performance by students in examinations. This view was prevalent amongst the visual arts and technology respondents who are assessed by portfolio, along with several teachers whose subject areas (for example, English) are generally assessed by written essay. Not surprisingly it was found that several of these teachers wanted even more exemplars, as a great focus of their teaching practice appears to focus around scrutinizing the exemplars along with frequent discussion in the classroom. This idea of discussing the exemplars within the classroom is consistent with the findings of Carless and Kennedy (2016) who, in their studies of tertiary students, showed that student achievement can be improved if exemplars are used and referred to during formative teaching, and particularly if they are combined with productive dialogue between student and teacher. The teaching and learning approach in which students mark exemplars and then receive an explanation from the teacher has also been shown to be a very effective strategy by other researchers (Hendry et al, 2012; Sadler, 2010). Therefore, this study, in the context of NCEA external assessment, has built on the previous research conducted in other settings, on the use of exemplars by teachers, by highlighting the important role of the teacher’s explanation and whole class interactive process when using exemplars to scaffold student learning in the NCEA environment.

Of particular interest was the finding that a number of teachers said they found the exemplars very useful when working with student teachers or beginning teachers as they had not yet had enough experience with marking actual student work. This unexpected finding suggests a possible avenue for future research. The MoE (2011) stated that building assessment capability in teachers is crucial to achieving improvement therefore it would be interesting to see how teacher training organisations approach this aspect. In addition, this requirement also supports the universal demand of those teachers surveyed, for ongoing, quality professional development.

**Issues and challenges with teachers’ use of exemplars**

An important finding from this study was that most of the teachers surveyed recognized that there was potential for negative and unintended consequences such
as plagiarism, copying, teaching to the test and narrowing of the curriculum to occur when exemplars were used. However, the findings indicated that overall, the teachers surveyed believed these issues are not common in all subjects and may only be confined to those assessments which are fairly predictable and where there is not much variation into the task from year to year. Almost half the teachers surveyed recognized that copying from the exemplars, including rote learning answers or sections of essays by students was the major challenge associated with their use. This is also supported in the literature by numerous researchers such as To and Carless (2016) who found that the availability of high quality exemplars can encourage copying and Hounsell (2008) who found that ‘unthinking mimicry’ was a key challenge.

It is easy for academics and researchers to promote the idealised scenario whereby exemplars are used to develop teacher and students’ awareness of quality differences and the students apply these ideas to their own work (Carless, 2016; Sadler, 2010). However, the realities pose difficult challenges for teachers wherein the availability of a rich source of exemplar material actually has the unintended consequence of encouraging copying by students, as a short cut to gaining a desirable grade (Christodoulou, 2016; Lipson, 2018). Evidence in the findings points to some teachers instructing students to copy, structure, words and phrases from the exemplars and they regard this as good practice and preparation for examinations. These findings are similar to the research carried out by Hendry et al., (2016) which has shown that while students may not outwardly plagiarise content, they do tend to model the structure of good quality work. However, the findings also indicate that the general feeling is that the practice is not widespread and would not benefit students in those assessments which change each year.

The findings indicate that many teachers encouraged students to model their work on the exemplars, particularly essay structures and portfolio ideas which had gained excellence results in the past. Whilst this mimicry is seen as an effective method of helping students raise their level of achievement by many of those surveyed, the contradictory viewpoint of others raises the suggestion that excessive reliance on the exemplars to model good performance ceases to be regarded as effective pedagogy and becomes a coaching exercise. This is supported in the literature by Christodoulou...
who poses the question “What is the difference between legitimate coaching that increases the validity of the exam score, and coaching that starts to compromise it?” (p61). Furthermore, it seems that although the beneficial educational imperatives with using exemplars to promote learning are professed to be ideologically driven there are several comments from the participants in this survey which point to teachers being well aware of the pressure to produce improved outcomes for their students, together with the implications this may have on their teaching practice. This underlying tension was evident and similar conclusions were drawn from the research of Hipkins et al., (2016) who questioned how much guidance teachers were giving students, in the belief they were supporting their students to succeed in NCEA.

The obvious implication is that if the assessment task does not change much from year to year, and/or questions are generic there exists the opportunity for students to rote learn and ‘brain dump’ an answer. Numerous researchers have noted that this becomes problematic if copying from exemplars results in the attainment of good grades. Inevitably the practice is encouraged further, and the system is open to abuse, at the expense of deep learning (Hounsell, 2008; To & Carless, 2016). Conversely plagiarism, copying and teaching to the test will not be an issue if assessment tasks, particularly essay questions are less predictable. Findings from this study reiterate this view as teachers reported that in many instances copying is not an issue because the assessments have a degree of variability from year to year. Hendry et al., (2016) point out that to reduce the temptation for students to copy, the exemplars should be on a different topic or context to the assessment task. This conclusion is reiterated by Christodoulou (2016) and Fountain (2017) who stress that assessment tasks should assess the curriculum but also have an element of unpredictability each year so that they remain valid measures of the domain, rather than the sample. The challenge for NZQA therefore, is to balance the need to produce valid and reliable assessments, which have a degree of unpredictability and assess the curriculum, with the added responsibility of being totally transparent, fair and consistent.

The key finding that there is need for ongoing professional development to develop confidence and a sound understanding of the quality judgements in external assessment is interesting given that most participants are very experienced teachers with a great deal of subject specific knowledge. Several teachers mentioned that they
have a much clearer understanding of external standards based assessment after training as a marker or exam developer with NZQA, however not all teachers can take up this opportunity. Although beyond the scope of this research, it raises the question as to how teacher training courses prepare student teachers to teach not only the curriculum content, but also how to understand assessment, and best prepare students for external examinations. In other words, how are student teachers developed to become assessment capable practitioners?

My research demonstrated almost universal agreement in that there is a pressing need for subject specific professional development with a focus, amongst other things, on generating a common understanding of the assessment criteria within the standards as well as supporting teachers to develop a greater assessment confidence and awareness. Professional development also needs to be grounded in a desire to improve students success in NCEA, not just from an accountability viewpoint centred around credit accumulation, but from re-examining pedagogical issues centred around teaching depth in the curriculum. The focus of professional development in recent years has been on improvement of the teacher, from the perspective of increased scrutiny and evaluation together with the implication that effectiveness is based on exam results. The comments from many of the teachers surveyed supports the views of researchers such as Wyse et al., (2016) who have also noticed this trend in the United Kingdom where the accountability aspects of teacher development have been pushed to the forefront, to the detriment of subject focused professional development.

The pitfalls are complex and from an exam development perspective it would seem prudent to mitigate against the likelihood of such undesirable practices occurring in the first place. Recent commentators such as (Fountain, 2017; Hipkins et al., 2016; Lipson, 2017) agree with one of the key findings of this research which was that exemplars lend themselves to encouraging “teaching to the test” or coaching or copying because they are such a rich source of material and some assessments are fairly predictable from year to year. This is also consistent with the research of Christodoulou (2016) and To and Carless (2016) who go further in questioning the
deeper pedagogical reasons surrounding excessive exam preparation and the use of exemplars.

**Conclusions**

The role of research in education is ultimately to discover ways to improve education. In this study I set out to explore the issue of how external assessment exemplars are used and valued by teachers of NCEA in New Zealand secondary school because relatively little is known about this, and it appears to be a significant gap in the body of literature on this topic. As Merriam (2009) points out, “research is a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process” (p149) therefore the purpose of this study was to add to the knowledge base in the area of exemplar research and standards-based assessment. Previous qualitative research has been done on the topic in other contexts, as outlined in the literature review, but not specifically with the study population. Analysis of the qualitative data gathered provided some new and enlightening viewpoints and interesting tensions that have influenced the perceptions and behavior of the participants in this study. The findings from my research disclosed the implicit meanings in this social situation from the perspectives of multiple participants, and not my own (the researcher’s) viewpoint.

The motivation for carrying out this particular research study stems from my role as a national assessment facilitator with NZQA. I am responsible for ensuring the quality, validity and relevance of NCEA external assessments, so it is crucial that we have a clear understanding of any situations or practices which may compromise the quality of these assessments, and the qualification as a whole. In light of the recent situation in which an obviously plagiarized essay was published as an exemplar on the NZQA website, prompting an independent review of all processes associated with exemplars, it was timely to look into the use of exemplars by teachers. I questioned if the provision of a large amount of material available on the NZQA website, particularly the provision of multiple exemplars of student scripts for each external assessment, was a valuable resource for teachers as intended, or whether these exemplars were being misused by teachers and/or students. My research study was built around the need to find out the opinions and experiences of teachers from a number of different disciplines and to
identify what constitutes current practice. Furthermore, I was interested in finding out whether these teachers recognized and identified any issues associated with exemplar use.

The major conclusions to be drawn from this research is that exemplars of student work from external assessments, with good quality annotations, are a valuable resource for many teachers, particularly when the assessment criteria of the standard are difficult to interpret. There is a noticeable difference in opinions and practice depending on the subject area of the teachers surveyed. This also appears to be linked to both the nature of the standard and the style of the assessment task. Teachers recognize that there is potential for undesirable behaviours to occur, such as plagiarism, copying and teaching to the test, however again these appear to be related to assessment tasks which are very predictable in nature, rather than being of widespread concern. A key challenge that was highlighted is that the provision of a large number of assessment resources each year, whilst desired by many teachers can also be problematic in that it inadvertently encourages teaching to the test, rather than the full curriculum in any subject area.

Whilst most teachers surveyed have considerable teaching experience and subject expertise, a common thread that ran through the responses was that there is a strong desire for more targeted professional development opportunities which is centred around assessment. One of the key findings is that there has been little if any professional development available which focuses on external assessment understanding and practice.

This small study reveals a clearer understanding of the reality of practice for the fifty teachers surveyed. The findings have provided a window into the thinking of secondary school teachers of NCEA, and what they consider to be important regarding the use of exemplars of external assessments and the challenges they perceive with their use. The beliefs that these teachers hold about the value of exemplars as a tool on preparing students for external assessments, act as a framework which guides the use (or not) of exemplars in their teaching practice.
Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of my research there are a number of recommendations I would like to put forward:

Recommendations for Ministry of Education

- Consider reviewing the current standards as part of the NCEA review
- Provide subject specific professional development for teachers which is targeted to improve assessment capability by building confidence in understanding the intent of the standards and assessment writing.

Recommendations for NZQA

- Review assessment tasks to ensure that all assessments are designed to be less predictable so that it is harder to “teach to the test” and difficult for students to rote learn and “dump” a response in an examination.
- Ensure the exemplars on the NZQA website are current, of high quality and are annotated so as to be useful and ‘fit for purpose’
- Consider limiting the number of exemplars available for each standard

Strengths and limitations of this study

The strengths of this study lie in the candid responses from the teachers who participated in the survey and shared their thoughts, experiences and challenges. In addition, by purposively choosing participants from a range of different teaching specialty areas, rather than a homogeneous sample, some interesting and different insights emerged. Researching into the experiences of these teachers generated a variety of responses to the research questions and provided an invaluable window into the thinking of currently practicing secondary school teachers. Cresswell (2012) notes, that by probing into the experiences of the participants, answers to the research questions can be illuminating. A further strength of this study was that the findings were presented in a narrative form which presented the voices of the participants fairly and accurately. This emic perspective has informed a deeper understanding of the research problem that defines this study.
Every qualitative research study has limitations. By necessity, this research was of a small scale, so any reader of these findings should remain cognizant of the limitations of this study. Whilst the findings provided an insight into the perceptions of this purposive sample, the views expressed by this group may differ from others in their field and should be treated with some caution. We cannot generalize to the whole population, however the conclusions generated from this study align with the social research paradigm as they have provided ‘appropriate and useful insights’ into this particular context (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). The data provided a rich and detailed picture of the individual experiences of the participants; however, one must be careful in drawing conclusions too broadly. Surveys can yield useful and detailed information, in a relatively short time frame, as was the case in my study, however the biggest drawback was the inability to probe further into the responses to obtain more detailed information in some areas. The suggestions in the following section would be useful to elicit even deeper understanding of practices and issues surrounding the use of exemplars.

**Areas of further research**

The findings from my research has provided a ‘snapshot’ of the place of exemplars in current teaching practice through the lens of secondary school teachers. These findings have contributed new knowledge to the body of literature on the use of exemplars by specifically focusing on the use of NCEA external assessment exemplars by secondary school teachers in New Zealand. An obvious implication of the preceding discussion is that we need to know more about the complexities surrounding use of the exemplars for external assessments in different subject areas. Further study is warranted to verify the findings in this study, and a more extensive or larger scale investigation could include teachers from subject areas which were not included in this research, for example; history, languages.

Less obvious, but nevertheless part of the bigger picture, is that it would be of interest to investigate how teachers are prepared for understanding standards based assessment in general, and specifically how assessment capability is enhanced during teacher training. To provide a greater insight into the use of NCEA external
assessment exemplars, I suggest the following ideas as potential directions for further research:

1. Further investigate exemplar use within specific subject domains separately to determine whether or not issues and tensions are related to individual subject areas or are generalised across all subjects.

2. Further study into the different types of assessment tasks, and how the provision of exemplar material impacts on the validity of these assessments is clearly warranted.

3. Investigate how teacher training organisations prepare teachers for teaching and assessing in a standards-based environment, in particular what strategies are being used to ensure they are supporting beginning teachers to become assessment capable practitioners.

4. Research into how students use and value these exemplars.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A  Questionnaire

Exemplars for external NCEA assessments

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire. The purpose of my survey is to determine how secondary school teachers use the NCEA exemplars for external assessment which are published by NZQA after each exam round. This research is carried out as partial fulfilment for a Masters in Educational Leadership and Management through Unitec Institute of Technology. By completing this survey, you are contributing valuable information to guide the way these exemplars can best support students’ learning and exam preparation.

Please note that although I am employed by NZQA as a National Assessment Facilitator with responsibility for managing external examination processes, which includes the publishing of exemplars, all responses and data collected will remain completely anonymous and neither you nor your organisation will be identified.

Completion of this questionnaire implies your consent for me to use the data you provide, in an anonymous way, within my dissertation.

If you have any queries, please contact my supervisor Martin Bassett (mbassett@unitec.ac.nz)

UREC Number: 2018-1007

Part 1

Number of years teaching

☐ less than 1 year

☐ 1 - 5 years

☐ 5 - 10 years

☐ 10 - 15 years

☐ 15 - 20 years

☐ 20 plus years

My subject area is:
### Part 2

You will be asked to rate your perception of the importance of each statement.

There is a 6 point scale with 1 = strongly disagree through to 6 = strongly agree.

For the open-ended questions please give as much detail as possible in your response.

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The exemplars clearly indicate the grades for the standard *

2. Exemplars enable me to be clear about the criteria for achievement at each grade *

3. The use of exemplars can help students' learning so that higher quality outcomes are produced *

4. I use exemplars to differentiate learning for my students *
5. What is your understanding of the purpose of exemplars for external NCEA achievement standards?

Long-answer text

6. How do you use the external NCEA exemplars in your teaching practice?

Long-answer text

7. How often do you use the external NCEA exemplars?

Short-answer text

8. Exemplars can encourage copying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Exemplars can stifle creativity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. The use of exemplars narrows the curriculum

11. What challenges, if any, do you perceive to be associated with the use of these exemplars?

12. Overall I think the external NCEA exemplars are a valuable teaching tool

13. Please suggest any ways to improve the value of these exemplars to your teaching and/or exam preparation

14. What professional development have you received regarding the use of exemplars in teaching practice?
DISSERTATIONS

RESEARCH BANK UPLOAD FORM (LIBRARY)

Full name of author: Karen Elizabeth Scott


Practice Pathway: TE MIRO POSTGRADUATE

Degree: Master of Educational Leadership and Management

Year of presentation: 2018

Associated URL link(s) (OPTIONAL for example ORCID ID): ...........................................

Principal Supervisor: Martin Bassett

Associate Supervisor: Carol Cardno

Permission to make open access
I agree to a digital copy of my final dissertation being uploaded to the Unitec institutional repository (Research Bank) and being made viewable worldwide.

Copyright Rights:
Unless otherwise stated this work is protected by copyright with all rights reserved.
I provide this copy in the expectation that due acknowledgement of its use is made.
AND Copyright Compliance: I confirm that I used no substantial portions of third party copyright material, including charts, diagrams, graphs, photographs or maps in my dissertation or I have obtained permission for such material to be made accessible worldwide via the Internet.

________________________________________
Signature of author: ______________________

Date: 1/2/19

ADMINISTRATION

Email this form and final PDF of dissertation to David Church dchurch@unitec.ac.nz