

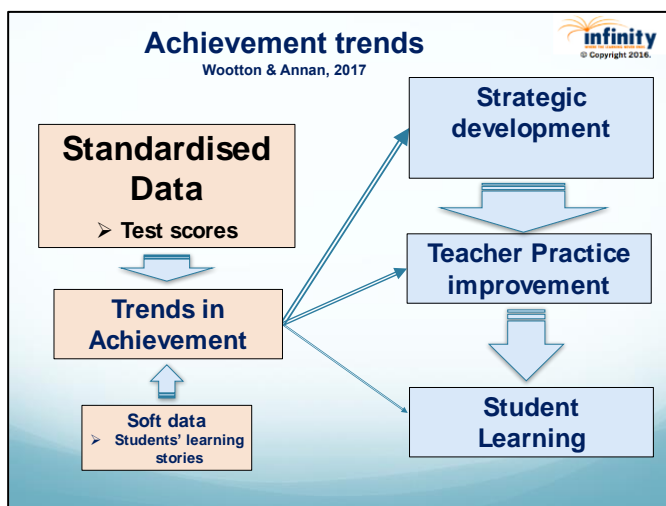
EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS

Advice for Kāhui Ako, Communities of Learning, School Collaboratives

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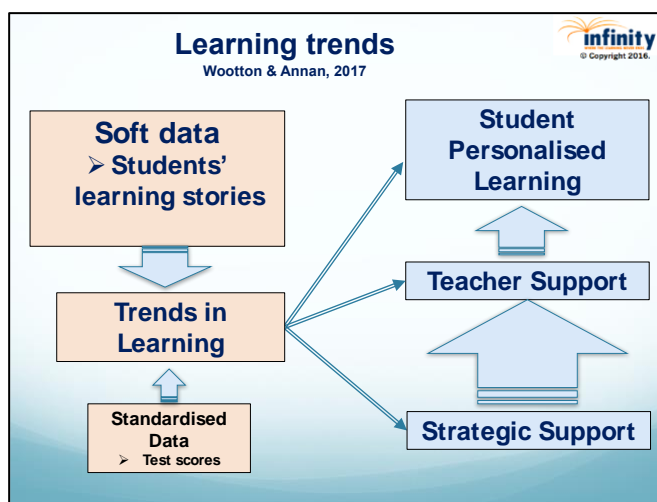
Many teachers in Kāhui Ako consider they are juggling two worlds when they are evaluating learning. One is a 'have to' world and the other is a 'want to' world.

The frame below captures the 'have to' world. This world has been dominated by hard data, mainly test scores used to identify academic achievement trends. Numbers are crunched, rankings made and teaching designed and organised based on results. In this world, names, faces and identities have little status. Although measures of academic achievement have an important



role in education, knowledge of results can be brutal for students struggling with foundation learning areas, such as literacy and mathematics. NZ's current government has sent a humanizing message by removing the requirement to use National Standards. However, the world of hard data remains alive and well in our modern world. Fortunately, the hard-data world is well developed. There are oodles of metrics operating in a tech-savvy environment that make number-crunching reasonably easy to complete.

The second frame to the right captures the 'want to' world in which soft-data has the upper hand. Student names, faces and identities are front and center. The focus of evaluation is the script that students have in their heads about themselves as learners. Many already have positive narratives to maintain and grow. Those students with negative narratives can re-script their stories with focused support from caring adults surrounding them, such as parents and teachers (White, 2007).



Evaluation in the 'want to' world is about identifying themes and patterns across the students' stories, themes that point to learning trends worthy of pursuing. For example, a student, facing a seemingly insurmountable challenge to succeed in mathematics may not address the subject directly. Rather, a more relevant and doable next step may be to develop confidence in asking questions in class. The advantages of soft-data are that it allows us to address what underpins achievement and can open windows to positivity. There is, however, a great deal of work to be done to create ways of understanding subjective experience and to develop appropriate soft measures.

Realities of our modern world suggest that teachers in schools, as with most other parts of society, will continue to live in both worlds of hard and soft data. The challenge facing teachers is to get the balance right. Take sports teams, for instance, a soccer team that plays in a world cup final

will have good 'stats' but they will also have soul. As do great jazz bands, make-up artists, even NASA space missions. Too much emphasis on 'stats' and not enough attention on soul, heart and family produces technical results; OK to good but not extraordinary.

Every student story about their learning capability can be interpreted as extraordinary.

Here is an example of soft-data evaluation in the field of well-being that may be useful to kick-start some Kāhui Ako soft-data evaluative developments.

A group of young adults came together to discuss their views about well-being.

- Participants were presented with six concepts that contribute to well-being, which came from a social services article; love, economic prosperity, achieving, participating, belonging and social connections.
- Pictures were found that matched the six concepts and the six pictures were given to each participant. They were asked to prioritise the six pictures and stick them on an A3 piece of paper. The most important concept was put out in front, followed by two second tier priorities followed by three lower priorities.
- Participants were then asked to discuss in pairs how they prioritised the concepts. They were encouraged to form a credible argument about what was most important and least important for their well-being and why.
- The youth were then asked to present their argument to the group. They had two minutes to present their case. Their presentations were videoed.



The six-picture prioritising chart with the two-minute video provided baseline data for the young adults' views about well-being. The idea is to repeat those two evaluative exercises with participants after they have developed some new knowledge and understanding about well-being. A second round of evaluation would allow participants to introduce new concepts and pictures to represent their more developed views about wellbeing. It would also create an opportunity for participants to adjust their criteria, to measure the sophistication of their conceptual knowledge about well-being and the strength of the argument in the video.

In summary, evaluation will always have hard and soft edges. Kāhui Ako collaborations can help create a useful balance by lifting the status of soft-data evaluation. As one lead said:

"I want to promote richer student-centred models like learning maps, student voice, attitude surveys etc alongside the harder, assessment data and get people thinking more deeply about how exciting these measures can be." James Robertson, Lynfield Kāhui Ako, 2018.

Our Kāhui Ako advice is to encourage teachers to become creative in designing new evaluative tools and criteria for evaluation with students. Capturing the perspectives of teachers as well as children and young adults about what constitutes success is critical to assess progress in Kāhui Ako collaborative learning activities.

Got you thinking? Be in touch to build evaluative capability; Contact: brianannan57@gmail.com; wootts70@gmail.com; jean@positively.co.nz

Reference

White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York, NY: Norton.