

# Assessment for Education

Standards, Judgement and Moderation

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# The transformation of assessment

## Introduction

This book presents the case that intelligent accountability (O'Neill, 2002) involves high-quality assessment that can be inclusive of, but not restricted to, examinations. Our argument is two-pronged: first, high-quality assessment requires teachers to have well-developed assessment literacies and, second, teachers are central in creating much-needed assessment reform.

In taking up this case we aim to bring together the trilogy of standards, teacher judgement and moderation. Historically, these have been presented in the main as separate rather than intersecting fields. We bring them together in order to present new perspectives on quality assessment practice. In the chapters that follow, readers will encounter concepts traditionally associated with assessment, including validity and reliability, as well as new understandings about the global policy contexts of assessment and the associated demands on systems and classroom assessment practices in order to achieve equity. Also new is our introduction to ethical assessment, which attends to principles of social justice and equity. In the twenty-first century, concerns about validity and reliability, though essential, need to be complemented by a third and equally important feature of quality assessment: ethical practice.

Our focus is at the intersection of assessment standards–learning–teaching–judgement and moderation. We recognize this intersection as a new, interpretive space within which to see anew the dual purposes of assessment, namely for improvement and for determining or judging quality. Taking these purposes as complementary, we explore the space for its potential to achieve coherence between systems' and local site efforts to improve teaching and learning, and for accountability purposes.

Human judgement is central to assessment practice and, while the book is largely concerned with judgement and decision making in the field of education, we suggest that the messages are applicable to other professions and that the lessons, such

as how to gain an understanding of the factors that influence professional judgement practice, extend to other fields.

## The call for teachers to be assessment literate

For teachers to be ‘assessment literate’ they need to have a repertoire of skills and understandings to design quality assessments and to use achievement standards and evidence as a means by which to discern, monitor and improve learning as well as judge the qualities of student work. These capabilities and understandings are foundational to efforts to address issues of equity and social justice. They are also the means through which assessment can become a shared enterprise, with benefits accruing to all students, including those who are marginalized and disengaged and those who are identified as gifted and talented.

The book characterizes classroom assessment with the teacher at the centre. It presents ideas from a large body of assessment writing and empirically generated findings with direct application to the judgements and decision making that teachers are called on to do in their routine practice. Throughout the book we take the position that aligning assessment practice, curriculum and pedagogy is a main strategy for realizing learning improvement in accountability-driven systems, and beyond for enhancing learner engagement. Further, our aim is to connect the past and present – what we know about assessment and learning – to futures-oriented assessment possibilities and new contexts for learning, in order to meet the changing needs of the global society.

There is ample evidence that, in these times of economic uncertainty, many countries are increasingly concerned with the quality and effectiveness of their education systems. Through a range of strategies and investments governments across the world are seeking to develop an informed, skilled workforce that is productive and adaptable to changing global needs. Several developments have taken place in support of this priority, with three being directly relevant to this book. Major curriculum reform has been initiated in many parts of the world, with heavy investments in large-scale standardized testing for public reporting at local, regional, country and international levels. Also evident is the increasing role of new and emerging technologies, bringing with them capabilities to leverage changed assessment practices previously not imaginable.

The book is written against this background. It is also informed by the concerted move globally towards the development of inclusive educational policies, with reforms to maintain student participation in both senior secondary and higher education sectors. Globally, education policies have prioritized increased participation in all phases of formal education, extending from the early years through to higher education. This has attracted increased numbers and a greater diversity of students. In part, this has occurred through increased mobility and movement of peoples globally. The strong focus on inclusion and diversity also reflects diminishing employment opportunities in many countries as well as the demise of low-skill jobs in the wake of technological advances.

Given these changes, curriculum authorities and education departments throughout the world are seeking to take up futures-oriented perspectives to curriculum. Many have broadened the scope and demands of curriculum to include knowledges, skills and dispositions that enable participation in communities within and beyond the school. Further, there is growing recognition of the need to transform educational assessment and, in turn, instructional practice using new and emerging information and communications technologies (ICTs). Indeed, assessing and teaching twenty-first-century skills have been prioritized, nationally and internationally. Notable work includes the international project *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills* (Griffin et al., 2012) and the ETS research and development initiative *Cognitively Based Assessment of, for, and as Learning* (CBAL™). Projects such as these point to how ICTs offer opportunities to leverage change in assessment in ways previously not possible. They also show the strong and growing corporate business interest not only in educational assessment but also in investing in assessment innovation. This is hardly surprising. It has been clear for some time that education and assessment are big business. Such directions helpfully remind us that a quality education is about life futures: preparing a highly skilled, flexible workforce and an informed citizenry with capabilities that extend to innovation, creativity, collaboration and ability to use and create knowledge.

While assessment change is inevitable, the dominant view of assessment in many countries has tended to remain static and safe: examinations continue to be the traditionally safe choice for summative assessments bound up with reporting and certification. Indeed, many countries have seen a proliferation of examinations across the phases of education, with a concurrent press by the public for improved results. In many countries, despite the obvious societal changes over time, the changing needs of learners and the pressing global challenges of our time, examinations continue to offer the 'safe' and reliable assessment option, especially with regard to standards credentialing and the offering of university placements.

Taking account of the global development mentioned earlier, we seek to connect assessment past, present and futures. We build on ideas about the spaces and places 'beyond testing' and seek to reposition assessment in relation to new ideas about what we refer to as 'the masterful teacher'. Our interest is in quality assessment in which teachers, students and the wider community can have confidence. Quality assessment requires recursive decision making that takes into account expectations of assessment, including standards, learning opportunities, pedagogical approaches, curriculum and resourcing. Such approaches to decision making are critical to well-informed teaching that has rigour and quality, and is responsive to learners' diverse needs. We also seek to connect assessment to knowledges within and beyond the classroom, digital literacies and emerging technologies. In this way, we reframe assessment in relation to a much-needed move from knowledge acquisition, through participation, to knowledge creation. The position taken in this book recognizes how assessment has historically been grounded in theories of learning that understand knowledge to be acquired. Within this traditional framing of assessment, value has been ascribed to examinations and

the measurement of learning. This has served the purposes of 'gate keeping' and selection for certification for the past two centuries. With developments in learning theory, sociocultural perspectives value student agency and participation in learning, which in turn call for different roles in assessment for teachers and students and different types of assessment. Within this alternative framing, value is placed on interactions between teacher and student, and student and peers, in assessment understood as a social act. It is through participation and dialogue that teachers and students can co-construct knowledge. Our interest is to transform the understanding of assessment to include knowledge creation, facilitated by new and emerging technologies. This represents a development of the field, recognizing the potential for technologies to leverage changed assessment practices and processes. It is indeed the affordances of technologies themselves that open up possibilities for assessment of student products, learning processes and the interactions, both individual and collective, which have occurred over time. It is now possible for us to 'see' achievement over time through a range of digital means, such as e-portfolios that include learning processes and completed works, and digital learning records.

Standards and judgement within this framing of assessment assume heightened importance. Our interest is in bringing about change in teaching through deliberately aligning or connecting assessment and curriculum in teaching and, further, by 'front-ending assessment' (Wyatt-Smith and Bridges, 2007) with related foci on quality task design and the pedagogical utility of summative standards. These elements contribute to sustainable assessment cultures, with coherence between system and site assessment practices. Underpinning this call for change is a sociocultural orientation to learning, moderation practices and the use of standards. Such changes are facilitated by new and emerging technologies. However, in and of themselves, the technologies are mere tools. The masterful teacher will be able to design interdisciplinary learning opportunities that enable students to both use existing knowledge and create new knowledge. This calls for teachers who are able to develop quality learning through well-developed disciplinary knowledge and an appreciation of how such knowledge intersects with community knowledge, digital literacies, criterial knowledge and understandings about quality.

Consistent with this approach, we explore opportunities to assess vital attributes and capabilities for an informed twenty-first-century citizenry. New understandings are presented about how achievement standards can engage with creativity, innovation and design capability, and critical thinking. The book charts new territory, exploring how assessment can incorporate ways in which students work individually and in teams, using both traditional and new technologies. The discussion therefore includes consideration of new and emerging technologies, their convergence and their effect both on teaching and learning, and what counts as quality assessment.

The book also takes into account the global context of testing and classroom assessment. We consider large-scale international testing, including Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress International Reading Literacy Study

(PIRLS), as well as national testing initiatives employed in several countries. In the discussion we open up the utility of standards-referenced data for informing and changing governmental policy and assessment practice in the classroom. We consider how, in these ways, standards contribute towards systems-level expectations and improvement initiatives at the local, site level.

The alignment of assessment, curriculum and pedagogy is also important and acts as a powerful driver for change in all phases of education. In fact, alignment – or, more aptly, the extent to which it is achieved – is a marker of good education. It lies at the heart of the teaching–learning dynamic. Within this dynamic the relationship between the learner, learning and assessment is integral to teacher judgement at the local, professional level. In moves towards standards-referenced assessment systems, teacher judgement is critical for both curriculum and assessment design. Teacher judgement in this context refers to decision making regarding how assessment, curriculum and pedagogy align in practice. This is because standards can be used to indicate the desired qualities and levels of achievement within a learning area of the curriculum. They can also be used in relation to interdisciplinary studies in all phases of education. Essentially, standards work to indicate student learning and achievement in relation to the constructs being assessed. In turn, student achievement, as reflected through assessment requirements and tasks, is referenced to the standards.

The opportunities for assessment to broaden what it values as evidence of learning and achievement have been a catalyst for this book. Also to the fore have been attempts in several countries to focus on, value and strengthen teacher judgement, standards and moderation in order to develop more intelligent accountability systems. A main characteristic of education systems in which such developments have occurred is the recognition of the need to support the professional judgement of teachers, particularly with the introduction of standards-related accountability. This requires appropriate support of quality assurance measures, which, in turn, will help build dependable teacher judgements in which the public can have confidence. The relationship between the teacher and the student matters, as does the teacher's discipline or subject content and pedagogical content knowledge. Standards-driven reform and increased emphases on teacher judgement and moderation practice bring with them new demands of teachers, students, parents, carers and the public. Assessment literacies and skills in the use of standards are some of the emergent needs in this changing climate of curriculum and assessment reform that have prompted the writing of this book. Accordingly, we aim to address the conditions under which assessment and judgement practice can be valid and dependable for both local and systems reporting. Insights derived from research of social moderation practices and developed from analysis of moderation in different contexts, including educational authorities, regional organizations and schools, are offered to promote further understanding.

In discussions of educational opportunity, many writers have recognized the need to emphasize quality. Similarly, there is a clear impetus internationally to deliver both high-quality and high-equity outcomes. In this context, the book explores how quality assessment can extend well beyond basic literacy and

numeracy to include complex reasoning and critical thinking skills, and a broadened notion of education that quite properly factors in student attributes of resourcefulness and resilience.

The book addresses approaches to assuring quality and standards, and presents the role of review through moderation practices. The main interest is in how educational professionals engage with standards in their own practice, and not simply as a regulatory mechanism mandated by policy. That is, our interest is in the self-regulatory use of standards to build a networked community of judgement practice.

In exploring moderation as involving networked professional discipline communities, we invite readers to consider the interpretation required in the use of standards, and how standards themselves acquire meaning through use. The argument developed in this book is threefold: teacher judgement, informed by standards, lies at the heart of quality learning opportunities; moderation provides the means for teachers to review their interpretation and application of the stated standards; and moderation supports system efforts to promote consistent use of standards, both over time and across sites. This is not to suggest that the function of teacher judgement and moderation is narrowly understood as serving accountability alone. Nor is it to argue a case against external examinations and large-scale tests. Both can play a part in quality assessment, including monitoring trends for reporting at particular phases. Our argument is that teacher use of standards in moderation practices can have a direct flow on to systems-wide efforts to improve curriculum design and development in the classroom. Specifically, it is in the context of standards-based moderation talk that teachers can explore the meaning and use of standards as this relates to construct validity. Standards and moderation work together to enable teachers to achieve clarity of expectation for themselves and their students, especially in relation to task design. Further, moderation can function as a main means through which teachers reach agreement regarding the qualities of the learning being assessed. Moderation practice therefore involves practitioners in explicating the basis for their judgements, including how they have drawn on the standards to arrive at a judgement of quality. This position holds at all levels of education, from early years of schooling through to postgraduate programmes at regional, state, national and international levels.

## The chapters in outline

In conclusion, we introduce readers to the suite of chapters. They do not need to be read in a specific order, and we encourage readers to 'dip into' the ideas of the book in ways that are responsive to their contexts and practices. For the purpose of this introduction, however, we outline each chapter in turn as a guide to the focus and ideas explored in the respective chapters.

Chapter 2 considers why teachers need to understand standards. Certain twenty-first-century trends in education, such as the increased use of standards for improved learning, and for system and individual accountability and evaluative purposes, have required teachers to develop new skills and understandings in their



practice. These include what counts as quality in assessment and how assessment and curriculum align. In this chapter we discuss the nature and functions of standards and how teachers can use them as part of their repertoire for analysing and interpreting achievement data. Specific quality assessment issues are discussed, with some examples provided to support this approach.

Chapter 3 presents a sociocultural perspective of teachers' judgement practice. We take a sociocultural perspective of learning and assessment and provide examples of teacher assessment that involve both the judgement and the decision levels of the purposes of assessment. Judgement procedures are articulated using the sociocultural theoretical perspective that identifies the importance of the interaction of teachers' tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge of curriculum, achievement standards and pedagogy. How judgements are defended and deprioritized is made explicit, with reference to research findings and examples of practice. The important question of fairness in assessment that includes key ideas relating to cultural difference and equity are also presented. Assessment issues of validity, access and literacy demands are defined and discussed in relation to studies of culture-responsive assessment.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the integration of assessment and instruction, and presents two related concepts for the maintenance of dependable and sustainable assessment cultures: the alignment of assessment curriculum and pedagogy and the front-ending of assessment, mentioned earlier. Designing effective, suitably demanding assessment tasks becomes a major skill within curriculum planning and teaching. Quality assessment task design requires teachers to consider the evidence to be collected and the methods by which the information is to be collected to assess student learning. This chapter presents design decisions that teachers could consider as part of their repertoire of practice.

Chapter 5 extends to the purposes of moderation. We address questions of how moderation practice attends to accountability and improvement priorities. The discussion includes how moderation is one means to achieve reliable and valid judgements with high levels of inter-rater reliability. Moderation is defined and the processes and the role of standards described. Use of evidence and exemplars are extrapolated with issues of consistency, comparability and agreement addressed. The chapter introduces various models of moderation and describes specific moderation systems.

Chapter 6 considers the pedagogical utility of summative achievement standards in improving learning and teaching. The discussion addresses what is involved in a dialogic inquiry approach to classroom assessment that has at its heart intentional and artful connections across curriculum, instruction and assessment. Teacher judgement and standards are presented as central to a long-overdue focus on quality in the classroom, with direct benefit to teacher and student efforts to improve student learning. At issue is how teachers and students can work purposefully with standards to develop student knowledge about the expectations or characteristics of quality, their capabilities in recognizing quality, and their 'know-how' in applying standards to improve performance.

In Chapter 7 we offer insights into the building of sustainable assessment cultures, and consider coherence between system and site. With the emergence of

the need for more intelligent accountability systems and a greater recognition of the professionalism of teachers we explain how teachers can use standards and achievement data to make more discerning decisions for a variety of assessment and learning purposes. A case study of exemplary classroom assessment practice is used to illustrate the concept of front-ending assessment as used at the local professional level to achieve coherence with system-level accountability demands. We explain how teachers can develop their judgement practice so that it is explicit and defensible, using achievement standards with students in classroom assessment practice. We introduce different approaches and models of judgement that relate to decision making for both summative and formative learning purposes. The use of exemplars with students is also discussed. Strategies are presented for ensuring that the judgement practice is rigorous and addresses equity issues.

In Chapter 8 readers are offered new ways to think about assessment in the digital, screen-based age. Rapid changes in ICTs have challenged educators in many ways. There are the obvious infrastructure issues, including the initial investments required in hardware and software, and the related costs of maintenance and replacement. These budgetary issues are significant. There are also equally significant challenges of integrating the technologies into what and how students learn and are assessed. In this chapter we recognize that new practices that students and teachers use when working online call for fundamentally different notions of assessment. New ways to think and talk about features of quality are also needed from those that have been used in assessing traditional demonstrations of knowledge and skills. With this in mind, we move into a new assessment space to explore multi-modal ways of working online.

In concluding the book, Chapter 9 revisits the notions of assessment literacies and intelligent accountability to explore characteristics of a futures-oriented approach to assessment in classroom practice.

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