INVITED REVIEW ARTICLE

Redefining Assessment: The Struggle to Ensure a Balance between Accountability and Comparability Based on a 'Testocracy' and the Development of Humanistic Individuals through Assessment

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This paper reviews the paradigms of international assessment within the current accountability and comparability agenda and projects towards a model of assessment for the next generation. The conceptualization of that model has as it locus the support of pupils' humanistic development rather than the application of metric-based labels. The equating definition of assessment currently is, and has been for the last twenty years, testing and this has had resultant effects on pedagogy and learning through the prevailing culture of 'a testocracy that claims to sort, evaluate and rank' (Guinier, 2003). The author proposes a move towards redefining assessment. The focus of the definition is to be less on judgement and metric but on the superiority of the affective and conative domains in support of pupil learning (Allal & Ducrey, 2000). This aim offers some prospect for future generations being exposed to an 'equity pedagogy' (Banks, 1993) based on a core integration of assessment with teaching and learning to address the complexity and humanistic needs of the learner.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment is the cruellest of words. In its current definition (and for current, read last 20 plus years) it has no mercy; it judges and labels and levels, creating hierarchies across schools and in classrooms. Assessment has traditionally been defined by two methodologies: summative and formative (TGAT, 1987). Both summative and formative approaches to assessment are important. Summative assessments are 'an efficient way to identify students' skills at key transition points such as entry into the world of work or for further education' (OECD, 2005, p. 6). Tests and examinations are the traditional ways of measuring student progress and have become integral to accountability of schools and the education system. However internationally, assessment has become almost universally equated with high stakes scoring and testing (Twing et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2004; Shephard, 2000, 2005) and teaching has consequently been reduced to servicing that metric (Guinier, 2003). This is a minimum competency accountancy model (Tymms, 2004; Wiggins & Tymms, 2002; Karsten et al., 2001) which does assessment a disservice but has grown in status and has dominated both internationally (PISA, TIMMS) and nationally (SATs, NCLB testing)[1] since the decade before the millennium. In England the introduction of National Curriculum Assessment in the Education Reform Act of 1988 led, by the early 1990s, to the supremacy of summative forms of assessment. This was despite the fact that the National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing stipulated clearly that the 'system will rest on the levels and criteria alone, through which different pupils may progress at different paces' (TGAT, 1988, p. 1). Similarly in the United States of America school funding decisions became dependent on the summative outcomes from No Child Left Behind legislation.

ASSESSMENT PARADIGMS

The outcome of this has been the restriction of pedagogy to a 'banking model' (Freire, 1970) and a 'one size fits all delivery model' designed to service a 'teach only what is testable or tested' agenda (Alexander, 2005, 2008) for accountability purposes. Governmental interventions have produced an international 'testocracy' (Guinier & Torres, 2003) in which limited domain testing has been used to benchmark 'national standards'. This has reduced breadth and balance within the taught curriculum to support the pupil performance outputs (modelled on a factory production-line) of a small core of elite subjects – or more accurately the testable aspects or domains of those subjects. In England, despite a raft of government interventions, (Booster classes, Catch Up programmes,

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[1] SATs: Standard Assessment Tasks were introduced as annual tests for pupils aged 7,11 and 14 in England during the 1990s; NCLB tests: No Child Left Behind legislation (2002) introduced federal tests to rate all 91,000 US schools)

Excellence in Cities, Optional tests) there is evidenced (Boyle & Bragg, 2009) a national league table of school performance which profiles the socio-economic 'haves' doing well and the 'have-nots' doing poorly. Consequently the schools habituated by the 'have-nots' are inevitably judged against this metric and criticised for their 'underperformance' (Gorard, 2010; Boyle & Charles, 2010a; Brehony, 2005; Lupton, 2004; Gorrard & Smith, 2004; Gray, 2001, 2004).

The competition for comparability in dubious (in terms of validity, contextually misaligned, reliability, 'standards over time', item consistency) international testing programmes whose data are used to produce international league tables has spawned test domain-dominated curriculum-cloning (England, Russia, Singapore, USA, etc) in countries aspiring to gain a few places of promotion up the Champions League table. It has also promoted a blatant commercial market place developing publishing empires procuring vast profits from this misunderstanding of the role of assessment in education by promulgating that 'purchasing our products will improve your school performance data'.

The purpose of assessment in its current definition is reduced to measurement. The psychometricians have become the 21st century's alchemists turning base data into ..into what? The notion of the child at the centre of education or the development of the whole child through a teaching programme which integrates the affective, conative and cognitive domains (Allal & Ducrey, 2000) as part of a formative teaching, learning and assessment cycle is ignored or seen as superfluous. Teachers no longer believe that they need a philosophy to support their planning for teaching and learning. 'Why do I need a philosophy while we have the SATs?' has been a common response from our classroom research (Boyle & Charles, 2010b). Observed lessons (Boyle & Charles, 2010b; Alexander, 2005, 2008) have evidenced formulaic 'one size fits all' pedagogy (Alexander, 2004) with no differentiation to address learning needs (Boyle & Charles, 2010) – note, that is differentiation, not setting (Boaler, 2005) – or to identify and supply the micro support required to scaffold learning (Shepard, 2005). The teaching menu is not modelled on the use of pedagogical strategies such as the guided group to enable optimum assessment opportunities to feed directly into learning but on coaching and preparing for the type of questions anticipated in tests or examinations. Longitudinal national school data evidence and illustrate that the primary curriculum in England has become skewed, narrowed and unbalanced in favour of time allocated to the two tested subjects, mathematics and English (Boyle & Bragg, 2006). By 2002 the combined teaching time of English and mathematics had totalled exactly 50% of the available teaching time per week – so that the remaining 10 statutory subjects had to scramble to divide the remaining 50% available teaching time as equitably as possible between them (Boyle & Bragg, 2006, p. 577).

Assessment now has three paradigms and one result. Paradigm one is the accountancy model, beloved of policy makers and at the core of the school effectiveness debate (Gorard, 2010). It is best defined as 'teach to be measured', in which the sole purpose of teaching is to deliver or cover material that will later be tested; there is no involvement of the pupil in that learning process. Paradigm two is the banking model (Freire, 1970) in which the teacher teaches and the pupils are taught, those are the fixed and immutable roles; there is no deregulation of that role (Perrenoud, 1998; Allal & Ducrey, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). This was traditionally described as the 'topping up' model in

which the child was an 'empty vessel' and was topped up or filled up with knowledge, which she 'recited back to the teacher to prove that learning had taken place (Alexander, 2005, 2008; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991 in Smith et al., 2004). How sad that it is still in evidence in 2011. Paradigm three is the 'testocracy' in which the metric is prescribed and the teaching and learning process conforms to that testing metric. Its limitations and the humanistic and social implications (as follows) are not even considered as flaws in the system: 'test scores correlate with parental income (and even grandparents' socio-economic status) rather than actual student performance.' (Guinier & Torres, 2003, p. 68). The fact that the testocracy reduces merit and a meritocracy to a meaningless pre-destined ordination is ignored. 'Test-centred techniques are used to ration access to elite higher education as appropriate measures of merit' (ibid, p. 69) and '… at no point was any attempt made to reconcile this with an elitist rationing process' (ibid, p. 69). Guinier and Torres (2003) assert that alongside the testocracy even the vagaries and lack of standardisation of teacher assessment stand out like a beacon of fairness and equity: 'reliance on teacher ratings excludes fewer people from lower socio-economic backgrounds than does reliance on test scores…' (ibid, p. 71). The testocracy knows no boundaries but income, it even, as Guinier and Torres (2003) found in their research in the USA, redefines merit: 'it moved from an assumption that tests are meritocratic for everyone except people of colour to a larger critique of the way in which the conventional testocracy denies opportunity to many deserving white applicants as well. It changed the definition of merit' (ibid, p. 72).

The three paradigms of Assessment, as outlined above, have contrived to produce one result: a reduced pedagogy so that the complexity of the individual learner is ignored through the insistence of the system that the learner conforms to the (narrow) norms of the metric (Guinier & Torres, 2003) as defined by political intervention. This soon became and is now firmly established as centralised control of a minimum competency 'standards' based accountancy and accountability system.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

What was all this doing to pedagogy? 'Education can either socialise students into critical thought or into dependence on authority' that is, according to Shor (1992) 'into autonomous habits of mind or into passive habits of following authority, waiting to be told what to do and what things mean. Unfortunately in traditional schooling, the latter most often occurs' (p. 153). According to this definition, the teacher's pedagogical positioning is at the centre of the 'how' and the 'what' of teaching and learning. In short pedagogy is dichotomous: it can encourage and support growth for children, locate and empower children at the centre of learning or it can stultify and reduce the process to following externally prescribed schema' (Dunphy, 2008; Edwards, 2001).

Within this accountability-compliant model there was no place for 'teachers shifting from control of knowledge to creation of processes whereby students take ownership of their learning and take risks to understand and apply their knowledge'

(Graziano, 2008, p. 157). Certainly no way that the factory-product technicians would understand 'teachers and children are partners in teaching and learning transactions. We need to find ways of interacting with children to co-construct shared meanings in ways we cannot do if the children themselves are not active participants in exploring the situation' (Makin & Whiteman, 2006, p. 35). Even less that 'child-centred teaching includes behaviours that actively involve children in guiding the learning process, such as offering choices, encouraging activity and suggesting solutions'(Hayes, 2008, p. 433).

Researchers (Alexander, 2005, 2008; Edwards, 2001; Patrick et al., 2003; Wyse et al., 2007; Boyle & Charles, 2010b; Dunphy, 2008) have chronicled the sterility of the pedagogy that has emanated in England from 14 years of central government imposed National Strategies designed to improve test scores within a minimum competency model and restricted definition of the term 'Standards'. 'Pedagogy is so palpably the missing ingredient...and it is so obviously vital to (pupils') progress and to learning outcomes that we have no alternative but to find ways of remedying the deficiency' (Alexander, 2008, p. 22). So teachers and their trainers have to re-think the basis of pedagogy: synonymous with this process is an understanding that a pupil as an autonomous learner should be involved in sharing the construction of his/her own learning, i.e., self-regulated learning. For Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) 'self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal [learning] goals' (p. 14). For Perry, Hutchinson and Thauberger (2007) pupils 'develop the process of self-regulation through instrumental support from teachers and peers through the forms of modelling and scaffolding attitudes and actions' (p. 29); note the focus across both those definitions on enabling the pupils to systematically monitor their own learning. The importance of Perrenoud's philosophy is evident as he states that 'the roles of teacher and pupil have to be deregulated from the traditional transmission and passive reception model' (1998) and therefore as a minimum requirement for teaching, teacher training should stress avoidance of the 'recitation script' style of pedagogy so criticised by Alexander (2005). The current summative metric model and didactic pedagogical style are producing pupils who cannot self-regulate (because they are not offered the experience of working that way) and teachers who are still located in the traditional model of whole class teaching and didactism. Ruttle (2004) warns the didacts to reflect whether their 'preconceived learning objectives, however well-intentioned and metacognitively 'pure' get in the way of actually working with how some children think about their own writing' (p. 75). Ruttle (2004) is cautioning teachers (and the teacher- trainers) against both the rigidity of the pre-planned package version of teaching and the dangers of ignoring individual learning needs to keep the majority moving at pace through the weekly objectives.

In England the influence of the government's National Strategies which listed learning outcomes by term and by year encouraged teachers to believe that there was a requirement for strong pacing. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the government's school monitoring force, exacerbated this situation through its 'concern to sharpen pace in teaching which led to the pursuit of pace at all costs, regardless of the fact that pace without attention to [children's] understanding leaves all but the fastest learners stranded' (Alexander, 2008, p. 18). Contrast that Ofsted statement with TGAT's mandate that 'different pupils may progress at different paces' (TGAT, 1988, p. 1).

In practical terms, one step which would demonstrate critical movement from the 'one size fits all' didacticism (Alexander, 2008, p.18) is that of the teacher engaging in systemic guided group methodologies. The guided group is a pedagogical strategy which enables the teacher to focus on small size (4-6 pupils maximum) differentiated groups of pupils. The teacher still makes managerial decisions about the differentiated learning objectives, teaches and interacts with the whole class but the notable difference is that the teacher then teaches the targeted group. She has specific aims and objectives for a 20-30 minutes maximum session of focused, uninterrupted teaching, having planned high level, challenging, self-supporting activities from the lesson's theme for the rest of the class to engage with. This formative teaching and learning approach optimises the teacher's observations, evidences, insights and understanding of the pupils' learning location and needs eg the levels of language experience that a child is comfortable working within such as complex/non-complex sentence structure, use and breadth of vocabulary, etc. It enables each pupil to have the necessary time and space to explore and internalise rather than being rushed through a 'coverage' model to confirm a 'level'. The teacher, through the structure and formality of the guided group approach, can support each pupil's affective domain needs which consequently supports and develops both conation and cognition (Allal & Ducrey, 2000). Conation is in the 'work domain' of learning. Pupils will engage or disengage their will to learn based on whether the topic or subject matter has some personal or 'real life' meaning for them. 'Conation can be thought of as an 'internal engine' that drives the external tasks and desires. The drive shaft links 'what I want to know' to 'how I feel about the task' and subsequently 'how I will respond to the task' (Huitt, 2003, p. 2).

Pupils will not arrive at this self-regulated position overnight nor by accident nor will the trainee teacher understand self-regulated learning without tutoring and support, both theoretical and empirical. Meyer and Turner (2002) recognise the pupil's achievement of self-regulation as a learner by describing the process as 'assuming responsibility, this becomes contingent not only on the classroom climate and growing competence but also on the opportunities afforded to demonstrate that competence' (p. 23).

Take the development of writing competence as an example, because the process of becoming a writer is more complex than a discrete linear staged process, and with the added variable of ESL (ESL = English as a second language) it becomes even more complex (Flower et al., 1986). Flower's metaphor of writers as switchboard operators, juggling a number of different demands on their attention and various constraints on their behaviour, captures a learning model which although pedagogically sound has been made redundant. This failure to engage with such a rich and relevant teaching and learning model has been caused by a generation of teachers who do not feel the need to have this level of complexity in their pedagogy as they follow the outcomes-oriented demands imposed by the English government's measurement of National Strategies. Within that current accountability model, Piazza (2003) sounds like a distant voice from history in referring to the process of teaching writing through content features which are divided into four critical components: the writer, the process, the text and the context. Examples of the 'writer factor' include background, interests, self-efficacy, learning style, knowledge base in writing and developmental level. Piazza is thereby demonstrating the relationship between the affective and cognitive domains essential for the development of automaticity in the writer. However

it is important to understand the change in contextual contrast between Piazza's findings and the current Standards agenda for Literacy in England. Teachers here are being told that the performance score is what matters not the development of the child as writer eg 'many schools are finding difficulty in raising standards in writing' (Ofsted, 2006, p. 55) and that 'improving standards of writing at the end of Key Stage 2 [age of 11] is a national priority' (DCSF 2007, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to draw the distinction between an inclusive model of formative teaching which has the child at the centre of a learning agenda and the complex pedagogy required for that process to be supported and to compare it with the present situation in which the child is reduced to a provider of statistical data within a metric driven model of teaching (Perrenoud, 1996). The current teacher training model in the England is based on the formal 'surface' accretion of 33 standards (TDA, 2008). These standards are based on process competencies rather than on the development of teacher professionalism through a focus on understanding and using differentiated formative teaching practices, developing an active pedagogy and engaging in innovative approaches to involve both teacher and pupil in self-regulated learning (Perrenoud, 1996). In contrast to this prevailing model, Rowsell et al (2008, p. 115) suggest that 'pedagogy refers to an educational position or approach that includes both theory and practice'. This definition focuses on the strength or weakness of the connection between theory and practice in the teacher's pedagogical development. There should be no end point in the teacher's development as a practitioner and for that development to produce a truly reflective formative practitioner there has to be a synthesis between theory and practice (Shepard, 2005).

The issue requires a reconstruction of the conceptual field which controls our understanding, our values of an educational system dominated by a model of metrics which demands conformity from the learner. This current (last twenty years) definition of assessment has reduced teaching and learning (pedagogy) so that the complexity of the learner is ignored but which, dictated by political intervention and centralised control, insists that the learner conforms to the norms of the metric. Teaching has become the 'banking model' (Freire, 1970): the teacher teaches and the pupils are taught in a delivery model. What is taught has to be measured in a summative definition of assessment and its judgemental role. Future models of training the next generation of teachers have to re-define assessment so that 'the more the evaluation is integrated into situations, becomes interactive and lasts, the further it distances itself from normative or summative evaluation, the province of tests and exams and their consequences' (Perrenoud, 1998, p. 100). In conclusion it is important to remind ourselves what the introduction of this testocracy was meant to provide in a positive way for the community: standardised tests and other objective measures of excellence were to enable administrators to compare individuals from different demographic, geographic and social cohorts and to strategise equitable policies accordingly.

However, in its current definition, the assessment system and its attendant testing industry has become established as the 'primary gatekeeper to upward mobility' (Guinier, 2003, p. 71).

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