

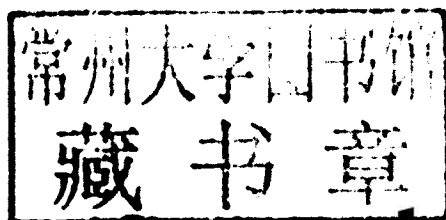


Assessment for Education

Standards, Judgement and Moderation

Valentina Klenowski and Claire Wyatt-Smith





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Assessment for Education

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About the authors

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Claire Wyatt-Smith is Executive Dean and Professor of Educational Assessment and Literacy Education, Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education. She first became interested in assessment and literacy as a high school teacher and Head of Department, English. Building on this foundation she developed her considerable expertise in researching professional judgement and teachers' assessment literacies, including the use of standards and social moderation. Claire's work in the field of professional judgement relates to teaching at all levels, including higher education and clinical practice. Current, large-scale funded projects include studies investigating digital assessment, gaming and the nature and effects of standardized testing upon learners and reluctant readers. Claire has an extensive history of working closely with the teaching profession and in advisory roles in curriculum and assessment policy, both within Australia and internationally.

Foreword

This is a remarkable book, not only because it presents a new and yet achievable vision for state assessment systems, but also because it presents, in its account of how this vision has been realized, the evidence of others who have found the system both practicable and rewarding. However, running through this account is a deeper lesson – that only teachers themselves can insightfully discern and so engage with the new problems and opportunities that society now presents to the work of teachers and schools.

In 1999, in an article entitled ‘The knowledge creating school’, David Hargreaves argued that schools now had to prepare students not just for increasingly higher levels of knowledge and skills, but also ‘in the personal qualities that matter in the transformed work place – how to be autonomous, self-organising, networking, entrepreneurial, innovative’. To these he also added the capability to re-define the needs for skills and to find the resources to learn them. Whilst this is by now more widely recognized, Hargreaves took his argument further in the following way:

It is plain that if teachers do not acquire and display this capacity to re-define their skills for the task of teaching, and if they do not model in their own conduct the very qualities – flexibility, networking, creativity – that are now key outcomes for students, then the challenge of schooling in the next millennium will not be met. (1999: 123)

One obstacle to the development of this process is that there are some who believe that they know and understand the new professional knowledge that is needed and, through their influence, seek to implement their recipes through state systems. The consequence is sadly familiar:

An effect of recent educational reforms has been to discourage teachers from engaging in the process of professional knowledge creation by which, in rapidly changing social conditions in schools and society, the profession generates new knowledge to become more effective. (1999: 123)

Nowhere is this baleful influence more evident than in assessment. It is baleful because it discourages teachers from engaging in the generation of the new professional knowledge that is sorely needed in this key area.

Assessment is a key feature in this scenario because its role within a larger picture of pedagogy has always been distorted. In theoretical writing it has not been seen as central. In professional practice, it has come to be regarded as the negative dimension of learning, a view strongly enhanced by authorities who see in it no more than a tool to impose accountability and 'drive-up' standards. The toxic product of this process is the teacher who feels obliged to 'teach-to-the-test', where the test is often a collection of short written questions, structured so that they are easy to mark. Moreover, externally imposed accountability tests serve as a model for the year-on-year assessments which schools themselves compose and which are used to review the progress of their pupils. They thereby undermine the quality of that advice and of decisions which follow. This is a depressing picture, the more so because it is a fairly accurate account of the interaction between assessment and teaching in many state systems.

This book presents a very different picture. The authors bring together a strong positive vision of the central role of assessment in teaching and learning, and also an emphasis on the need to respect and support the professional autonomy and insights of teachers so that this vision can be realized.

What makes this book a uniquely valuable contribution to the field of assessment studies is that it combines a clearly articulated vision of how assessment could and should operate at the heart of pedagogy, with a wealth of practical experience of the operation, over many years, of a state system where this vision has been realized. The authors are fortunate in being able to work in the Australian state of Queensland, but have taken advantage of this opportunity to present concrete and detailed evidence, whilst drawing both on this experience and on the experience of initiatives in several other countries.

Several features of their account are crucial. One is that the summative assessments by teachers will only be trusted if they can be shown to be dependable on standards which are so shared between teachers that their interpretations are comparable across all of the teachers involved. This need can be met by moderation, the process in which teachers compare their grading of the same samples of students' work and, in the process of reaching agreement, develop a shared understanding of those standards. This may be seen as a burden of extra work, but the experience of teachers who have engaged in this process is that, as familiarity develops, it makes an increasingly positive contribution to many features of their work. It gives them confidence in their assessments, and it enables them, by drawing on their shared experiences and insights, to seek for validity in the assessment tools which they used.

This enhancement of validity is one of the main benefits that follows from giving teachers responsibility for summative assessments. The evidence that can be brought to moderation can reflect a variety of types of achievement: formal tests, projects requiring search for evidence and information (in libraries and on the internet), exploratory inquiries in science, creative writing in various

genres, and so on. Each subject may define its own portfolio of tasks to reflect its particular learning aims. In producing such a portfolio, a student will be involved at several times and in several different contexts. All of these features strengthen the validity of the outcomes. At the same time, each student's portfolio becomes their personal product and the teacher can guide students to take personal responsibility for their portfolios by helping them to understand the aims and criteria of quality that are relevant to each component.

None of this is achieved easily or quickly. The successful examples all show that investment in supporting teachers to develop the skills, the practices and the confidence to make such an approach workable, has to be substantial and has to be sustained over several years. This book is a guide for those engaged in this process, for it contains a wealth of detail, grounded in experience, to help others foresee the needs and the pitfalls. But it is also rich in evidence of the rewards.

Many policy makers in education take the system, of high stakes accountability through external testing, for granted: yet outside education there is no arena of human activity in which personal achievement is appraised by the capacity to produce in writing – on one's own, from memory and without access to resources – accounts of the products of several years of learning, within a situation made stressful because one's future opportunities depend on the outcome. One reason for this paradox is the failure to accept the alternative – which is to trust, and to invest in, the professional development of teachers. This is obviously a far better alternative, and this book helps to show both how such investment can be made to work and the fundamental rewards that it can secure.

Reference

- Hargreaves, D. (1999) 'The knowledge-creating school', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 47 (2): 122–44.

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Contents

<i>About the authors</i>	vi
<i>Foreword by Professor Paul Black</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
1 The transformation of assessment	1
2 Why teachers need to understand standards	9
3 A sociocultural perspective on teachers' judgement practice and learning	29
4 Alignment and front-ending assessment	50
5 Moderation and the use of standards	72
6 How teachers can use standards to improve student learning	97
7 Sustainable assessment cultures	118
8 Assessment and digital literacies	137
9 Futures-oriented assessment	155
<i>Index</i>	162

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