Introduction

Educational assessment is a well-established and deep, if not even, field of research and practice. It engages those enchanted by the intellectual and technical skills required for finely calibrated item definition, valid and reliable test design, or analysis of statistical data generated by ranges of scores. It intrigues newly qualified educationalists passionate about learning for its own sake and charged with the responsibility of enabling learners to demonstrate levels of attainment. It animates and frustrates professional teachers and lecturers who have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to helping their students become the best that they can be. And it is surprisingly absent as a well-developed discourse in many teacher training programmes at all levels of educational provision, in many countries. However, we fully recognise the importance of *assessment* – the planned and systematic process of gathering and interpreting evidence about learning in order to make a judgement about that learning – to the educational and economic policy of any country, and the contested nature of the relationship between formal educational assessment systems adopted and pedagogical approaches implemented in educational establishments.

The idea of a text on *Key Concepts in Educational Assessment* originated in a discussion with teacher training students about the lack of a good reference in which contemporary terminology, definitions and contested debates were located in one place, as a starting point for further enquiry. This discussion took place at a time when the authors were working with the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) and colleagues from other UK universities to develop a suite of postgraduate programmes in educational assessment as a specialist subject for experienced educational professionals. It quickly became obvious to those colleagues and the CIEA that not only would our own particular students and members benefit from such a text but that it could benefit teachers, trainers, lecturers and assessors at all levels of educational provision. All of the authors are currently based in the UK, though not all are of British origin, and between us we have experience of educational provision in the USA, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, Finland, Norway, France, Spain and

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the Middle East. The text is therefore located primarily in a UK context. However, it is also informed by our various international perspectives and experiences but does not purport to represent these evenly or comprehensively.

Deciding what to include in this first edition of the book has been tricky. There were obvious contenders, such as Validity, Reliability, Assessment of Learning (Summative) and Assessment for Learning (Formative). In relation to our choice of the rest, we must thank reviewers, expert and lay readers for insisting we add or drop certain items, but the final responsibility for what has been included here is ours. The entries are of various lengths, which reflect what we believe to be their relative importance and/or complexity. We supplement entries with suggestions for further reading about the concepts. However, we recognise that educational assessment is not a fixed entity and as new systems and concepts are developed and evolve, it is our intention to update and provide future revisions of this book.

The original students who suggested the book, and several others too, have been kind enough to read and comment on its contents and have thereby helped to make it what we hope is an invaluable starting point and regular point of reference for those working and/or studying in this intriguing field. Any errors or infelicities are, of course, ours. We hope that this book both informs and illuminates the reader to the links between pedagogy and assessment.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The key concepts are listed alphabetically and each begins with a very short definition. The entries provide some background information on the topic, generally followed by a more analytical discussion that highlights changes to the topic over time, issues, debates and controversies. None of the concepts is straightforward and while we have tried to present things in a way that most viewpoints are aired, this doubtless has not always been possible to every reader's satisfaction.

Many of the concepts are interrelated, but we have no expectations that anyone will read the book from cover to cover, so we have sometimes repeated information in more than one entry. Where there is a direct link between concepts, we have referred to other concepts within the entry and highlighted those relationships in bold so that you can easily find and read through related entries.

Each entry has suggestions for further reading. Some of these suggestions are seminal works in the field; others are of a more recent vintage. We hope that these will get you started if you are seeking out additional information. Each entry is fully referenced and all of the references are in the back of the book, including website addresses where relevant. We have dispensed with the often used 'last accessed' element of the addresses because we do not believe that it adds very much pertinent information. At the time of writing, all of the addresses were live. Information in printed texts in this fast-moving field gets out of date quickly, though, especially in the more policy-related entries, something of which we are acutely aware. What was a government strategy in 2012 may not still be in place in 2013, much to the chagrin of educators who have to cope with policy and guidance overload.

Finally, while we tried to cover the essential concepts in the field of educational assessment, we doubtless have failed to explore all of them, or explore them to everyone's satisfaction. We therefore hope that you see this book as the start of further and deeper discussion about educational assessment and as a beginning point from which you can branch out and find your own definitions and interpretations.

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Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

> APL recognises learning that has taken place due to prior study, work or life experience, and allows colleges and universities to give credit for these, allowing students to follow a process in order to obtain credit for a module or unit that forms part of a course or qualification, instead of formally studying or gathering new evidence. For credibility, APL requires an assessment process, which replicates and gives equivalence to the assessment of a taught module or assessed unit of competence.

TERMINOLOGY

APL and APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. The Quality and Assurance Agency (QAA) uses the term APCL (Accreditation for Previous Certificated Learning) to refer to prior learning that has been accredited and where a formal record, such as a certificate, has been issued. APEL refers to learning that arises out of reflection on previous work or life experience. APL is an umbrella term, covering both APEL and APCL.

QAA GUIDELINES

The QAA is the higher education regulator in the UK. It takes the view that APL is consistent with a number of broad objectives: lifelong learning; social inclusion; wider participation; employability; and partnerships with business and community organisations. APEL, in particular, opens up opportunities for social and ethnic groups, which are under-represented in higher education, and people who might be operating at high levels at work or in the community, but lack paper **qualifications**.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

A key issue is that previous experience or studies on their own do not guarantee APL. It is the relevant *learning* that has resulted from this previous experience or study that is crucial. To obtain APL for all or part of a qualification, programme or module of study, students must provide evidence, perhaps in portfolio form, or through interviews, artefacts or written reflections, that they have achieved knowledge and understanding equivalent to the learning outcomes for which they are seeking credit.

Students claiming APCL might find that a certain amount of double-counting is permitted. In other words, a certificate that contributed to a qualification already obtained might also be allowed to contribute towards another qualification. This could happen in the teaching profession, for example, where some modules for a basic teaching qualification, the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), are passed at Level 7 and then some credits from those modules might later be accepted as APCL for a higher degree, such as a Masters degree (MA).

ACCEPTABILITY AND AUTHENTICITY

It is essential that APL should not be a mere formality. Complacent use of APL by educational institutions would undermine its credibility. Students should be put through a tailored process that generates evidence that can be verified and that is equivalent to written evidence from coursework or examinations. This evidence should be in a form that can be submitted to an external examiner and considered by an **awarding body**. In a higher education context, APL is best regarded as being a type of 'module' and will attract a fee in recognition of tutorial, administrative and assessment costs. The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system also recognises Prior Learning (PL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA). These processes have been devised to enable achievement from a range of activities to be counted towards an award. In order to assess the extent to which they demonstrate this, evidence of such activities must be mapped against the requirements of a given unit, part-unit or qualification. Such evidence must be valid, authentic, current, relevant and sufficient.

Evans, N. (2000). *Experiential Learning Around the World: Employability and the Global Economy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Quality Assurance Agency (2004). *Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning*. London: QAA.

Tummons, J. (2011). Assessing *Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector*. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Assessment for Learning

> Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (Assessment Reform Group, 2002: 1).

Assessment for Learning (AfL) was a term made popular in the UK by Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b) when locating teacher and student feedback as part of the assessment and learning process. AfL promoted the sharing of criteria with learners, the effective use of classroom 'talk' and questioning, and supported peer and self-assessment as part of the assessment and learning process (Swaffield, 2009). It represented a challenge to the ascendency of summative assessment and a turn (or return) towards the personalisation of learning, in schools in particular. It was further linked to conceptualising curriculum assessment activities (Black *et al.*, 2003) as part of an ongoing formative assessment process.

However, AfL as a formative assessment strategy (Clarke, 2005) goes back arguably as far as John Dewey's (Dewey *et al.*, 1987, 1988) seminal works linking active learning with meaningful experience and motivation.

Indeed, a pedagogical strategy that encourages action learning tasks and assessment strategies is something also suggested by von Cranach and Harré (1982) in their goal-directed activity theory. This concept was further refined by critical theorists such as David Boud (1988) who suggested the benefits and practice of student-centred and autonomous learning that underpins much of the pedagogical aspirations of AfL. Dylan Wiliam (2011) traces the history of AfL from the early 20th century, stressing the importance of individualising instruction, assessment and **feedback** to suit the variety of student needs.

From these ideas, the concept of feedback as an important stage within the human learning process developed, something that Black and Wiliam (1998b) suggested was of vital importance to classroom-based learning. A later publication by Black *et al.* (2003), *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into Practice*, provided a pedagogical rationale that combines the notion of feedback with **self-assessment** and formative assessment:

> an assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers and their students in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes formative assessment when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching work to meet the learning needs. (Black *et al.*, 2003: 2)

More recently, a group of scholars meeting in Dunedin, New Zealand in 2009 agreed the following definition: 'assessment for learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning' (cited in Crooks, 2011: 71–2).

Citing Brookhart, Wiliam (2011) charts the evolution of formative assessment, which he characterises as nested:

- Formative assessment provides information about the learning process
- Formative assessment provides information about the learning process that teachers can use for instructional decisions
- Formative assessment provides information about the learning process that teachers can use for instructional decisions and students can use in improving their performance
- Formative assessment provides information about the learning process that teachers can use for instructional decisions and students can use in improving their performance, which motivates students (p. 8).

The Assessment Reform Group, which originally commissioned Black and Wiliam's work, defined AfL as 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there' (2002: 1). They developed 10 key AfL principles that state that Assessment for Learning:

1 is part of effective planning
2 focuses on how pupils learn
3 is central to classroom practice
4 is a key professional skill
5 is sensitive and constructive
6 fosters motivation
7 promotes understanding of goals and criteria
8 helps learners know how to improve
9 develops the capacity for self [and peer] assessment
10 recognises all educational achievement.

Implementation of the three factors identified by the Assessment Reform Group can take place in a variety of ways: The first, judgements about where learners are in their learning, can be made through diagnostic assessment such as listening to children read and gleaning information from class work or tests. Open-ended 'rich' questions can involve students more deeply, engage them collaboratively in problem-solving techniques and provide opportunities for teachers to ascertain any misconceptions students might have.

The second, moving students forward to what they need to learn, involves a clear statement of learning criteria, building on current learning and explaining why the learning is important. Finally, the best way to achieve this is through feedback and feed forward, most useful when effectively timed and clearly linked to the learning intention. It needs to be part of the understood success criteria, focus on task rather than ego, give clues on how to bridge gaps, offer strategies rather than solutions, challenge, require action and be achievable (Stobart, 2011).

Black and Wiliam (1998a) describe what goes on in classrooms where assessment aids learning. Typically, classroom practices include: observing students and listening to them describe what they are doing and the reasoning behind their actions; using open-ended questioning, which gets students to articulate their ideas; setting tasks that require students to

apply skills and ideas; encouraging students to communicate their learning through actions as well as writing; and discussion rather than dialogue.

Further work on AfL, such as that by Mary James and her colleagues (2007), focused on making learning explicit, emphasising learner autonomy and shifting the focus from performance to actual learning (Swaffield, 2009). This means constantly checking the effects of certain practices and turning away from procedure-based activity.

Regarding the validity of assessment for learning, Crooks cites the following variables as being crucial:

- the relevance of the assessment evidence to the intended learning outcomes
- the degree to which the achievement of each learning outcome has been sampled
- how well the evidence focuses on performance at the intended time, or (where progress is the focus) on progress over the intended time period
- the fairness to all students of the processes and judgement during assessment
- the extent to which the evidence coalesces into coherent and meaningful pictures of performance (Crooks, 2011: 72).

Crooks (2011) highlights six key factors in effective assessment for learning: (1) committed, motivated participants – both teachers and students; (2) students' trust, so that they can be comfortable in admitting they need help; (3) students' understanding of the goals to which they are working; (4) learning goals of an appropriate level of challenge; (5) development of students' self-assessment skills; and (6) insight on the part of the person giving feedback (teachers or peers) into the difficulties a student might be having, providing feedback when students are most receptive and excellent judgement in framing comments appropriately, and tailoring them to each individual's needs.

The OECD considers AfL as an important part of a general international education policy to push formative assessment in secondary schools. The OECD (2005) published its findings in a policy brief article highlighting the benefits of formative assessment, in particular, achievement gains and equity of student outcomes. It emphasised that formative assessment builds students' learning to learn skills through: 'involving students as partners in that process' (OECD, 2005: 2). The OECD also identifies the tension between summative and formative assessment approaches and advises national policy makers to avoid 'high

visibility summative assessments' as they are a 'significant barrier to formative practice' (OECD, 2005: 6). The challenge is in getting the balance right between summative and formative assessment systems.

Hutchinson and Young (2011) analyse the role of assessment for learning in Scotland, where the government has supported this type of assessment for a decade through its Assessment is For Learning (AiFL) programme. That programme has not been an unmitigated success, partially because Scotland has combined assessment for learning with assessment for accountability. Hutchinson and Young point to the following problems: 'deeply ingrained beliefs about learning and assessment; different understandings of the language and terminology of assessment; lack of mutual professional trust; and reluctance to change practice and take professional risks and responsibility for judgments about learning' (p. 64). They suggest that only through shared understanding of what is important for students to learn, a framework of assessment arrangements, development of professional practice in assessment, adequate feedback to stakeholders and partners, and support from external agencies can assessment for learning truly thrive.

AfL has not been without misinterpretation or critical appraisal. The UK government adopted an Assessment for Learning Strategy (DCSF, 2008) that has been accused of bowdlerising the ARG's 10 principles to promote close focus on only two subjects, English and mathematics, and the frequent in-class 'formative' assessment of levels of attainment students achieved in each (Swaffield, 2009). With its tick-box approach, emphasis on data collection and direct relationship to summative national curriculum assessment, the Strategy's misappropriation of the term AfL undermined formative assessment in schools in England. Coombs and McKenna (2009) also reported that AfL in English schools suffered a patchy implementation due to a lack of any national coordinated and embedded continuing professional development (CPD).

AfL's critics get scant attention, since the concept is almost universally acclaimed. Smith and Gorard (2005) found that the progress of students in year 7 mixed-ability classrooms was less good for those who received formative feedback alone as opposed to those who received marks, grades and minimal comments. While acknowledging that some general practice associated with AfL can be helpful in the learning process, Bennett (2011) argues that with such a wide variety of practices, processes and methods routinely associated with AfL, no overall judgements about its effectiveness can legitimately be made. He questions claims that have been made about the effect size of assessment for

learning interventions (between .4 and .7 in Black and Wiliam's famous 1998 analysis [Black and Wiliam, 1998a]) because the studies under consideration were too disparate to be summarised in a meaningful sense. He also believes that certain considerations such as domain specific needs, the amount of support that teachers need to utilise formative assessment effectively and the wider impact on the educational system have not been analysed sufficiently. There are also problems with under-researched issues associated with **measurement** principles, since assessment for learning relies on human judgement and inferences that can be made about student performance, which can lead to measurement error and bias. If the inferences are wrong, the basis for altering instruction could also be wrong; if the inferences are correct, but the changes to instruction are inappropriate, then learning will not be improved. Without a well-defined set of practices, Bennett posits that there will be a wide variety of outcomes from AfL.

In a special issue on formative assessment in Applied Measurement, Robert Shavelson (2008) stated:

> After five years of work, our euphoria devolved into a reality that formative assessment, like so many other education reforms, has a long way to go before it can be wielded masterfully by a majority of teachers to positive ends. This is not to discourage the formative assessment practice and research agenda. We do provide evidence that when used as intended, formative assessment might very well be a productive instructional tool. Rather, the special issue is intended to be a sobering call to the task ahead. (p. 294)

Many researchers, teachers and other stakeholders believe the challenge is worth taking up and continue to explore the efficacy of assessment for learning.

FURTHER READING

Assessment Reform Group (2002). *Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles. Research-based principles to guide classroom practice*. Available at: http://arrts.gtcni.org.uk/gtcni/bitstream/2428/4623/1/Assessment%20for%20Learning%20-%2010%20principles.pdf

Black, P. J., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into Practice*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Wiliam, D. (2011). 'What is assessment for learning?'. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37 (1), 3–14.