Editorial

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The papers within this *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability (EAEA)* issue tightly focus on issues of teacher and leader assessment. While the authors apply different perspectives and strategies to conceptualise, understand and evaluate professional effectiveness, the papers echo an underpinning commitment to the important role that teachers and leaders play in supporting school improvement and student achievement. The papers provocatively problematise and challenge current knowledge, policy and practice related to classroom and school-based assessment of teachers and leaders.

My reading of this issue provoked two specific questions related to what constitutes good teaching and how assessments are nested within the overall suite of activities and experiences that constitute professional practice and school improvement. Looking back to my own student days, I can clearly identify the teachers that most strongly influenced my learning and future academic choices. In primary school, Mrs. McKinley and Mrs. Thompson at Glen Ogilvie Public School in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, spotted my personal (perhaps obsessive) interest in phonics and allowed me to proceed at my own (almost Olympic medal winning) pace. Their support gave me confidence and a momentum that I have perpetually drawn on. In their classes, I had opportunities to learn about creativity and critical thinking, as did my peers, and these early experiences shaped my thinking to this day. My student colleagues came from different countries and I remember my teachers working with us individually and collectively to ensure everyone was learning. Their classrooms were fair and ambitious.

At Gloucester High School, I was busy with musical theatre, organisational and economic theory and slightly disenchanted at times—not atypical teenage student behaviour. Several teachers, most importantly, Mr. Pritchard and Mrs. Duffy, gave me pertinent guidance and set high expectations for my work and effort. In the end, these teachers gave me confidence, helped me find my own academic strengths and shaped my academic ambitions and career choices. These teachers shared an ability to tend to individual students, provide timely and pointed support and encouragement and set expectations of high performance that were simultaneously daunting and motivating. They were fair and tough.

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Upon reflection, even as a young person, I could identify many of the factors that are empirically evidenced to comprise outstanding teacher practice. The ability of students to predict teacher effectiveness is taken up in our fourth paper this issue.

I attended primary and secondary school in a bygone era in which student test scores were not used to compare schools or teachers. I was not savvy enough to gather information on how teachers and leaders were formally assessed at the time. However, I am quite confident that there were not a large number of teaching observations in which the outcomes determined teacher pay or long-term career prospects—as is increasingly the case in some jurisdictions. While Ontario remains a globally recognised educational jurisdiction with highly prized student outcomes, the level of teacher and leader assessment in my opinion remains on the low end of the stakes continuum. Still, as we see in our own research, the Ontario-based strategies appear to improve professional practice by focusing on high expectations continuous improvement and light touch aspirational support. The lack of formal repetitive high stakes in-class teacher observation would make some policy makers and practitioners quiver with disbelief and fear. However, the relative soft touch, low-risk, high-expectation environment, at least in the Ontario context, appear to be supporting improvements in teaching and learning that contribute to conditions including: high teacher retention rates and equitable access to higher education regardless of parental experience or income. With this thought as a backdrop, we set off on the quick tour of the content of this issue.

The issue sets off with a paper by Hallinger, Heck and Murphy entitled, *Teacher evaluation and school improvement: an analysis of the evidence*. The paper provides a rigorous and timely examination of the evidence base upon which much of the current teacher evaluation strategies and policy are predicated. More specifically, the authors explore ‘three lines of analysis: evidence on the magnitude, consistency and stability of teacher effects on student learning, evidence on the impact of teacher evaluation on growth in student learning, and literature from the sociology of organisations on how schools function’. The authors firmly state that both leadership and school improvement efforts must be empirically evidenced and feasibly implemented. They also posit that most current teacher evaluation strategies may not meet these thresholds and call for a careful consideration of teacher evaluation as a strategy for school improvement.

Covay, Minor, Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Cravens and Elliott shift the focus to leader assessment measures in their paper, *A known group analysis validity study of the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) in US elementary and secondary schools*. The VAL-ED is an evidence-based principal evaluation tool and the only principal assessment instrument having well-documented known group validity. The paper highlights the accuracy of VAL-ED in relation to superintendent perception’s of principal effectiveness for leaders at both the top and bottom 20 % of their districts. The validity of the VAL-ED is reinforced by a 70 % accuracy rate which is greater for higher performing principals. The authors also disaggregate the key factors and components within elementary and secondary schools that influence accuracy prediction.

The issue refocuses on teacher assessment in the paper by Kalule and Bouchamma entitled, *Teacher supervision practices and characteristics of in-school supervisors in Uganda*. In the context of the introduction of universal free education in Uganda, the authors employ a quantitative survey across 45 rural schools to examine how school leaders and programme directors perceive teacher supervision practices including

supervision models, phases and professional development guidelines. The paper identifies different supervision models being employed in relation to supervisor reports of collective and professional/personal efficacy. The authors make a very important and timely contribution to the overall literature on assessment and even more importantly, the growth of a more global discussion of the patterns and trends emerging in teacher assessment and professional growth.

Next, Panayiotou, Kyriakides, Creemers, McMahon, Vanlaar, Pfeifer, Rekalidou and Bren present their paper entitled, *Teacher behavior and student outcomes: results of a European study*. The paper reports the findings of a six-country study of their dynamic model of educational effectiveness. The paper highlights the model and, more specifically, examines classroom-level factors related to teacher behaviour and the influence on student achievement. Evidence was collected from written tests of over 10,000 students in over 300 schools and was combined with a student survey of teacher behaviour. The paper reveals that student ratings can be reliable measures of the teacher factors included in the dynamic model. The authors also discuss implications for policy and practice.

The issue concludes with a paper by Simms and George entitled, *Approaching assessment from a learning perspective: elevating assessment beyond technique*. The authors argue for the necessary centrality of assessment in assuring quality education within a framework that the authors suggest assessment should be underpinned by the questions: ‘How well are students learning?’ and ‘How do we know?’ and that the process of assessment should be nested, if not, led by a programmatic approach to examining quality practice. This paper explores the relationship between assessment and the scholarship of teaching and learning in an effort to identify a systems approach to programme management practices. The authors argue the merit of curriculum maps and overarching taxonomies of significant learning to advance a framework-driven practice that supports assurance of learning.

As we go to press, different countries and jurisdictions are adopting various models of large-scale and intensive teacher assessment practices. These strategies are expensive, time intensive and may be having unintended short and long-term implications for teachers and leaders. At times, the evidence base lacks a robustness that supports assessment as a lever for improving professional practice and student learning.

This issue of *EAEA* explores the notion of school-based assessment of the performance of teachers, leaders and students. Each paper raises important points of evidence and consideration in relation to how systems and schools assess teacher and leader performance. The authors point to factors and conditions that need to be taken into consideration in order to truly develop schools and systems that improve student learning and the overall organisation of learning over time. The papers also highlight, in some ways, the important roles that students, district-level leaders and academics have to play within the debate, discussion and support of assessment practices.

When I reflect on my own school days, and the ways in which my own teachers supported my development and learning, my great teachers consistently believed that I could get better and provided with the encouragement and support to do so. While I am aware of the advantages proffered to me by my geographical and socio-economic positioning, I was not always the best student and quite often baulked at the system of assessment and reward simply in protest.

As we discuss systems and strategies for assessing teachers and leaders, the conditions that prioritise support, high expectation and a shared policy and practice focus on continuous improvement often serve as a faded backdrop to the more empirically driven and systematic structures that often frame the local and global discussions. We rarely receive research papers examining these so called ‘softer’ conditions that assess teacher and leader development and they remain equally as important.