# Editorial

**John MacBeath · Lejf Moos**

From report cards to digital technology , the four papers in this edition encompass 'technologies', on the one hand as old as schools themselves, and on the other, challenging the very nature of schools as we have come to know (and sometimes love) them. The first paper reminds us of that perennial verdict on our potential and accomplishment as students—the report card, a quaint relic in a digital age? Its purpose is usually as a summative statement but sometimes, and only sometimes, with the intent to be formative rather than simply backward looking. The complexities and ambiguities of assessment are the subject of the second paper by Rasmussen and Frich, leading us through the thickets of confusion that surround that term. There is a short step from there to accountability, discussed in Munoz and Barber's paper, as assessment has lent itself most obligingly to an accountability purpose—the report card on the school and on individual teachers. But we will need to think differently about those assessment and accountability protocols, as Stobaugh and Tassells explore in the final paper, the implications of new technologies which cast teachers as 'co-learners with their students'.

How well do report card grades inform parents and students about the likelihood of success on mandated assessments? The answer, 'not very well', is however complex and challenging. Optimism and high expectations may be a very good thing but, apparently, not when they lead to self deception.

As anyone who has ever been a child knows, report cards are a cause for parental celebration or castigation, reward or sanction. For parents, as the Ross/Kostuch Canadian study reports, report cards provide the most important source of student achievement data, particularly in respect of their scope and accessibility and the frequency of their issue—three to four times per year for all subjects. But there is

J. MacBeath (✉)
University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
e-mail: jecm2@cam.ac.uk

L. Moos
Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: moos@dpu.dk

sometimes a shock around the corner. The authors study found that 25% students were misclassified: they did better or poorer on the external assessment than their report cards predicted.

Herein lies a paradox. As classroom tasks are designed for students to be successful students, may then tend to over-estimate their ability. Mastery experiences, which good teachers would naturally strive for, may then lead to the belief that as students were successful on particular tasks they have the ability required for success, while perceptions of being successful in the past generate expectations of future success. While there may be a virtuous circle in self belief leading to higher performance (the much rehearsed self-fulfilling prophecy) there is a note of caution: 'modest inflation of ability perceptions contributes to higher achievement but not if the gap between belief and performance grows too large'. The authors add, 'The relationship between achievement and self-efficacy is reciprocal, generating upward and downward spirals'. However, students with inappropriately high self-efficacy beliefs may fail to seek help when they actually need it while others with incongruously low self-efficacy may avoid opportunities which would challenge them to improve.

The parental role in encouraging the upward spiral is shown to be a significant factor, encouraging children to do better. However, there is a caveat and a recommendation. Schools, Ross and Kostuch conclude, confuse parents by using different achievement scales in early and later grades, by using technical terms unfamiliar to parents, by employing policies such as grading more severely in the first than in the last term, by not separating achievement from attitudes and motivation, by mixing norm-referenced and criterion-referenced scales and by not providing sufficient explanation in a language parents can understand. The recommendation is—'that teachers as well as education departments should continue their efforts to increase the transparency and precision of report cards to ensure that parents receive accurate information about their children's academic accomplishments and feasible educational futures', that is, providing information which helps to align self efficacy with actual performance achievement.

However, this paper needs also to carry a health warning regarding the weight given to external assessment. Its high stakes nature and the inevitable caveats that accompany any such blind testing means that alignment should not operate simply in one direction. Continuing work needs to be done on external assessment to ensure that it reflects as closely as possible student achievement in the best and broadest sense of that term, and that its purposes do not serve other agendas. The second paper in this volume has something to contribute on that subject.

So, what is assessment for? A report card on schools and teachers? And to what extent do assessment pressures actually demotivate students and contribute to lower motivation and performance? Rasmussen and Frich address these questions in a Danish context. Their findings may, or may not, apply to Canada but as with the above study they do problematise the role and impact of assessing individual performance, the confused purposes of assessment and the inevitable tensions between its formative and summative functions.

Performance pressures, it is written, have an impact at both the institutional and individual level not just in Denmark but 'all over Europe'. The extent to which assessment in lower and upper secondary schools is seen as a mechanism of control

or as an impetus to learning is investigated through two case studies in Denmark, focusing on the relationship between policy imperatives and local level interpretations which have a significant bearing on teaching and learning.

Drawing on Broadfoot's conceptual framework, four competing or coincident roles of assessment are analysed. These are: assessment as attesting or certification of competence; regulating competition and selection; external control on the content of school knowledge; system control.

The first role, to do with attestation is described as summative, from a student's point of view having little formative value. Echoing the findings of Ross and Kostuch, the authors of this paper report that assessment can have either a 'warming' or 'cooling' effect on student motivation. With reference to the second of the four roles (competition and selection) as long as the students have positive experiences (good grades), there is a warming effect, that is higher investment in doing well, but for the students whose experiences are negative (low grades or failure) this may result in demotivation. This does not imply that learning is improved or more valued but that 'learning becomes a means to an end, not an end in itself', the competitive climate impacting in learning climate in negative ways, creating a tense atmosphere around the learning processes and devaluing what it is intended to measure.

The third role, which has to do with the mandating of certain kinds of knowledge, is also demotivating due to ambiguity about personal competence criteria, the increased level of individual monitoring which this entails and heightened external control on the content of the curriculum. This institutional strengthening of performativity control on what is prescribed 'might well cool down both local ambitions and personal incentives to improved learning'. The fourth role—system control—it is argued places demands on teachers to report and document assessment activities and results in frustration by teachers and is then met with opposition. It seen by them as indicating a lack of trust in and a threat to teacher professionalism. In this case the 'cooling down' effect applies to teachers' motivation to improve their teaching.

Who wants to be an assistant principal? The recruitment and retention 'crisis' for senior leadership positions has become a recurring theme in recent years in many countries of the world. In the U.S. the appeal of the job, as Munoz and Barber write, has not been enhanced by the federal programmes such as *No Child Left Behind* and the more recent federal initiative *Race to the Top*, both serving to intensify accountability and placing greater demands on senior leaders.

The focus of the Munoz and Barber paper, an empirical study of 403 elementary, middle, and high school assistant principals with 'on-the-job knowledge' in the state of Kentucky, explores ways in which job specifications and allocation of duties affects candidates for assistant principal positions in K-12 schools (that is, 'all through' schools from Kindergarten through to the end of senior high school).

As shown by many other studies, being held accountable for multiple responsibilities in recent years is not only decreasing incentives to apply to the AP position but also stemming the flow in the pipeline to principalship. The recruitment challenge is made more difficult and complex due to the multiple stages in recruitment such as attracting, screening, and determining job candidates who meet the required profiles for the leadership position. However, qualified the candidate the need to mollify angry parents, cope with large amounts of paperwork, disciplining students, and evaluating teachers, have little obvious appeal.

This greater appeal of the AP position is when it is primarily about learning and teaching rather than discipline duties. 'Presumably, few persons go into educational administration out of desire to deal with discipline', 'Accordingly', write the authors, 'schools and school districts should make greater use of instructional leadership content when describing and announcing assistant principal vacancies in such media as job descriptions, position advertisements, web-site job postings, and recruitment interviews'. This does, however, leave hanging the question of who can undertake the somewhat thankless task of being in charge or law and order. After all 'someone has to deal with discipline issues, particularly in high-need schools in urban settings'. Or are there other solutions to making better connections between achievement and discipline which do not rely simply on a policing role for someone in that high status position? After all, concludes this paper, 'The future of our K-12 schools depends on recruiting quality administrators to inspire a community of stakeholders focused on improving student achievement.

Improving student achievement by harnessing the potential of technology is one of the hallmarks of the new education leader, write Stobaugh and Tassells in the fourth paper of this journal. Its premise is that school and leaders need to be alive to the critical role of technology in the work place. The accelerating impact of technology means it can no longer be regarded as an optional tool but as a necessary medium of learning and teaching. It follows that pre-service teacher education should also exhibit a quality of leadership which ensures that new entrants to the profession are not only comfortable with technology but creative in its uses, expanding students' horizons so as to meet the bar set high by the National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS). Its six key indicators include students' ability to demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge; to use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, contributing to the learning of others; applying digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information; critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making; understanding human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practicing legal and ethical behavior; and 'digital citizenship' which implies understanding human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.

The schools these new teachers enter will be equipped with computers, high-speed Internet access, printers, software products, and many other resources, representing millions of dollars of investment. Yet, the evidence is that teachers are still not exploiting that technology to achieve even a few of the ambitious goals set out by the NETS programme. The outcome of this study, collecting data from a comprehensive institution teacher programme that prepares approximately 400 new teachers per year, reflects the concerns of the Department of Education study. Using Jonassen's three categories for learning impact: (a) learning about technology, (b) learning from technology, and (c) learning with technology, the Stobaugh and Tassells conclusions were that learning 'about' technology was about as good as gets. Learning 'from' technology was less encouraging while learning 'with' technology was even more problematic, due to lack of understanding the goals, unfocused efforts, and poorly designed assessment systems to document technology performance.

Pre-service teachers need, therefore, a quality of training which allows them to enter the classroom armed with 'the necessary strategies and skills to integrate

technology into effectively leading instruction', seamlessly integrating technology to advance student learning. So this paper concludes.

At times, as European editors, we have taken issue with the North American language of 'instruction', and 'instructional leadership', which strike us as particularly inappropriate in a context where learning with technology casts the teacher not as the instructor but as pedagogue, drawing on the range of tools which prompt and promote student learning. As Stobaugh and Tassells conclude their paper:

> Teachers must become comfortable as co-learners with their students and with colleagues around the world. Today it is less about staying ahead and more about moving ahead as members of dynamic learning communities. The digital-age teaching professional must demonstrate a vision of technology infusion and develop the technology skills of others.

> 'These are the hallmarks of the new education leader'.