

Evaluating Education: Normative Systems and Institutional Practices

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Sharon Rider, Department of Philosophy Science and Technology Studies Center,
Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Michael Peters, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

This series addresses the normative implications of and assumptions behind schemes for assessing and assuring the quality of education at all levels and the role of education in the knowledge society. Educational assessment in most countries has become a standardized function of governments and funders, raising concerns that the distinctive aims of different parts of the educational system and their inherent values base will be eroded over time. Moreover, contemporary education research tends to be compartmentalized, having limited contact with relevant research in philosophy, sociology, history, economics and management studies. This series seeks to rectify this situation by:- examining the historical development, theoretical underpinnings and implicit conceptual assumptions of different regulatory and evaluative regimes and making these explicit - investigating the implicit or explicit values exemplified in and buttressed by policy, and studying its implications in practice - proposing and developing models for alternative practices for realizing goals and promoting norms tied to different conceptions of the purposes of public education and the mission of the university The series will focus on the pragmatic as well as the theoretical aspects of valuation activities in education and foster dialogue between different approaches within the field, taking as a starting point the fact that processes of valuation are not always quantitative and that these regularly involve a variety of interests and actors. Thus the series will address the diversity of valuation practices, measurements and techniques in education in general at all levels – primary, secondary, tertiary and postgraduate, as well as adult and continuing education –, and higher education in particular, especially regarding potential sources of dispute or controversy. The series will also deal with the consequences of valuation practices in higher education, exploring the ways they resolve, engender or conceal conflicts of values, goals or interests. By bringing forward the normative and institutional dimensions, the series opens the prospect of providing more integrative coverage. This will be of benefit to scholars in the humanities and social sciences, and especially to evaluation researchers and people training to be academic and school administrators. Viewing the field through a philosophical, sociological and historical lens, while incorporating empirical research into the institutions of education and its instruments of assessment, the series seeks to establish and enrich understanding of links between values, pedagogy and evaluation.

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David Scott

New Perspectives on Curriculum, Learning and Assessment

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David Scott
Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment
University College London Institute of Education
London, UK

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*To Lucas Scott, Robin Scott and Jake Scott
with love and thanks*

Preface

The impetus for writing this book comes from a general dissatisfaction with the state of education round the world. This has two principal sources. The first is the adoption by governments, policy-makers and practitioners of a set of knowledge practices that can be broadly characterised as positivist/empiricist/technicist and which has come to dominate how curricula are constructed and certainly how education systems and their work can be described. The second is the adoption of a model of curriculum that is both backward-looking and, in its own terms, confused and muddled. This book sets out an alternative model, which is more cogent and better focused on human well-being.

Liminality is the sense of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs during a learning episode, where participants no longer subscribe to a particular way of thinking or seeing the world, but have not yet fully adopted, or adapted to, a new way of structuring their identity, their time or their thinking.

There can be no curriculum development, as Lawrence Stenhouse (1975: 65) so persuasively argued, without teacher development:

Idea and action are fused in practice. Self-improvement comes in escaping from the idea that the way to virtuosity is the imitation of others – pastiche to the realisation that it is the fusion of idea and action in one’s own performance to the point where each can be ‘justified’ in the sense that it is fully expressive of the other. So the idea is tuned to the form of the art and the form used to express the idea. Thus in art ideas which are tested in form by practice, exploration and interpretation lead to revision and adjustment of idea and of practice. If my words are inadequate, look at the sketchbook of a good artist, a play in rehearsal, a jazz quartet working together. That, I am arguing, is what good teaching is like. It is not like routine engineering or routine management. The process of developing the art of the artist

is always associated with change in ideas and practice. An artist becomes stereotyped or derelict when he ceases to develop. There is no mastery, always aspiration. And the aspiration is about ideas - content - as well as about performance and execution of ideas.

Reforming curriculum arrangements also requires a fundamental change to those infrastructural elements of the education system which inhibit the implementation and use of the knowledge-based and learner-centred curriculum that this book advocates, i.e. top-down systems of accountability; punitive inspection systems; published league tables of excellence; external incentive schemes for teachers; hierarchical systems of organisation within schools; summative forms of assessment conducted at regular intervals in the careers of learners; and pre-service and in-service training programmes and protocols which marginalise effective learning and knowledge-producing activities. In short, this means that the curriculum, central to the learning experiences of children, needs to be: focused on learning; constructed around those forms of knowledge which constitute a sharing of culture; and supportive of modes of professionalism for teachers that position them as central to the construction of productive learning environments in schools.

Deborah Britzman (2003: 54) suggests the following:

It is not only the child who dreams but the dream of the child, indeed, the child as dream that interferes with the question of knowledge in education. Can educators face the same sort of choice, between the empirical child made from the science of observation, behaviourism and experimental and cognitive psychology and the libidinal child who dreams and yet still desires knowledge? The field's dominant tendency is to choose the empirical child over the dream, the child the adult can know and control. But in so doing, education has reduced the child to a trope of developmental stages, cognitive needs, multiple intelligencies, and behavioural objectives. And these wishes defend against a primary anxiety of adults: what if the dream of learning is other to the structures of education?

These suggestions are clearly normative and prescriptive, and require a series of arguments, reasons and justifications to support them. This is what this book is about.

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David Scott

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Contents

1	Introduction: Curriculum, Learning and Assessment	1
1.1	Learning	5
2	Curriculum Frameworks	11
2.1	Scientific Curriculum-Making	13
2.2	Epistemic Foundationalism.....	21
2.3	Cultural Transmission	24
2.4	Innovative Pedagogical Experimentation.....	25
2.5	Productive Learning Environments.....	26
2.6	Autonomous Instrumentalism	29
2.7	Critical Instrumentalism.....	31
2.8	Economic Instrumentalism.....	32
3	Theories of Learning	35
3.1	Delineations, Boundaries, Classifications	37
3.2	Behaviourism	38
3.3	Phenomenology.....	39
3.4	Constructivist Theories of Learning.....	40
3.5	Post-Human, Actor-Network and Complexity Theories of Learning	46
4	Knowledge and the Curriculum	51
4.1	Foundationalism.....	53
4.2	Instrumentalism.....	54
4.3	Pragmatic Arguments	55
4.4	Social Epistemologies	56
5	Learning Environments and Transitions	61
5.1	Learning Models	63
5.2	Internality, Externality and Vertexicality.....	69
5.3	Learning Transitions.....	70

5.4	Structures, Agents and Time	72
5.5	Identity	73
5.6	Pathologising Capacity.....	74
5.7	Progression.....	75
5.8	Learning Careers	77
5.9	Position in the Life Course.....	78
6	Accountability	81
6.1	Different Models of Accountability	83
6.2	Bureaucratic Knowledge and Accountability Mechanisms	84
6.3	Accountability Judgements.....	86
7	Globalisation Mechanisms	91
7.1	False Beliefs	93
7.2	Culture-free Tests	98
7.3	Examination Technologies	99
7.4	A Competency Curriculum	101
7.5	Comparative Emergent Properties.....	106
8	International Comparisons	111
8.1	Finland.....	113
8.2	Massachusetts.....	116
8.3	Scotland.....	119
8.4	Ontario.....	122
8.5	The Netherlands	125
8.6	Germany	127
8.7	England	129
8.8	Chile.....	132
8.9	Singapore.....	135
8.10	Curriculum Comparisons	140
9	A New Model of Curriculum	143
9.1	Standards	145
9.2	Progression.....	147
9.3	Pedagogic Standards	148
9.4	Summative Assessment or Evaluation Standards.....	151
9.5	Curriculum Integration.....	153
9.6	Implementation of the Curriculum Standards.....	154
9.7	The Essential Components of a Curriculum	157
Notes	159
	Chapter 1: Introduction: Curriculum, Learning and Assessment.....	159
	Chapter 2: Curriculum Frameworks	161
	Chapter 3: Theories of Learning	164
	Chapter 4: Knowledge and the Curriculum	166

Contents	xiii
Chapter 5: Learning Environments and Transitions	167
Chapter 6: Accountability	175
Chapter 7: Globalisation Mechanisms	175
Chapter 8: International Comparisons	176
Chapter 9: A New Model of Curriculum	183
References	191
Author Index	203
Subject Index	207