

# ***MA in Education – Assessment***

## ***Unit Outline***

### **A Aims and Objectives**

#### **Overview**

This unit aims to meet the needs of those requiring a specialised knowledge of the roles and procedures of assessment. Assessment is interpreted in a broad sense to include all means of obtaining information about pupil achievement in order to inform educational decisions at a range of levels from the system to the individual. The unit aims to increase both technical expertise in the field amongst participants and to encourage informed critical reflection on their own experience and practice. To this end it draws on appropriate recent research in a range of aspects of assessment.

#### **Aims**

The unit aims to:

- develop understanding of key concepts and terminology in the field of educational assessment;
- broaden participants' awareness of the variety of assessment options available and their applicability to different purposes and contexts;
- encourage critical reflection on assessment practice;
- raise awareness of the roles of assessment in broader educational and social contexts;
- familiarise participants with recent debates and research in this field.

#### **Objectives**

At the end of this unit it is expected that you will:

- be able to describe and identify a range of purposes of assessment;
- be aware of the tensions and trade-offs that arise out of these multiple purposes;
- be familiar with a range of concepts and technical issues in assessment;
- have developed critical skills for evaluating current practices in assessment, including your own;
- be able to make an informed selection of techniques of assessment appropriate to different purposes;
- be familiar with and able to evaluate recent research in the field of assessment;
- be familiar with and able to evaluate forms of reporting assessment outcomes to different audiences for different purposes.

### **B Set Books and Other Basic Reading Materials**

There are several useful books available that provide an introduction to the whole field of educational assessment. While we have our own preferences, to some extent you should identify those books that you find most personally appealing. The list below is not exhaustive and if you come across a book not on the list but which is useful, use it!

There are further references to materials on specific issues in assessment in the appropriate sessions of the course.

A few key books are available on-line as e-books via the University of Bath Library Catalogue site. Those currently available are indicated below but these are continually being added to and although we try to keep it updated, the list may not be definitive at any given time.

## General assessment issues

A couple of excellent introductions to the issues are:

[Black, Paul \(1998\) \*Testing: Friend or Foe? The Theory and Practice of Assessment and Testing\*. London, Falmer Press.](#)

[Lambert, D. & Lines, D. \(2000\) \*Understanding Assessment: purposes, perceptions, practices\*. London, Routledge-Falmer.](#)

The next book is quite challenging in places but it is an important contribution to developments in our understanding of educational assessment and we encourage you to make use of it. It is also available as an e-book.

[Gipps, C. V. \(1994\) \*Beyond Testing: Towards a theory of educational assessment\*. London, Falmer.](#)

## Assessment and learning

This is an important area that has received a huge amount of attention in recent years. The following list identifies just some of the books available.

Black, Paul; Harrison, Christine; Lee, Clare; Marshall, Bethan & Wiliam, Dylan (2002) *Working Inside the Black Box: Assessment for learning in the classroom*. London, Kings College.

Clarke, Shirley (2001) *Unlocking Formative Assessment*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Clarke, Shirley (2005) *Formative Assessment in the Secondary Classroom*, London, Hodder Murray

[Gardner, John N. \(Ed.\) \(2012\) \*Assessment and Learning\*. London, Sage.](#)

Murphy, P. (Ed.) (1999) *Learners, Learning and Assessment*. London/ Buckingham, Paul Chapman Publishing/ Open University Press.

[Torrance, H. & Pryor, J. \(1998\) \*Investigating Formative Assessment: Teaching, Learning and Assessment in the Classroom\*. Buckingham, Open University Press.](#)

## Assessment of younger children

Assessment in primary schools often poses different concerns from those arising in secondary schools but the emphasis in most 'general' assessment books tends to be on the latter. For those of you interested in assessment of primary school (or even younger) children, the following might be of particular interest. They might also interest those of you working with older learners, as primary practice is often more innovative than that in secondary schools – for reasons which it is worth thinking about.

Clarke, Shirley (2001) *Unlocking formative assessment: practical strategies for enhancing pupils' learning in the primary classroom*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

[Drummond, M. J. \(2003\) \*Assessing Children's Learning\*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London, David Fulton.](#)

[Hall, Kathy \(2004\) \*Making formative assessment work: effective practice in the primary classroom\*. Buckingham, Open University Press.](#)

Hutchin, Vicky (1999) *Right from the start: effective planning and assessment in the early years*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

## Particular issues in assessment

The issue addressed in each of these works is clear from the titles.

Broadfoot, P.M. (1996) *Education, Assessment and Society: A sociological analysis*. Buckingham, Open University Press.

[Filer, Ann \(Ed.\) \(2000\) \*Assessment: Social Practice and Social Product\*. London, Routledge/ Falmer](#)

Gipps, C. V. and Murphy, P. (1994) *A Fair Test? Assessment, achievement and equity*. Buckingham, Open University Press.

Harlen, Wynne (Ed.) (1994) *Enhancing Quality of Assessment*. London, Paul Chapman.

[Harlen, Wynne \(2007\) \*Assessment of Learning\*, London, Sage](#)

James, Mary (1998) *Using Assessment for School Improvement*. Oxford, Heinemann.

[Wolf, Alison \(1995\) \*Competence-based Assessment\*. Buckingham, Open University Press.](#)

## Journals

Assessment articles appear in a variety of journals but here are four 'specialist' titles, both of which are available electronically via the Catalogue on the library website:

### ***Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice.***

This is possibly the main 'go to' journal on this subject. As well as a range of articles on various aspects of assessment, some 'special editions' have appeared, focussing on particular issues.

These include:

- Assessment and Classroom Learning 5(1) 1998
- Science Education 6(1) 1999
- Assessment at the Millennium 8(1) 2001
- Upper Secondary Examinations and Entry to University 8(3) 2001
- Assessment, Literacies and Society 10(1) 2003
- Assessment in the Digital Age 10(3) 2003
- Assessment Development in the Asia Pacific Region 13(2) 2006
- Investigating Washback in Language Teaching and Assessment 14(1) 2007
- International Comparative Studies of Achievement 15(3) 2008
- Recognition of Cross-Border Qualifications 16(1) 2009
- Assessment for Learning in the Asia-Pacific Region 16(3) 2009
- Addressing Issues of Access and Fairness 18(2) 2011
- Marking Quality within Test and Examination Systems 18(3) 2011
- High Stakes Testing 19(1) 2012
- Moderation Practice and Teacher Judgement 20(1) 2013
- Assessment in Sub-Saharan Africa 20(4) 2013
- English Language Assessment in China 21(3) 2014
- Large Scale Evaluations of Assessment for Learning 22(1) 2015

- Sociocultural Theoretical Perspectives 22(2) 2015

### ***Educational Assessment***

Perhaps more focussed on testing than broader principles of assessment and often quite technical articles. Quite US-centric but does have some relevant articles.

### ***Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability***

A rather eclectic range of articles, often focussing on assessment and evaluation at teacher, school and system levels but does have some more classroom-focussed articles.

### ***Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education***

As the title indicates, this focuses on assessment in Higher Education, but there are often articles which have wider relevance.

## **Websites**

There are many of potential relevance and interest.

The UK government Department for Education is responsible for the National Curriculum in England. Information about this including attainment targets can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

The responsibility for operation of Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 assessment and reporting is delegated to the Standards and Testing Agency:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/standards-and-testing-agency>

Qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels are regulated by Ofqual:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>

Responsibility for curriculum and assessment was the responsibility of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and its predecessor bodies. The QCA website is available as an archive although it becomes increasingly irrelevant as it does not represent current government policy:

<http://www.qca.org.uk/index.html>

An interesting private website called Education in England gives access to a number of reports and other publications about the history of policy development and legislation which led to the introduction of the National Curriculum and its subsequent development:

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/index.html>

Although Wales and Northern Ireland operate similar National Curriculum structures as in England, they are developing their own distinctive approaches to curriculum and assessment:

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/?lang=en>

<http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/>

Scotland has always had its own educational system and the government body Education Scotland is responsible for it. Its website gives the most coherent view about assessment policy and practice of all the UK nations:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/assessment/index.asp>

The International Baccalaureate website contains information about all the IB's programmes:

<http://www.ibo.org/>

Cambridge Assessment operates three examination boards but also carries out research in assessment:

<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/>

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) also conducts research in assessment:

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/index.cfm>

The Nuffield Foundation has funded a number of projects on assessment including the influential Assessment Reform Group:

<http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/assessment-projects>

International comparative studies are undertaken by PISA and TIMMS:

<http://www.oecd.org/pisa>

<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/>

## **C Assessment (including for the IBEC)**

### **Assignment Guidance**

- Your assignment should be 5000 words in length (plus or minus 10%, that is, 4,500-5,500).
- The published works which you mention in the text must be clearly and fully referenced using the [Harvard \(Bath\)](#) system.
- You are required to submit the final version of your assignment within six months of enrolment for the unit. Please refer to your unit welcome letter for exact dates and deadlines.
- The assignment is intended to be a reflective piece of writing using literature and other secondary sources. There is no expectation that any additional empirical data collection should be undertaken.

*The assignment is expected to be analytical and not just descriptive. You are strongly advised to draw on your own experience in choosing a title and in writing the assignment; but you should also make use of the work covered in the unit and your own reading to inform your understanding and analysis of this experience, and to help locate it in wider contexts of practice and theory.*

You will be expected to demonstrate that you have read the relevant literature, understood the key concepts and reflected on how you might best apply your understanding to your own experience. You should remember that description alone is inadequate; you will need to demonstrate skill in analysis and synthesis. You are strongly advised to adopt a staged approach to your assignment, sending your tutor first a proposed outline, and subsequently a draft submission. Your draft submission should be with your tutor six weeks before your final submission deadline, in order to ensure that you have time to receive and act on tutor feedback (please see your unit welcome letter for the exact deadline for the draft).

General guidance on MA assignments can be found here:

[MA Programmes - Information for Full time and Part Time Students](#)

General information about the MA programme can be found here:

[MA programmes](#)

### NB Students completing this unit as part of the IB Educator Certificate (IBEC):

- full advice on the IB Educator Certificate can be found on the [IBEC wiki](#)
- you are required to choose one of the three IB programmes (Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme or Diploma Programme) as the focus for all your assignments
- it is also essential that you address the *Essential Questions* identified for this unit in your assignment; [guidance on the IBEC for the Assessment Unit](#) can be found on the [IBEC wiki](#), including the [Evidence summary form for the Assessment Unit](#) which must be uploaded with your final assignment
- a thematic list of IB-related academic literature sources (by theme and by programme) that may be helpful can be accessed [here](#).

## Assignment Titles

*Below are some suggestions for possible titles.*

1. Select an existing assessment instrument from within your own personal or professional experience and critically evaluate its 'fitness for purpose'.
2. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the assessment of achievement, in a selected subject area, by school-based teacher assessment and by external examination.
3. Distinguish between the terms 'criterion-referenced assessment' and 'norm-referenced assessment'. Describe and explain, from within your own educational practice, specific situations in which each type of assessment could be justified. Are these two approaches to assessment always mutually exclusive?
4. Discuss the meaning of 'competence based assessment' and the key issues relating to it.
5. Distinguish between 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning'. Are they always necessarily distinct from each other? Drawing on your own experience, discuss appropriate contexts for each of these approaches and suggest how they might best be implemented.
6. Critically discuss the reporting of assessment outcomes in a context with which you are familiar, paying attention to the intended audience(s), the information desired and that given, the validity and reliability of the information, given the assessment regime behind it, the format of the report and means by which it might be improved.
7. Discuss the view that traditional concepts of validity and reliability are of only very limited use in evaluating the educational utility and worth of assessment instruments, relating your discussion to a particular educational context. What advantages, if any, do alternative indicators of assessment quality have over these traditional concepts?
8. Suggest how self- and/or peer-assessment methods might be introduced into a named educational course. Discuss and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of such a scheme.
9. Discuss the impact of high-stakes assessment on educational quality in a specific context with which you are familiar.
10. What do you understand by the concept of equity in relation to educational assessment, and how might such equity be enhanced in relation to a specific assessment situation?
11. 'The social and managerial functions of assessment have increasingly displaced educational functions.' Discuss this statement in relation to a particular context with which you are familiar.
12. To what extent does the assessment of younger learners face its own distinct problems of quality assurance? How might these problems be addressed in practice?
13. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of ICT-assisted assessment with reference to a context in which it is already in use or one where it has the potential to be used.
14. It is also possible to modify one of the titles above to meet specific contexts or indeed to negotiate a different title with your tutor.