

Special Issue on Assessment Editorial Introduction

Charl (CC) Wolhuter

South Africa, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus

charl.wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

Assessment is an unavoidable, yet controversial aspect of any education system and teaching-learning community. Internationally comparative perspectives allow the researcher and practitioner alike to acquire a broader, more complete view of any educational issue, its full implications, possible causal factors and possible ways to approach challenges. This volume and the next volume of *SA-eDUC* offers a collection of cross-national perspectives on assessment.

Sakaria Ipinge and Gilbert Likando show in the case of *Namibia*, how the advent of independence in 1990, and the desire to break with the discredited South African education system and its assessment practices, led to the adoption of the Cambridge Overseas Examination Board's system, until such time as an indigenous Namibian system of assessment could be developed.

Rita Berry and Bob Adamson describes the way in which assessment in *Hong Kong* schools has been characterised by high-stakes standardised external examinations, and the damages an assessment such as that can inflict on an education system. The decolonization of Hong Kong and the assimilation of the education system to that of China have also brought about a change in assessment policy. The high-stakes examinations have now been toned down to a small extent, and Berry and Adamson report on an empirical study on the implementation of the new assessment policy.

Shamaas Gul Khattak shows that, unlike Hong Kong, in the case of *Pakistan*, the assessment system has not adapted to the post-colonial and twenty-first century context, which, as an anachronism, inflicts great damage on education in Pakistan.

The case of *India*, as explained by Tapas Sarkar, shows resemblance to both Hong Kong and Pakistan. While assessment has been reformed (as in Hong Kong), as a mechanism to help monitor the country's "*Sarva Shiksha Mission*" (Education for all), it has not overcome (as in Pakistan) the obsolete fixation of assessment of lower order cognitive skills, rote memorization in particular.

In *Iran* too, as Abbas Arani and Lidia Kakia explain the exigencies of modernization and a competitive globalised world has shown that even a society and education system founded on a strong fundamentalistic Islamic religious ground motive cannot be isolated from them.

Shosh Leshem and Zvia Markovits explain how assessment in *Israel* is caught in a field of tension between the need to make assessment practices fair to all in a multicultural country and, on the other hand, the exigencies to be competitive in an increasingly globalised world. Ana Canen shows that *Brazil* is in exactly the same position, amplified by the sheer geographic and demographic size of the country, it being one of the BRIC countries (emerging economic giants of the world) and in need of an education

system serving rapid economic growth and modernization; on the other hand, it is one of the most unequal and stratified societies in the world.

In (re)connecting with the outside world and the exigencies of the modern age, *Poland*, as Marta Anczewska and Katarzyna Charzynska explain, overhauled its entire education system, including the assessment system, scrapped the Eastblok system, and went back to elements of the pre-comprehensive school system of Western Europe.

The volumes include two case studies from *South Africa*. Muchativungwa Hove compared the results of learners who wrote both the Cambridge International Examinations and the South African Umalusi, and that comparison revealed some concern-raising deficiencies in the latter. Sarah Bansilal analysed the results for one of the provinces of the first round of the Annual National Assessment tests and showed how learners who write these tests in their first language perform much better than those who write them in their second language. Thus this article also passes comment on the current controversy in South Africa on the question of language of learning and teaching (English or mother tongue?).

In *England*, Tina Isaacs explains how assessment in schools intensified after the neo-liberal economic revolution, and how the culture of performativity and accountability resulted in learners being over-assessed, and thus the dangers of going over the top with assessment.

The educational philosophy of John Dewey, the history of federalism, and the tradition of the Common School all have contributed to the *United States of America* being a country where assessment does not stand central in the education system. Yet, as Suzanne McDonald writes the wake-up call of Sputnik and the neo-liberal economic revolution have also in that country led to more attention being paid to assessment and to national assessment exercises in particular.

Thus these volumes offer the experience of assessment in a selection of countries representative of all parts and sections of the global spectrum. If readers can find something in them which can assist them in critical reflection on assessment policy and practices in their own education system, the volumes will have served their purpose.

CC Wolhuter
Editor