

Abstracts

The Association for Educational Assessment – Europe. An Agency for Accountability in Europe

Emma Nardi

AEA–Europe was founded in 2000 with the main goals of improving communication among European institutions interested in educational and occupational assessment, and providing a framework within which co-operative research, development implementation and evaluation of projects involving educational assessment could be undertaken. After 10 years of successful activity, the Association has built a position that could allow it to become the protagonist of the EU's policy in the field of assessment, becoming a reference point for all its members, and playing a crucial role as an applicant for projects funded by the European Union. This article, dealing with research policy, describes the activity carried out by the Association since 2000, presents the EU's policy in research funding specifically applied to Tempus projects, and discusses how the Association could contribute to evaluation and accountability in the European Higher Education and Research Area.

Keywords

European educational policy, Bologna process, evaluation, accountability, Higher Education and Research Area.

The Contribution of Centralisation and De-centralisation to Public Confidence in Examinations and Qualifications

Andrew Boyle

This article discusses the centralisation and de-centralisation of examinations systems, and the relationship of the concept of (de-)centralisation to public confidence in examinations and qualifications systems. In reviewing previous literature it finds that (de-)centralisation has been considered as a unitary concept affecting education systems, whereas previous literature had only looked at (de-) centralisation of disconnected parts of exams and qualifications systems. The article then reports findings derived from qualitative analysis of data collected at an international focus group. The analysis of these data allows reflection on: whether (de-)centralisation as a unitary, multi-faceted concept had power to explain examinations and qualifications systems; what the characteristics of such a concept of (de-)centralisation would be; and on the relationship between the concept of (de-)centralisation and public confidence in examinations and qualifications systems. The article concludes by discussing ways in which researchers or policy makers might apply this research to their own contexts.

Keywords

Qualitative research, international comparative research, centralisation and de-centralisation, public confidence, examinations and qualifications systems.

Improving the Acceptability of Teacher Assessment for Accountability Purposes – Some Proposals within an English System

Sarah Maughan

The National Curriculum was introduced in England after the Education Reform Act of 1988. The compulsory curriculum is made up of four key stages, and until very recently there have been high stakes assessment at the end of each stage. Over time additional tests and examinations were added to the system leading to English children being some of the most tested in the world. In parallel to this, the use of test results to hold schools and teachers to account has emerged as one of the key purposes of the tests and examinations. This article describes the use of the results for accountability purposes, and the ever increasing criticism of this due to the distorting effects it has on

teaching and learning. A number of recent changes to the system, in response to the criticisms, mean that test results are no longer available at all the stages to meet the accountability purpose. The article discusses whether the teacher assessment that has been proposed as a replacement could be used for accountability purposes in such a high stakes system, or whether the accountability system will be forced to change.

Keywords

Assessment, teacher judgement, moderation, accountability, England.

The Concept of Accountability in Education: Does the Swedish School System Apply?

Hanna Eklöf, Ewa Andersson, Christina Wikström

Recent years have seen a growing international debate over accountability in education, and particularly the consequences of such systems. The Swedish school system seems to share many common features with systems in countries where the accountability debate is strong. Still, in Sweden there has been limited discussion and no attention paid to the international debate. The present paper explores whether Sweden can be said to have a standards-based accountability system or not, by comparing the Swedish system with a standards-based accountability model. The conclusion is that the Swedish national assessment system may not be an accountability system in the narrower sense, but that issues of accountability are nevertheless prevalent in current discussions about the successes and failures of Swedish educational policy and practice. It is found the in-explicitness of the system is a threat to validity as assessment instruments may be used and interpreted in ways they were not intended to, with unintended consequences as a result.

Keywords

Accountability, assessment, goals, consequences, compulsory education.

Accountability and Mandatory Testing in Germany: How do Teachers use Performance Feedback Data?

Uwe Maier

The German federal states implemented bureaucratic accountability systems and mandatory testing which aim at self-evaluation and school improvement. This paper investigates how teachers respond to mandatory testing and how they use performance feedback data for instructional improvements. In a qualitative study, 18 teachers in 9 secondary schools were interviewed. The site of the study was Thuringia, one of the German states where schools get elaborated feedback information based on competency modeling and school performance data which are controlled for socio-economic factors. Teacher statements on feedback data usage were classified as either instrumental, conceptual, convincing, strategic or non-use. Qualitative content analysis revealed that strategic or unintended consequences of mandatory testing are less grave than in countries with high-stakes testing. On the other hand, instrumental and conceptual use of feedback data occurs in German schools, but the examples show that it is questionable if mandatory testing can deeply influence teaching strategies.

Keywords

Educational accountability, mandatory testing, school performance feedback, qualitative content analysis, teacher interview.

The Norwegian Assessment System: An Accountability Perspective

Eyvind Elstad, Guri A. Nortvedt, Are Turmo

During the last decade, the knowledge-based school as a “master idea” has developed in Norway, followed by the introduction of a wide range of test instruments for improving educational practice. The PISA shock in 2001, when it became public that Norwegian students only scored at the OECD average in core subject domains, has been an important catalyst in this transformation process. However, it would be wrong to say that the Norwegian school system at the national level has a fully-fledged accountability system and instruments for the promotion of accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, during recent years, the quality assessment system’s usefulness for accountability purposes has been significantly weakened. Still a main conclusion is that the Norwe-

gian quality assessment system in education has unique features, although it is influenced by international trends.

Keywords

Accountability, assessment, Norway, national tests, international comparative studies.

Policy, Latent Error and Systemic Examination Failures

Jo-Anne Baird and Adrian Coxell

Politicians and civil servants are very much involved in examination developments in many countries. Policy development and implementation is notoriously difficult to unpick in terms of decision-making, roles and responsibilities. Nonetheless, three systemic examination failures are used to illustrate the problems caused by the policy context – in Scotland 2000, New Zealand 2004 and England 2008. Taking these cases and the literature together, it is argued that features of the policy environment conspire to generate latent errors: 1) evolving policy and competing perspectives; 2) lack of role clarity and diffusion of responsibility and 3) timeframe slippage. Human error theory indicates that to try to reduce errors we must understand their fundamental causes and that these usually run deeper than the first stories that are told. Understanding the full reasons for particular systemic examination errors is difficult because politics is slippery, and many perspectives have to be sifted.

Keywords

Assessment, system, management, politics, policy.

“Do no harm”– A Call for Greater Ethical Regulation of Innovation in Education and Training

Tim Oates

The paper examines the curious absence of ethical regulation of trialling and mass innovation in education and training, contrasting the management of innovation in education with management of innovation in the medical arena. The issues are explored through four case studies from the English context. Each case study illustrates a different approach to mass innovation and reveals

acute limitations in the design of trials. The paper explores the debate regarding whether trialling is possible in complex social systems but argues that there has been a serious neglect of the rights of learners in respect of innovation. The breakdowns evident in the case studies provide the basis for an argument that there is a need for ethical regulation of trialling, and the paper tentatively presents some prototype criteria for such regulation.

Keywords

Ethics, rights, trials, change, innovation.