Book Reviews

Comparing Standards Internationally: research and practice in mathematics and beyond

Barbara Jaworski & David Philips (eds), 1999
Wallingford, Symposium Books
£24.00 paperback

Is it actually important if at the age of 13 you cannot subtract 2369 from 6000? (In the current zeitgeist a calculator is nearly always at hand.) But if you cannot, does this imply a fatally restricted sense of number that will arrest your further mathematical development? Or is it simply that your mathematical experiences so far have not emphasised strongly enough this type of task? It seems to me that the answer is relatively unimportant, since nearly everybody else around the globe can perform this task almost casually.

Aggressive and catastrophic reports in both the ‘serious’ and the ‘popular’ press lamenting the continuously falling standards in education, in particular in mathematics, often grounded in international comparisons, are not a recent phenomenon; in fact they date back as early as the 19th century. However, as comparativists never cease to stress, direct policy borrowing from other countries, even though ostensibly sensible, can be dangerous. In fact mathematics, with its perceived but highly debatable universality and transcendence of cultural differences, has been the curriculum area where this tendency to ‘look abroad’ has been recently exacerbated (recall such a ‘loan’ from the Pacific Rim countries in the ‘back to basics’ fervent advocacy of whole-class teaching and numeracy skills). This bypassing of sound pedagogical developments in favour of mechanistic policy transplantations is light years away from the more appropriate, context-sensitive, critical consideration of international comparative results. It seems that this is a task that urgently needs undertaking by the mathematics education community, a task to which this book, edited by Barbara Jaworski and David Philips, is a serious contribution.

The chapters originate in a series of seminars conducted at Oxford under the aegis of the Centre of Comparative Studies in Education and the Centre for Mathematics Education Research. All authors have a wealth of experience in international comparative studies. Under scrutiny here are predominantly the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 1995), relating to the performance of English pupils in mathematics, but other relevant studies are presented as well, facilitating crucial methodological comparisons.

As Neville Postlethwaite explains, in his illuminating if slightly overextended chapter, given the marked differences between educational systems (for instance, the differing roles of private tuition in various countries make the claim that comparisons between educational systems are actually very shaky), international achievement studies are often plagued with difficulties, such as constructing comparable populations (to compare cohorts of students of the same age or the same grade is the thorniest of all), identifying determinants of performance (mono-causation is rare in education), finding the determinants of difference between countries by constructing careful pooled analyses and, finally, refraining from ‘ecological fallacies’ in the interpretation of the data, so often woefully committed by the media. As an example of such a fallacy: it is not valid to assume that because between countries strong performances in TIMSS have been co-related to whole-class teaching that these co-relations apply between schools or between pupils within each country.

In any case, TIMSS suggests that Japanese 8- and 9-year-olds perform impressively better than their English counterparts and achieve a higher rate of progress from one grade to the next. Moreover, the variation in pupils’ performance is higher in England and, in general, an average Grade 4 Japanese student is 18 months ahead of a Year 5 English student. In fact the weakest English pupils are 2 years behind their Japanese counterparts. According to Julia Whitburn who reports the
above, Japanese students seem to benefit greatly from a form of whole-class interactive teaching that combines work on contextualised problems, whole-class demonstration by pupils, teacher introduction of vocabulary and abstract mathematical notation and oral and written practice. Finally, consolidation culminates in the pupils’ own construction of word problems where the new vocabulary and notation are used.

These recommendations are also largely supported by other longitudinal, mixed methods projects, like the Kassal project, reported here by David Burghes and Graham Last, and grounded in studies of mathematics teaching in Eastern European countries and Switzerland. Moreover, as the thoroughly designed TIMSS video study illustrates (reported here by James Stigler and James Hiebert), the Japanese approach to mathematics teaching is in favour of a stronger fostering of deductive reasoning and mathematical invention/thinking and of an introduction to new concepts by rational development rather than by mere statement. Japanese teachers seem to achieve these not by simply applying elaborate ministerial instructions, but by ceaselessly engaging in professional development, for example by participating in lesson study groups. In her second chapter in the book Whitburn exemplifies the above poignantly in the context of the teaching of subtraction.

The topic of subtraction is now notorious because of the TIMSS performance of 13- and 14-year-olds in it: as S. J. Prais and others in this book report, only 59% of English pupils gave a correct answer to the multiple choice item on the subtraction of 2369 from 6000. More generally the performance of the more able students is less impressive than in previous studies and there is a larger number of English pupils in the lower ability zone than in many other countries, even after factors such as that in most European countries low attainers repeat classes have been considered.

Until nearly the end the book seems to build up the suggestion that, after a methodological scrutiny of TIMSS and with support from other studies, these depressing results are not easy to refute. Therefore, it is rather unsettling that the concluding chapter by Margaret Brown, while brimming with acute cautionary remarks on the dangers of fallacious interpretation of international comparative data, is largely just such a refutation: the age of the tested student cohort, class repetition of low attainers, school sampling procedures and curriculum match in TIMSS are all under attack here. A celebration of the strong English performance in science, about which Prais, for example, was sceptical, is coupled with the condemnation of its silencing by the media. At once then bravely inconclusive and painstakingly professional, this book is a timely contribution and, arguably, an accurate reflection of the ongoing debate on interpretations of international comparative data within the mathematics education community.

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SILENCES AND IMAGES: THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE CLASSROOM
KATE ROUSMANIERE, IAN GROSVENOR & MARTIN LAWN (eds), 1999
New York, Peter Lang Publishing
$29.95

The local museum service showed the way. During a school visit in the 1960s a museum tutor lit a roman lamp filled with vegetable oil. Arousal was spontaneous. The cry of recognition, ‘fish and chips’, began as a murmur but became a single voice. It was a collective eureka moment. In their excitement the children had learned something about life in Ancient Rome. Many years later I read T. W. Baldwin’s Shakespere’s Small Latin & Less Greek (1944), an equally memorable two volume tome that discusses, among other things, the influence of 16th century school life upon the writings of William Shakespeare.

Silences and Images: the social history of the classroom is closer to fish and chips than William Shakespeare. The 13 chapters report the work of a seminar group that met in Birmingham (UK) and Toronto (Canada) on two occasions in the mid 1990s. The participants, with women in a majority, came from seven countries. They shared an interest in
‘teaching, children, curriculum or social relations’, whether in sociology and/or the history of schooling. Their intention was to focus on a silence in the history of education.

This dialectic of diversity and focus is forcefully represented in this impressive volume. The seminar had been convened at a time when a substantial sector of the international educational research community was beset with doubts about the legitimacy and efficacy of rational inquiry. *Silences and Images* can be read, therefore, as a counterpoint to the ‘tell it like it is’ research demands of the 1960s and 1970s.

Ian Grosvenor writes on problems associated with the innocent interpretation of school photographs; Martin Lawn focuses on classrooms as technologies of teaching (but not instructional technologies); Kate Rousmaniere focuses on a problematical autobiography, reconstructing the classroom life of Margaret Haley, a Chicago teacher who became the leader of America’s ‘first and largest union’, but whose 16 years of classroom experience take up less than 80 words in her autobiography.

The remaining chapters also focus on the reconstruction of historical silences using, variously, interviews (Philip Gardner, Valida Littlefield and Lars-Göran Högman), letters and textbooks (David Vincent, Harry Millar and Jo Anne Preston), reflections on the research process (Ulla Johansson), deliberations about the changing ‘climate’ of classroom life in progressive schools (Kristof Dams, Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon) and, not least, a sample of photographs from a Dutch museum, selected by Jaap ter Linden.

The silences and images discussed in this book range from the physical to the metaphysical and from the biological to the cultural; they are extracted from country to country and from century to century. They are a notable contribution to a (not ‘the’) social history of the classroom. *Silences and Images* is a valuable incision in the seamless web of educational literature on life in classrooms. It points in many directions. And it begins to make links between structure, process, function and dysfunction. It is an important reminder that the word class, like the word church or university, has a double meaning. It denotes both a group of people and the material circumstances under which they relate to each other. To write social history is to engage with this dynamism. It brings something to life. It animates, creating a moving picture from an incomplete series of faded snapshots.

*Silences and Images* succeeds. It might have been even more successful with a tad more editing. Will international readers understand the reference to the ‘Tudor’ schoolboy; and will curious teachers of reading be familiar with the ‘three-leaved battle-dore’ used in the 18th century? Interested educationists will find much to ponder. It is much more than another dreary volume in the library of ‘fancy that’ (or antiquarian) studies in education. Perhaps the word ‘smell’, along with a series of scratch cards, will find its place in the next volume?

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**Schools and Community: the communitarian agenda in education**

**James Arthur & Richard Bailey**, 2000

London, Falmer Press

£15.99 paperback

James Arthur has written, with the help of Richard Bailey, an informative book about communitarian ideas and their implications for education policies. Arthur declares at the outset that it would make more sense to speak of ‘the communitarian perspective’ rather than ‘the communitarian view’, and he backs this claim by drawing from a wide range of writers. Yet this immediately raises the question of how he will go on to square this observation with the very subtitle of his book, namely ‘The communitarian agenda in education’. He deserves credit for discerning a number of key communitarian themes in relation to education in its broadest sense (pp. 136–141), even if their connection with communitarian thinking in general is not so well explored.

On the alleged opposition between communitarians and liberals, for example, although Arthur recognises that there are many thinkers who bring together communi-
tarian and liberal ideas in their theoretical and policy deliberations, he nonetheless regards it as a distinct problem for communitarians to explain how they can displace liberal thinking (pp. 23–26). He does not see that liberalism (or any other -ism, be it socialism or conservatism, for that matter) is no less contested in its core meaning than communitarianism. What is particularly significant about the surge of communitarian advocacy in recent years is that it reconnects the communitarian liberal ideas of philosophers like John Dewey and Leonard Hobhouse with contemporary thinkers such as Selznick, Bellah, Sullivan, Halsey, Marquand and Boswell.

Having declined to accept any attempt at synthesizing communitarian ideas as adequate, Arthur steers his discussion to cover all kinds of position which can be conceivably labelled ‘communitarian’. He suggests that some communitarian writers might be interpreted as favouring ‘traditional’ forms of family life, but concedes that overall it is parental behaviour in terms of raising socially responsible children, rather than any particular family structure, which really concerns communitarians (pp. 44–45). He questions whether communitarians would have to accept that teaching history from an exclusive and imperialist point of view should be the way to promote a sense of common values in a multicultural society, when such a position has been consistently and convincingly rejected by communitarians who maintain that values grow out of cosmopolitan as well as national and local human interactions. He even goes so far as to compare Bellah’s and Galston’s views on what he terms ‘civic religion’ with Nazi ideology and state worship (pp. 98–99). This is casual rhetoric sliding into irresponsible scholarship, as anyone remotely familiar with the writings of those cited would readily acknowledge.

Arthur seems to think that communitarians do not have a cohesive reform philosophy because communitarian philosophers such as Sandel do not write about practical policy issues and policy proponents like Etzioni do not add significantly to the philosophical arguments. And when there are attempts to produce a broad synthesis of the philosophical and public policy issues, he is unhappy with the lack of details on implementation guidance. He does not appreciate that communitarians, be they philosophers, social theorists, policy advisers or practitioners, see their individual works as contributions to a bigger collective enterprise. In fact, Arthur’s misunderstanding of communitarian motivation is reflected by his claim that the central flaw of communitarian thinking is that ‘the only reason for acting non-selfishly it offers is selfishness’ (p. 142). If there is one fundamental point which unites all communitarian thinkers it is that beyond self-interest we must all learn to care for others and accept responsibility for the well-being of others as an end in itself.

Ultimately, the real merit of the book lies in its exposition of practical education issues which are at the forefront of communitarian thinking. There are good discussions about the work of the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community and the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy. Richard Bailey makes a particularly valuable contribution with his case studies of three schools and the way they exemplify communitarian concerns in practice (Ch. 6). Bailey’s approach is a good example for anyone interested in communitarian education to follow, for he recognises that while none of the schools ‘explicitly claim an affiliation with the communitarian agenda, … each school has implemented a series of practices that are firmly grounded in a community-based approach to education’ (p. 118).

Henry Tam

Global Progressive Forum

Supporting Improving Primary Schools: the role of heads and LEAs in raising standards

Geoff Southworth & Paul Lincoln (eds), 1999

London, Falmer Press

£16.99 paperback

School improvement books are increasingly plentiful, so I was interested to see what this one might add that was new. Overall it is an extremely informative read with a wide audience of senior managers, LEA officers and
inspectors, both primary and secondary classroom practitioners, researchers and those in higher education. The text maps and analyses a 3 year school improvement research and development programme in 22 primary schools in Essex, the Essex Primary School Improvement programme (EPSI), from 1995 to 1998 directed by the LEA and colleagues at the University of Cambridge School of Education. An original feature is the make-up of the team, which included school development advisors (SDA), senior educational psychologists and team leaders from the Special Needs Support Service, working as multi-disciplinary programme teams providing external support throughout the project.

Whilst one strand of the project was to research how self-managing schools enhance pupils’ achievements, there was also a focus on developing LEA capacity and school improvement knowledge as identified in the three aims of the programme:

- to enable schools to develop strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning provided for all pupils;
- to increase the LEA’s capacity to support schools as they seek to improve the quality of education that they provide;
- to increase understanding of the processes and outcomes of school improvement.

Each aim had targets and success indicators identified, thus generating a large pool of rich data to support future developments beyond 1998. This data-driven approach to school improvement enabled staff to establish clear foci for improvement, set targets and plan and monitor developments in a teacher researcher model. Collection and analysis of Key Stage 2 data not only focused action but also debate between teams of school, LEA and university staff in continuous cycles of learning based on enquiry and reflection.

This brief summary has outlined the approach and in writing this review I have attempted to capture the style and tone of the text. Whilst recognising that 10 writers collaborated to produce 10 extremely informative chapters, I was uninspired. All chapters appear to follow a writing frame formula that stripped away from the text the excitement and passions which must have existed in this challenging project. I had no sense of the ‘internal turbulence’, described by Huberman, that is an integral part of the change process. There was no sense of the conflicts, bargains and ownership challenges which need to be worked through if improvements are to be effectively initiated, implemented and sustained. The vignettes which gave accounts of teachers’ experiences in the Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) project, if used here, could have illuminated so many of the chapters. Perhaps that will be the sequel.

So, it is stylistically disappointing. One could argue, however, that the framework of each chapter enables a reader to dip in and out of the text easily, as all chapters are well signposted and share both analysis and conclusions of each area of the research project. The level of detail in the text about schools’ insights, LEA insights, wider issues arising from the project and the conclusions and appendices convinces the reader of the thoroughness of this piece of research. So what is new for the reader of school improvement work?

It is an important book in that it reviews a large project in primary schools at KS2, an area receiving government attention. Few studies in the UK have focussed on primary schools. Most recently MacBeath and Mortimore’s Improving School Effectiveness project (which includes primary as well as secondary schools) and this study are timely reminders that primary schools have different cultures and a different curriculum which therefore impact on improvement initiatives differently from secondary schools. In this description of the EPSI research and improvement framework we are reminded of good practice developed through school improvement research with the editors’ comment that ‘frameworks need to be respectful of school backgrounds and histories and flexible to context determined needs’ (p. 5).

All chapters are well worth dipping into but I will highlight five. Southworth’s headship chapter provides interesting questions and challenges concerning the ways data can be used to inform school improvement and raises issues about the skills required for analysis and interpretation for subsequent
action. One head gives evidence of how data affected staff approaches to planning and marking written work: ‘our work is much more specific, criterion referenced. Our plans are much more target based’ (p. 74). However, another commented ‘I would like the pupil data to inform our teaching. It should be diagnostic, but so far it is not’ (p. 75). From reading this chapter it seemed that data-driven school improvement had been a critical component in supporting staff being better informed, providing a source for continuous debate and, in the words of one head, producing ‘a cultural change here’ (p. 79).

The two LEA insight chapters explore the challenges of multi-disciplinary team working, which is still relatively rare. This approach may offer, as the writers claim, ‘richness and integration’ (p. 137), although they raise a note of caution, commenting ‘the resource and time devoted to this role must be realistic’ (p. 138). Issues are raised in relation to expectations placed on consultants and the models of consultancy practices. Useful reference is made to Schein’s three consultancy models which place the client centrally. The challenge of moving models and changing expectations has been lived through, as have issues of ownership, dependency and the individuality of clients’ needs and concerns related to individual settings. Disappointingly, the chapter by Fielding and colleagues on pupil perspectives does not really investigate how changing classrooms and teacher behaviours improve pupil learning. It misses the opportunity to ask pupils this question. However, it does reference exciting work from Pollard, Leisen and Fuller which shows teachers as researchers using data to develop ways of going beyond ‘acting on behalf of pupils’ to ‘working with pupils’ perspectives’. There is a hopeful vision of pupils as co-enquirers and change agents.

Southworth and Lincoln’s concluding chapter is a strong synthesis of school improvement learning already in the public domain and indicates the new and developing themes emerging from the EPSI programme. The EPSI project identifies one of the key challenges for the future as the need for the profession to engage with its own pedagogy. This will be a necessary development as new technologies affect children’s learning oppor-
tunities. Let us hope that this book will encourage the profession to engage with improving current practice and the idea of teachers as researchers. For this we need a climate which is conducive to teacher growth. In such a climate those teachers and advisors engaged in the project could describe the ‘internal turbulence’ of change in their own stories.

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Catholic School Leadership
THOMAS HUNT, TOM OLDENSKI & THEODORE WALLACE (eds), 2000
London, Falmer Press
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In the last 5 years there has been a significant increase in the number of critical studies that focus on Catholic education (for example in the UK, USA, Ireland, Scotland and Australia). Between the promulgation (at the national and international levels) of abstract and universal principles that are expected to govern the work of Catholic educators and the actual daily experiences of teachers and headteachers working in Catholic schools, there now exists a substantial body of academic literature which offers a critical analysis of the wide range of purposes, contexts, resources and approaches that jostle for attention and priority in this field. This collection of essays offers philosophical, theological, historical, sociological and legal perspectives on Catholic schooling. It comments on the curriculum, initial teacher education, continuing professional development (including distance learning), organisational management and work with parents and families. The editors envisage the work as building upon and further extending the discussion begun in an earlier collection of essays, The Contemporary Catholic School, published in 1996 (also by Falmer). Unlike its predecessor, this collection is drawn entirely from the USA. With the exception of one chapter, which does offer an international perspective, it ignores insights and resources for Catholic education offered from other countries. In this sense, the work is less than fully catholic.
However, in other respects the book is both inclusive and open. Far from being elitist or inward looking, the Catholic school experience described here gives a high priority to meeting the needs of the poor and marginalised, whatever their religious affiliation, and it seeks to contribute to the common good. A sense of social consciousness is promoted in many Catholic schools by the widespread inclusion of service learning as a regular feature within the curriculum. The qualities of discipleship and citizenship are considered to be congruent and indeed intimately related. Catholic schooling seeks to be student centred rather than authoritarian; it is also self-critical rather than indoctrinatory. It is willing to learn from the best practice and scholarship in secular or mainstream education.

What emerges very clearly from many of the essays is the central importance in Catholic schools of faith leadership (see for example pp. xiv, 195, 237). This entails giving attention to the religious curriculum, to liturgy, staff selection and the ongoing formation of adults and students, welding all members of the school into a religious as well as an educational community. For this to be effective a deep sense of personal vocation on the part of teachers and principals is essential. So too is theological ‘literacy’ and a familiarity with the Catholic ‘story’ of education. The resources of living tradition are needed to support and to orient the witness of a coherent life, one that integrates faith and culture, a particular view of human nature, development and destiny and the fostering of a personal relationship with Christ.

Given the shift in personnel, from being mainly professed ‘religious’, i.e. (overwhelmingly) sisters or (less frequently) priests or brothers, to a situation where most staff and school leaders are lay people, new approaches to preparing and supporting Catholic teachers are now required. Mary Peter Traviss, in her chapter, combines a clearly documented historical perspective with visionary insight into the challenges to be faced in preparing the next generation of teachers for Catholic schools. Gini Shimabukuro offers an excellent chapter on curriculum development, with penetrating questions, systematic structure and a combination of clarity and realism. Joseph O’Keefe meticulously presents the financial constraints, organisational complexity, racial diversity, religious pluralism and staffing challenges facing Catholic schools in the USA. Two chapters offer very helpful guidance on staff development, here understood as professional, personal and faith development. The section on teachers’ implicit curriculum (pp. 159–160) was especially interesting.

Underlying many of the essays there is a strong evidence base, a balanced historical perspective and careful argument. The tone is confident but not triumphalistic. The contributors are realistic about the challenges to Catholic education, but not depressed by them. There are brief passages of rather sloppy writing (pp. 3, 16–17, 62, 64–65). However, in using the book with my MA students, all of whom are experienced senior teachers in (UK) primary and secondary schools, I have found it accessible, relevant and fruitful in promoting serious reflection and quality debate.

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Evaluating Creativity: making and learning by young people
JULIAN SEFTON-GREEN & REBECCA SINKER (eds), 2000
London, Routledge
£55.00 hardback; £17.99 paperback

This book takes on the tricky question of how to bring judgement to bear in the field of creativity in education. It brings together a collection of essays from a range of arts areas (music, media, design and technology and drama) and, unlike many edited collections, it manages to sustain certain arguments and themes throughout. There is consistency here. This is partly through the sheer narrative effort of the principal editor (Sefton-Green) who ‘tops and tails’ the book and in so doing both introduces and concludes with an integrated set of issues and questions. These questions broadly concern the following options in making judgements about creative enterprises:
1. we focus our judgement on the person (student) who is the creator;
2. we focus our judgement on the creation itself—the art product;
3. we focus our judgement on the social conditions surrounding the act of creative production.

There is a range of supplementary questions that address, for example, the tension between the autonomous judgement of the creator and that of the observer (in this case the teacher). Some consideration is given to the question of whether creative acts are validated apart from ‘developmental psychology’, i.e. apart from the educative or therapeutic effects on the individual. In such a case they are validated against cultural criteria, as social products.

To take just one example, a chapter from the much beleaguered area of media studies ends with the question of how student work is to be assessed. The authors argue that student production should be ‘more than just a critical act, or a means of displaying predetermined theoretical positions … requiring them to produce “radical” or “oppositional” texts’. Assignments should redirect students towards ‘rewriting forms with which they have greater familiarity’. The rest of their conclusion deals with the technology (rather than the logic or the ethics or the politics) of assessment. ‘We need to avoid reducing assessment to simply a matter of detecting evidence of theoretical understanding.’ Now at this point there is no reason for readers of this fine journal, which has always (rightly) celebrated theoretical sophistication in the curriculum, to reach for the scholastic panic button. The argument of this chapter (and other parts of the book) is less to do with ‘dumbing down’ or domesticating the critical mind than with rescuing a discipline from a purely speculative base and bringing it into a more ‘applied’ framework. It’s a bit clumsy, perhaps, but understandable and virtuous.

More to the point, this chapter expresses rather well the dilemma the book tries to address. Just what is at stake in creative education: cultural tradition, personal learning, the integrity of the curriculum programme? Is creative education an instrument of social critique or is social critique the driving force behind creative expression? Can we divorce the creator from her creations in the process of judgement (does liking Wagner imply an incipient predisposition towards racism)? The piece ends with another aspect of the book’s argument, which is a consideration of the conditions under which it becomes more wholesome, effective and socially healthy for students to assess themselves. The response given is that we should create more authentic settings for students to justify their work, for example by exposing them to interaction with real audiences.

The book addresses such concerns throughout, in an integrated and fairly efficient way. Most chapters raise salient issues in assessment to which both researchers and teachers of creative or arts or aesthetics subjects will relate. The Introduction and Conclusion provide the analytical frame which considerably enhances reading of the chapters; I would recommend eating both slices of bread before turning to the filling. There is, however, insufficient attention paid to curriculum issues (the single word ‘curriculum’ does not appear either in titles or in the index). For the most part, the research literature cited comes from disciplinary studies (media arts, music, etc.) or cultural studies or sociology. Apart from some references to the literature on assessment and one to a real arts evaluator and curriculum theorist (Elliot Eisner), there is little reference to the vast literature on curriculum as a field of study which has long addressed the issues at the core of this collection. So, for example, the key question of whether it is students or their work which is assessed is customarily treated as an ethical issue in curriculum literature and yet the word ‘ethics’ does not appear in the index either. I am being a little unfair here, since this does not entirely disenfranchise the authors from saying anything interesting about curriculum, but not that unfair. There is no convincing argument here, for example, that creativity is monopolised by the arts and does not feature in geography or biology for example (ask a geographer and a biologist and you’ll get an ear full of flea) or that issues in the assessment of creativity are somehow distinct from issues in the assessment of … , well, what exactly is it that students learn that is not creative? Were the authors to address
that curriculum literature they might usefully incorporate the thinking of Lawrence Stenhouse, who submitted cultural enquiry to educational criteria and, in doing so, researched the ethical question of what constitutes a standard. Or the work of Harry Broudy, who was concerned with the assessment of aesthetic experience, not in order to make judgements about people or products in art, but to expose the nature of judgement and the possibility of the autonomous judgement of the student.

I am not merely asserting my favourite literature over that of the authors of this collection; rather, I am making the point that there are key areas of analysis which would take the arguments further. Broudy is a case in point. For him the question was about how informed and independent is the judgement, not about its substantive content. The issue of whether the student self-assesses or is externally assessed is more a matter of its impact on the eventual intellectual independence of the student than of the integrity of culture, i.e. back to ethics. Indeed, the only reasonable ethical position for an educator is that any culture is obliged to treat the education of its youth as an act of self-destruction, inevitably doomed to failure through our moral and political weakness.

So the volume gets away with a lot by merely not stating it, if not by avoiding tricky fundamental questions. But then we all have a tendency to ask the second most difficult questions we face. This book is still worth reading for practical guides as to how to frame these important issues, but there is a fundamental flaw.

The clue is in the title. There is a basic confusion between assessment and evaluation. This was understandable 25 years ago when the discipline of evaluation was in its infancy; it is understandable today in Spain for example where there is no lexical distinction between the two concepts. But we have—haven’t we?—learned to distinguish between these fundamentally different acts of judgement. Assessment is about the judgement of individual students and their educational accomplishment within an educational programme (such as a curriculum); evaluation is about measuring the value or worth of the programme. The confusion was first exposed in the USA, where people once blithely measured the success of curriculum innovations by measuring (testing) student performance, but were soon reminded that there were too many intervening variables to make that either fair or viable. New and more extensive evaluation protocols were developed by a community of theorists (of whom Eisner is one) and the methodologies of assessment and evaluation diverged. They continue to face similar and often identical issues in ethics and power, for example, and also in epistemology (both, for example, suffer in similar ways from the growing post-modern scepticism of authenticity). But these are distinctive fields of thought and action. Let me offer a single example of how important it is to distinguish them. Assessment, other than for personal development purposes, tends to hold individuals accountable for the success of curriculum; evaluation tends to hold programmes accountable for their success in realising political or ethical aims of individuals (policy makers, participants and clients).

Now this may not matter to you, but don’t for a moment think we are talking of angels on pin heads. Such a confusion has led to our educational ambitions being held hostage by a group of amateurs and dilettantes whom OfSTED calls ‘inspectors’, who similarly are burdened with the erroneous notion that the judgement of the performance of pupils and teachers is sufficient to make judgements of the worth of curriculum and schools.

Just to be clear then, whatever its merits—and there are very many—this is not a book about evaluation. It would have been better entitled ‘Assessing Creativity’.

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