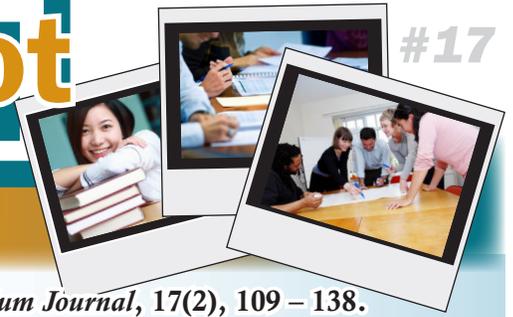


BEYOND METHOD: Assessment and Learning Practices and Values



Source of Research: James, M. & Pedder, D. (2006). *The Curriculum Journal*, 17(2), 109 – 138.

What is this research about?

The researchers sought to uncover detectable patterns of difference between teachers' values and practices. Focusing specifically on assessment practices, the researchers described assessment *for learning* as follows:

“Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there” (p. 110).

The researchers also examined factors that prohibited teachers' ability to sustain practices that were in line with their beliefs and values. Specifically, constraints related to complying with “performance goals defined by the curriculum, through closed questioning, and measured by marks and grades” (p. 123). These were closely aligned with assessment *of learning* practices. The tensions between promoting assessment *for learning* and assessment *of learning* in classrooms are explored.

What did the researchers do?

In studying how teachers' values were reflected in their practice, the researchers administered a 30-item questionnaire on two occasions; first to obtain baseline data and two years later in order to measure change. The design of the questionnaire was informed by models and frameworks and contained key dimensions of classroom assessment practices identified in literature. The 558 teachers in the study consisted of primary and secondary school teachers in England. The researchers acknowledged potential concerns in regard to collecting self-report data (are teachers' perceptions of their own practice accurately reported?) but noted that the results suggested that respondents were honest as evident in “their willingness to reveal gaps between their values and their practices” (113).

What you need to know...

Implications regarding the design of teachers' professional learning included the importance of engaging teachers in the critical examination of their values and beliefs. In addition, the authors suggest that teachers should be provided opportunities to clarify the values/practice gap in order to find ways to implement more “values-informed classroom practices” (p. 112).

What did the researchers find?

The research revealed “marked gaps between the levels of value and practice in relation to a number of classroom assessment practices” (p. 119). The largest gaps were as follows:

1. Opportunities for creating space in classroom lessons to discuss with students ways of improving learning how to learn.
2. Involving students in important decisions shaping their learning such as planning and learning objectives, and for helping students to think about how they learn best.
3. Providing students with opportunities to assess each other's work and learning.
4. Providing students with guidance to assess their own work and learning.
5. Teachers' use of assessment practices to help students to learn independently.

It was clear that in relation to a wide range of assessment that reflected an assessment *for learning* philosophy, teachers' practice was not congruent with their values. The authors reported, “Levels of teachers' practices were strikingly short of the high levels of importance they attached to the practices” (p. 121).

On the other hand, in relation to promoting assessment *of learning*, the researchers found that the typical teacher in the research sample was “pushed to levels of practice in excess of what he/she value[d] as important for the quality of their students' learning” (p. 125). For example, teachers' practices that were in excess of what he/she valued included:

1. Assessing student work using primarily marks and grades.
2. Questioning for factual knowledge.
3. Determining lessons based on prescribed curriculum rather than how well students achieved.

In conclusion, in relation to using assessment to promote learner autonomy, “a dimension of assessment considered by project teachers as an important strategy for helping their students to improve the quality of their learning” (p. 131) teachers felt the “heaviest burdens of constraint as reflected in the largest values-practice gap” (p. 131).