

## Chapter 3

### ASSESSMENT

#### *A philosophical position*

#### ***Why you might find this chapter interesting***

*Just as our arguments in Chapter 1 had consequences for Chapter 2, so too do those two chapters have consequences for Chapter 3. If education is to be centred on developing capability, and if this is to be developed through task-focused and individualised activities in which learners themselves contribute to the articulation of what counts as knowledge, then the consequences for assessment are profound.*

*We outline the case for authentic performance assessment in which knowledge is seen as a resource for action rather than as an end in itself. We explore the challenge of making learners' capability evident, and some of the interrelationships that exist between assessment and learning. Finally, we examine some important distinctions that inform our view of assessment; between judging and mapping; between norms and criteria; between 'better/worse' and just 'different'.*

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We have described our views of capability and of learning in design & technology, and how these emerged from our philosophical starting points with the *APU Design & Technology* project in 1985. The challenge here is to outline in a similar way our philosophical starting points with assessment. As with learning, it is important to start by considering what we see as the primary purpose of assessment and this takes us, once again, into the tricky terrain of intrinsic and instrumental motivations.

## 1. A SKETCHY HISTORY

Historically, the drive for assessment came from an instrumental route, initially, in the UK, to introduce more meritocratic procedures for entry to the military, universities and civil service and then, as a way of establishing standards, as exit exams. (MacLeod, 1982). Whilst some major assessment initiatives originated in the 19th century, it was the first half of the 20th century that saw the addition of ‘intelligence’ testing and (particularly in the USA) multiple choice tests, designed to provide summative information to aid decisions about further educational destinations or options in the employment market (Black, 1998). As practicing teachers, we were first involved in the assessment game in the 1970s and in the following two decades witnessed a shift in emphasis towards a view of assessment that was more closely aligned with learning:

- Introduction of the CSE with its emphasis on coursework assessment as providing a better indication of what learners were actually capable of doing
- Development of criterion-based assessment of the GCSE, indicating a move away from purely normative approaches for explicit selection purposes
- Introduction of the National Curriculum as an entitlement for all children aged 5–16, in which the rhetoric focused on more intrinsic aims, as outlined by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing

Promoting children’s learning is a principal aim of schools. Assessment lies at the heart of this process. (DES/WO, 1988a, para 3)

- Emphasis on key skills and transferability highlighted originally through the developments in vocational education leading to the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ).

## 2. PURPOSES FOR ASSESSMENT

This very sketchy and selective history contextualises our own starting point – as a team of practitioners who had been engaged with the ‘grass roots’ end of this shift. With our beliefs in capability and learning, we welcomed this more educational direction, placing the child – the learner – at the centre of the process. This is not to deny that the label ‘assessment’ is used appropriately in different ways, and for different purposes, typically:

- ‘Formative’ – to support learners in making progress during a programme of study