

IMPROVING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES THROUGH THE CLARIFICATION OF THEORY

Maddalena Taras
University of Sunderland
email: maddalena.taras@sunderland.ac.uk

Abstract

This presentation argues that our commitment to excellence in practice can only be achieved through a clear understanding and application of sound theoretical principles which explain and thus, permit improvements in practice.

Educational research needs to be supportive of learners and tutors in order to inspire the education community. A rare example of educational research having widespread positive impact is the 'assessment for learning' paradigm which has brought interventions into institutions to support learning through formative assessment. This work has had the support of governments, institutions, researchers, teachers and pupils to bring a much-needed boost linking assessment and learning. (Black et al 2003; Wiliam et al 2004; Black and Wiliam 2009).

However, a growing disenchantment with assessment for learning practices may be linked to problems arising from theoretical limitations. (Stobart 2008; Taras 2012; Lau 2015).

This presentation evaluates theoretical principles of assessment for learning in the literature and ascertains where the problems arise for practice. These include discussion on dichotomies of summative versus formative assessment and asks if the two can be easily separated. In addition, it focuses on clarifying the process of assessment versus functions of assessment and how they translate into practice. (Black et al 2003; Wiliam 2007; Black and William 2009; Taras 2012; Lau 2015.)

Finally, it examines inclusive assessment practices where learners are at the centre of both assessment and learning and demonstrates how excellence in theory sustains practice and that the two are inseparably linked. Addressing the problems within the assessment for learning theory will enable it to live up to the expectations it engendered.

Keywords: Theoretical principles, Educational research, Paradigm, Summative assessment, Formative assessment.

References:

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2003) *Assessment for learning. Putting it into practice* (Maidenhead, Open University Press).

Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (2009) Developing the theory of formative assessment *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 5-31.

Lau, A. M. S. (2015) 'Formative good, summative bad?' – A review of the dichotomy in assessment literature, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39, 1-17.

Stobart, G. (2008) *Testing times: The uses and abuses of assessment*, New York/London: Routledge.

Taras, M. (2012) Where is the Theory in Assessment for Learning? *Online Educational Research Journal* <http://www.oerj.org> (accessed 16 December 2012)

William, D.; Lee, C.; Harrison, C.; Black, P. (2004) Teachers developing assessment for learning: impact on student achievement. *Assessment in Education*, 11, 49-65.