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## **The Competing Interests of Assessment: An Australian Overview**

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### **Abstract**

The basic goals of assessment are to provide guidance and feedback to the learner. However, universities and schools have a number of other assessment goals which may at times compete and conflict with each other. From one point of view, assessment is used to help guide and transform students. From another view, assessment exists to ensure that minimum standards of entry to a profession are maintained. The growing tension between vocational and liberal education may be polarising teachers, but it is important to understand that each philosophy has value. Teachers can nurture in learners, both the liberal qualities such as knowledge-play and lifelong learning skills, and also guide the development of vocational, marketable skills. It is possible to set assessment activities which inspire and motivate students, promote self-knowledge and creativity, while at the same time build technical skills.

### **Introduction**

The term assessment is derived from the Latin “ad sedere” - to sit beside (Brown and Pendlebury, 1992). From this understanding the basic goals of assessment are to provide guidance and feedback to the learner. However, universities and schools have a number of other assessment goals which may at times compete and conflict with each other. Assessment is used to help, guide, and transform students. At the same time, assessment exists to ensure that minimum standards of entry to a profession are maintained. Finally, ongoing assessment can be used to guide the teaching approach in classrooms.

This paper will review assessment literature examining multiple meanings of assessment, competing philosophical and political interests that influence assessment choices and approaches to assessment research.

### **Historical Context of Assessment**

Historically, knowledge and attitudes about assessment developed according to social or economic shifts that affected education generally. Before the age of technology, education was pursued for the sake of enlightenment and workplace skills were handed down in an apprenticeship system (Bantick, 1992).

The origin of the first national examinations and assessment systems dates to the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the 19th century (Broadfoot, 1979). At that time, quality of output, competition and training for efficiency became important and assessment was influenced by industrial rather than educational goals (Hyland, 1994).

The early twentieth century saw the rise of scientific inquiry. This interest spilled over into education and assessment research from such people as Tyler, Thorndike, Snedden and Prosser (Eisner, 1993; Hyland, 1994) who focused on issues of measurement, rationality, prediction and control. Educational research operated from a positivist framework which assumes that knowledge is objective and exists as a social fact that is not constructed or changeable according to personal perceptions (Cohen and Manion, 1989). Research approaches in line with positivism are predominantly quantitative and use methods such as surveys and experiments (Wilson, 1994).

By the 1960s the focus broadened because of an awareness that standardised achievement tests could not adequately assess the outcomes of new curricula (Dewey, 1966). According to Eisner (1993), because the world economy was booming, society could afford to examine issues such as equity and justice, and quality as well as efficiency. At the same time, an effort to catch up in the space race occurring between the Soviet Union and the United States of America (USA), led to the revision of curricula. There was a concerted effort to challenge students to understand, and not just achieve proficiency. Thus, one can trace the emergence of interest in meta-learning skills as a focus for educational research (Brookfield, 1986).

Educators also began to examine not only what students learn, but the program that was intended to promote learning. Thus, there was a shift away from only measuring student achievement to a broader interest in evaluation as a way of understanding and enhancing educational practice (Eisner, 1993). Program evaluation research in education has been very popular since the 1970s but has been subject to criticism. Simons (1996) argues that experimental evaluation research in education is flawed because it tends to assume that edu-

cational outcomes are generalisable to all classrooms. But outcomes, or student profiles can refer to many things: improved grade averages, positive attitudes toward the subject matter, competent skills or broader perspectives. Cronbach (1985) and McKeachie (1974) argue that results of evaluation research also tend to have limited external validity because extraneous variables such as teaching contexts and climates, learning needs, and teacher and student resources vary widely. Thus, findings from evaluation research may have limited generalizability. Indeed, several authors argue that it is not the generalizability of programs that has merit, but its specificity (Farmer, 1993; Simons, 1996). Results of program evaluation are limited to the specific program under investigation, at that specific time, yet for many years results were erroneously seen as law-like and policies were developed to promote uniformity in teaching, and thus constrained the artistry.

As a result of this growing acknowledgement that regularities and certainty in education may not exist, the 1970s saw a rise in interpretive classroom research (Tom, 1980). The impetus for this paradigm shift appears to have come from advances in sociology, and the increasingly acceptable view that classrooms are places of human interaction, which can not be adequately understood using empirical methods (Candy, 1989; Jackson, 1968; Smith and Geoffrey, 1968). Thus, evaluation of teaching practices broadened even further to encompass a study of schools and classrooms as social organisations. Political movements such as feminism also began to influence the classroom (Culley and Portuges, 1985). The student body became more active (Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994) and teachers began to look at their work in a different way. Feminism offered a critique of paternalistic educational structures that: maintain inequalities within the classroom due to gender, culture, class or authority; overlook processes in learning because of a preoccupation with outcomes; and, promote objective, universal truth instead of acknowledging subjectivity and multiple understandings (Culley and Portuges).

Sociology, psychology and feminism were responsible for refocusing attention on the individual within the learning process and since the mid- 1980s, numerous studies and reports have explored the needs of students and the concern for quality within higher education (Bennett, 1984; Bok, 1986; Wingspread Group on Higher Education [WGHE], 1993). This new-found enthusiasm for rich and detailed research into the dynamics of power and human relationships within the classroom soon waned, however, with worsening economic times.

Fluctuating economies and a renewed concern for efficiency in the 1980s narrowed assessment concerns to again focus on the measurement of the achievement of students. Employers began to criticise schools for producing inadequately prepared graduates (Eisner, 1993) and called for "back to basics" policies such as centralised control and accountability, competency training, performance indicators and peer reviews to influence curriculum planning and work force practices. Many states in the USA introduced evaluation centres to oversee the implementation of policies relating to assessment reporting in schools (Eisner, 1995; Hyman, 1994). In Australia, however, evaluation has tended to remain decentralised and within the control of individual schools or teachers.

### **The Australian Context**

In Australia, attempts to introduce national centres for assessment and evaluation in education have historically been resisted by teachers and others who oppose regulation and threats to autonomy (Boston, 1995). In recent times, however, the world-wide philosophy of economic rationalism has driven the Australian National Training Authority and the Department of Employment, Education and Training to pressure educational institutions to make more effective use of their outcome data in order to promote the detection of at-risk student populations, and school, teacher or student under-performance (Hyland, 1994).

There is general agreement, at least within the Government and the Australian College of Education (ACE), that the education system needs consistent and agreed upon standards about what a child should know at each level of schooling. Thus, in 1992 the ACE Committee on Curriculum and Assessment (CURASS) developed national statements and profiles about eight key learning areas in the first ten years of schooling (Hager, 1994). However, no such agreement exists within higher education (Chappell and Hager, 1994). Quality management within higher education has largely been maintained internally by lecturers and faculties themselves (Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994).

Since the advent of standards, the focus in education, and in industry, has been on developing better outcomes-based reporting of student progress within classrooms using qualitative measurement tools such as benchmarks, competencies and profiles (Boston, 1995). On the macro-educational level, attempts are being made to make more effective use of this outcome data in order to promote the detection of at-risk student populations, and school, teacher or student under-perfor-

mance. At the micro level, the rhetoric is that effective ways of measuring student outcomes will enhance a student's learning because specific targets for achievement will be set. At risk in this process, however, is that reporting of assessment will take priority over learning and that standardisation of what makes effective learning will constrain and devalue individuality.

### **Efficiency and Effectiveness Measures in the Workplace**

Even though universities are resisting the pressure to conform to strategies to improve efficiency, there is growing pressure, especially on vocational courses, for the application of external measures of control and accountability (Boston, 1995; Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). The workplace arena is very different from the educational arena. While educational institutions have resisted external control, the worldwide efficiency and effectiveness movement has required industry to justify and report the outcome of their work (Boston, 1995). As a result, performance criteria, standards and competencies are being constructed and applied in many professions. Indeed, the Australian Government has produced generic key competencies that are to be applied to every Australian worker regardless of discipline. But the competency movement is itself problematic and has been analysed elsewhere (McAllister, 1998). Suffice to say that competency based assessment risks reducing assessment to checklists of skills, and fails to appreciate attributes such as knowledge, ability to problem solve, and positive affective attributes.

### **The Purposes of Assessment**

Eisner (1993) contended that teachers should realise that assessment is not one, but several processes and multiple assessment methods should be utilised in order to judge and develop students.

Assessment involves collecting evidence of student behaviours or outputs of behaviours, making inferences and estimating the worth of those behaviours (Brown and Pendlebury, 1992). Results of that assessment may be used for developmental or judgmental purposes. Feedback, information obtained from the assessment, is an important way for students to know how well they are learning, and specifically how to improve (Brown, 1981). Assessments that aim to be developmental rather than judgmental may have emerged from liberal education, a broad term that refers to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Bantock, 1981). Since the primary focus of liberal education is to improve the quality of life of an individual and to seek enlightenment, assessment of learning is concerned solely with how well the student is reaching their potential. In contrast, vocational education

seeks to prepare skilled personnel for the workplace and the focus of assessment in vocational education is to make judgments about the level of skill each potential worker has achieved. Concern for individual development takes place only after judgments have been made.

Curriculum may be understood to comprise explicit aims such as knowledge of a discipline, implicit aims such as positive values learned passively through engaging with others, as well as the null curricula, which is what the student learns about the world because of what is not taught (Eisner, 1994). Thus, it is important that researchers consider not just what is written in a curriculum document, but how that curriculum is conveyed, and what omissions occur within classroom teaching.

My personal experience as a teacher has led me to suspect that while teachers aim to teach students how to think, a liberal quality, students are more motivated to acquire workplace skills, which is a vocational attribute. To my knowledge, this tension has been overlooked in the literature and in research. Research into assessment practices within such curricula may indicate teachers' and students' values about assessment. Do teachers assess primarily to judge or to develop? Do students and teachers share similar values about assessment? These questions formed the structure of a qualitative study into teacher practice and is reported elsewhere (McAllister, 1997).

Since liberal and vocational education have competing interests and different assessment goals, a discussion of the origins and current meanings of these terms may help to deepen understanding of assessment in students of psychiatric/mental health.

### **Liberal Education**

The distinction between liberal and vocational education goes back to Ancient Greece (Bantick, 1992). Aristotle divided education into liberal and illiberal. General or liberal education was for living rather than earning a living. It was for the free person and leisured citizen and contrasted with the technical education needed by slaves or poorer free citizens, such as crafts-people. Technical, illiberal, or vocational education was discipline-focused and useful. For the class-conscious and truly free it was considered unworthy of studying. At this time, the difference between vocational and liberal education was clearly value-laden.

Also, liberal education was opposed to specialisation and broad based. Illiberal or vocational education, on the other hand, aimed for

productivity in the work place, not just knowledge acquisition. It also was more specific, teaching particular work skills (Morrow, 1992).

While the centuries may have weakened liberal education's association with high social class and extended its relevance to all social classes, there is still evidence of its elite status. Learning Latin, Greek and Mathematics were liberal subjects primarily available to the upper classes of England and Australia. They were subjects chosen for their supposed capacity to train the mind and cultivate the intellect (Sanderson, 1993). According to Sanderson (1993), liberal education has continuing popularity because of its long association with high culture and dignity. Its prestige is drawn from its connection, especially in England, with Church, State and Empire. Liberal education also celebrated diversity and extolled the virtues of learning for its own sake, guarding academic freedom and ensuring that less popular, although just as informative, subjects remain on offer at major universities (Davies, 1995). Australian students who study humanities or languages are evidence of liberal education's survival.

There has been some evolution in the meanings of liberal education. The modern concept of liberal education involves the study of a broad range of subjects, rather than specialisation. It also focuses on mastery of content rather than technique, and is involved in the study of the human and the natural world as well as the world of values (Barcan, 1992). Wiggins (1989) stated that liberal education helps students to refine a variety of cognitive skills: knowing how to listen to someone who knows something one does not know; perceiving which questions to ask for clarifying an idea's meaning or value; being open and respectful enough to imagine that a new and strange idea is worth attending to; and, being inclined to ask questions about past statements, hidden assumptions or confusions. Lewis (1990) also suggests that liberal education, unlike vocational education, has the following characteristics: it seeks to throw further light on the life choices one has to make; it cherishes hesitation rather than habitual responses.

Interestingly, liberal education is also economical. For example, in 1992 in the U.K., an average humanities course cost £2,470, while engineering cost £5,496. According to Sanderson (1993) vocational subjects cost more than twice that of the arts. However, while liberal education courses may be cheaper to conduct, vocational or technical education has become increasingly popular.



**Vocational Education**

There have been several reasons for liberal education losing favour over recent years. Liberal education has been criticised for being ill-matched to modern society (Davies, 1995). Its association with monastic scholarly institutions which are insular and independent of the wider community has resulted in a failure to meet community needs.

According to Bantock (1981), the notion of transfer of training, the need for usefulness of knowledge and specialised experts is making liberal education obsolete. Also, from the 1960s onwards in Australia, liberal education has been denounced as middle-class, and thought to constitute a brainwashing of lower class children. Liberal education began to be considered overly moral, old fashioned, and unsuited to a pluralist, multicultural society, and offended the right of the individual to think things out for themselves (Barcan, 1992).

Some argued that the liberal pursuit of mastery of content was not important; cultivation of feelings was more important (Barcan, 1992). For others, the economic crisis necessitated concentration on vocational skills. The space race in the 1960s has also seen the sacrifice of the humanities in order to salvage the technical sciences (Eisner, 1993).

The attack has also come from the changing focus from academics themselves, who, in tight economic times and job insecurity, became more interested in their material conditions, research and publication, as opposed to teaching liberal arts (Barcan, 1992). Also, the development of sociological beliefs about the construction of knowledge viewed liberal subjects as social constructs of a capitalist society and a vehicle for middle class values (Barcan). Liberal education became something to fight against.

Rather than viewing education as a fight against something, some see it as a fight for vocational education, a much needed solution to making young people more employable (Chipman, 1992). In schools there is now less emphasis on students as self-determining subjects, and more on producing the students that employers want.

However, from one who doubts the positive effects of a vocational education, Marginson argued:

For individuals, the pay off is meant to be greater access to career paths, through a higher level of training. But the result is more likely to be intensified competition for the same small number of job opportunities (Marginson, 1992: 35).

Moreover, because of the collapse of the labour market, students are now seeking vocational education as a substitute for work (Marginson, 1992). In the 1960s, 59% of the 15-19 year-olds were working full-time. In 1992, it was only 19%. The proportion of teenagers working part-time has risen to almost one quarter of the age group, but the majority of part time work is held by full time students (Marginson, 1992).

The 1989 Carrick Report on N.S.W. schools argued that the traditional concept of general education be broadened to include 'economic, technical and practical knowledge within the context of maintaining continuity of the essential knowledge and experience of the past'. The feeling was that because liberal education is a preparation for life it must also include preparation for making a living (Barcan, 1992). The 1991 Finn Report on young people's participation in post compulsory education and training has also called for more vocational education in an increasingly practical world (Bantick, 1992).

Yet, despite the growing interest in vocational education, there is still the belief in the need to expand the mind, develop rational knowledge, and value an aspect of learning which is unique to liberal education: *sprezzatura* — a beautiful word which is Italian for learning to play with knowledge (Lewis, 1990).

Bantock (1981) has suggested that play in the modern world has been reduced to entertainment and distraction, but that it can also be something that expands and enlightens. Knowledge-play can offer balance between effort and rest and it can transform old and familiar ways of knowing into discoveries and breakthroughs. When concepts are examined from different perspectives, fresh insights may be uncovered, boundaries can be extended, and new learning may take place.

In the future, with more people seeking and competing for jobs, full time employment may become an unachievable and irrelevant social goal. Thus, Australians need to carefully consider how to make meaningful use of increasing leisure time. The implication for teachers is that liberal educational skills may become more important. Aristotle's notion of the leisured citizen, without the elitist connotations, is an expanding social reality.

### **The Dichotomy Between Liberal and Vocational Education**

In Australian contemporary literature, a dichotomy appears to have been constructed between liberal education, also referred to as

general education, and vocational education (Morrow, 1992). This dichotomy is reinforced by divides between institutions such as TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and Universities; between authorities such as teachers and employers; and between processes for gaining credentials either from the workplace or centres for higher learning (Morrow, 1992). TAFE has traditionally been seen to be more vocationally oriented and Universities are considered more liberal. Also, teachers and employers differ in the extent to which they think education should be vocational (Bantick, 1992). There are several educationalists who believe that the dichotomy (and the hierarchy) between liberal and vocational education is not a natural one (Dewey, 1966; Hyland, 1994; Roth, 1992). In 1929 Whitehead insisted the 'antithesis between a technical and liberal education is fallacious. In the opinion of Whitehead in 1929 'There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical' (Whitehead, 1929: 5). Contemporary scholars still follow this lead. In 1992 Morrow insisted 'Vocational education should not be equated with training, and while it is not the same as general education, it is consistent with it (Morrow, 1992: 18).

Collins also called for a new conception other than the dichotomized vocational-versus-general ways of thinking about curriculum when he argued 'We need also to teach young people that a deeper and richer personal and community life matters, regardless of how wealthy they are or their country is (Collins, 1992: 46).

According to Collins, vocational advocates like contributors to the Finn Report were fixated on economic recovery at the expense of concern for young people with their difficulties, aspirations and despair. The Finn Report attempted to resolve the tension between vocational and general education by recommending a general education which focused on processes and skills, rather than content, which is a liberal educational concern. The report recommended six key educational competencies, but overlooked the fact that a traditional content-based curriculum, well taught, can also impart skills and mental training (Bantick, 1992).

Sanderson (1993) also argued that the assumed superiority of the academic over the vocational is not inevitable or irreversible. In France, Germany and Nordic countries, technical universities are considered equal or superior to academic institutions. The need to maintain standards in handcrafts such as glass making, porcelain and woodcarving has preserved the prestige associated with vocational training in these countries. Hence, there are important contextual

aspects to this issue. Currently in Australia, health care workers in particular are experiencing pressure from industry to change the nature of their work. Gee and Lankshear have explained the 'fast capitalism' that all Australian industry is undergoing. This reform is calling for 'smart workers' and a 'clever country'. The ideal workplace is one that stresses 'collaboration, active problem-solving, learning in context, alternative assessment, communities of practice and the integration of technology...the destruction of hierarchy, borders, divisions and stasis' (Gee and Lankshear, 1995: 5).

Gee and Lankshear (1995) point out that this vision for a smarter world is deeply paradoxical and has a dark side. If workers were actually encouraged to think for themselves they may begin to question the ends and goals of the workplace and upset the status quo. Thus, in reality, bosses remain motivated to continue to control the workers and this control can be seen in common workplace practices. For example, "self-directed" learning packages which aim to help health care workers revise clinical skills are actually far from self-directed. These packages contain predetermined content, materials and goals and, therefore, do not encourage the student to engage in self-discovery. The worker is not required to engage in self-discovery, but in acquiescence.

The quest for quality service may also lead to the realisation that "quality" may have different meanings for employers than for the individual worker. Quality may come to mean "which worker can do the job as efficiently and more economically" and result in a levelling down in qualifications, expertise and educational preparation.

Distinctions between similar work roles are also emerging in order to offer career structure and thus, the move towards destroying hierarchies, is itself being replaced with a hierarchy of a different kind: divisions between the workers where once no formal lines existed.

Furthermore, workers who educate themselves and seek career advancement may find it harder to get a good job because 'smart workers' are needed in lower numbers. In this 'fast capitalist' world it is no longer sufficient for workers to just 'pass tests'. According to Gee and Lankshear (1995: 7) 'they must develop 'higher-order thinking', 'real understanding', 'situated expertise', the ability to 'learn to learn' and to solve problems at the 'edge of their expertise'. Ironically, then, industries are calling for workers to be more liberally skilled but are complaining that they are vocationally inept.

### **An Awkward Tension**

For the classroom teacher, the tension between liberalism and vocationalism is especially apparent in the way assessment is practised. Sometimes teachers may find themselves attempting to negotiate incompatible goals and in this way, neither vocationalism nor liberalism are acceptable choices. To fail a student may assure maintenance of a quality product for the workplace, but risks the accusation of elitism and insensitivity to individual performance. Thus, there is conflict between vocational and liberal goals. To concede a pass may be benevolent humanism, but may also result in lowered standards. To keep on helping until the student passes raises questions of equity for other students, and actual authorship of the final product (Taylor and McWilliam, 1995). Finally, in the current climate of fee-paying students, or workplace sponsored students, the course becomes a commodity that has been purchased, and teachers may feel pressured to pass students because student failure may reflect a failure of the course to supply the goods, rather than indicate poor student performance. Clearly, there is a pressing need to understand and work out ways to overcome the tension between vocationalism and liberalism.

### **Resolving the Dichotomy**

Sound education requires a balance between vocational skills and liberal knowledge and attitudes, although negotiating that balance will be tricky. Skill-based practice without theory is not the answer. Yet, theory without technique is also problematic. However, a curriculum that teaches core liberal subjects in a variety of practical ways, without diluting them of substance or imposing specific ideologies, is possible. Wirth (1994) called for a reconstituted curriculum that blends liberal education with vocational education. Many years ago Holmes argued similarly when he said:

Mental and moral habits (such as) . . . 'thoroughness', 'order', 'concentration', 'self reliance' may be taught by precept and example in the work of any subject. . . . Science is as good as Latin, and mechanical drawing may be better than either. Much depends on the ethical enthusiasm, the insight, the sympathy, and the leadership of the teacher; much on the methods of teaching and class management he [sic] employs (Holmes, 1914: 293-294).

Holmes' point is that meta-cognitive skills, perhaps the essence of sound liberal education, can be learned in even the most "vocational" course if a skilled teacher is there to teach them. Therefore, the teacher's role is crucial in bringing a balance of cognitive and practical skills to the mental health classroom and may be an important variable affecting learning outcomes.

In the 'fast capitalist' world, there is growing distrust in the ability of schools and universities to teach the skills needed in the changing workplace (Gee and Lankshear, 1995). Teachers should be aware of and responsive to these changes. One way to close growing rifts between the workplace and professional ideals is in the classroom. Assessment methods available to teachers should attempt to balance theory and practice, and support the learning styles of their students and their roles as health educators. Teachers should focus on developing metacognitive skills as well as practical skills. This can be done by instruction and by offering students the opportunity to perform and hone newly developing skills by way of a variety of assessment activities. The role of the teacher will be to guide, give feedback and ultimately judge mastery.

### **A Tripartite Approach**

While one might think that it is employers who favour vocational training, current research does not support this assumption. In a recent report on undergraduate education, Candy, Crebert and O'Leary (1994) argued that employers themselves think that practical knowledge is less important than the cognitive skills of communication, teamwork, learning to learn, initiative and flexibility into the teaching and learning. Employers want graduates who can work under minimum supervision, with an ability to learn new skills and procedures, rather than be equipped with a finite body of knowledge that will soon be out-dated and irrelevant. Employers believe that curricula need to move away from a focus on technique and content towards a concern for liberal or generic skills which include: analysis, synthesis and evaluation, critical thinking, construction and reconstruction of meaning and reflective practice. Ironically, the vocational world itself is arguing against vocational education! But, rather than conceptualise sound curricula involving a balance between two choices vocationalism and liberalism, Candy et al. see education as comprising three components: the technical knowledge of the subject, a wider general education, and personal and transferable skills and attitudes.

### **A Shift Towards Caring**

Noddings (1995) also offers an alternative to the dichotomy by proposing an ethic of care in education so that the purpose of schooling be altered from a preoccupation with academic standards, to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people. She argued that liberal education is outmoded for today's students: it does not help people live intelligently, morally or happily. Noddings does not argue that subject matter is worthless, but liberal educa-

tion's ideology of control, wherein students are forced to study narrowly prescribed curricula, does nothing to foster critical thinking, creativity and novelty. However, a rigid preoccupation with accountability which is a vocational education aim also does not necessarily meet desirable outcomes. Noddings contends that competencies and standards which are forced on students may encourage resistance rather than enlightenment.

Instead, Noddings (1995) suggests that we must relax the impulse to control, be clear about our educational aims, encourage self evaluation, remove hierarchies such as that which exists between liberal and vocational education, and teach an ethic of care so that students learn how to practise competently in a safe learning environment.

This review of current literature, has illuminated complexities and competing issues about assessment. Historical forces which have operated within the world and within Australia have influenced the focus for research into assessment. Assessment research has tended to focus on issues relating to efficiency and outcome. Strategies to measure and quantify learning have also been thoroughly researched. Evaluation research has tended to overtake an interest in assessment so that programs and outcomes, rather than processes for student achievement, have been the focus for study. Consequently, assessment as part of the process of teaching and learning is poorly understood. Little information exists about assessment *within* teaching, which would assist teachers in devising curriculum and implementing pedagogy.

Tension between liberal and vocational aims exists within education and influences assessment choices. Liberal qualities such as self-awareness, thoughtfulness, rational knowledge and creativity are all valuable student attributes because they pave the way for life-long learning and flexible practitioners; but these qualities may be overlooked in assessment practices which focus on procedural or technical skills. The acquisition of procedural skill is a driving aim in vocational education and forms the basis of the competency movement within Australia.

The tendency for educational research and practice to focus on outcomes of learning has produced an imbalance between these dual purposes of assessment (Hyman, 1994; Eisner, 1993; Rowntree, 1987). Also important is the teacher's role in guiding students to learn from their mistakes, acknowledge their strengths and identify their weak-

nesses. Assessment should attempt to reach a balance between judging and guiding students.

At the same time, teachers should appreciate that assessment is a necessary, but not exclusive aspect, of teaching and learning. A preoccupation with assessment may encourage students to be externally motivated, learning only because they are being assessed. Thus, teachers should design curricula with attention to balancing assessment with other pedagogical practices such as listening to student experiences, sharing expertise, learning from others, having fun with knowledge, regularly evaluating the course, and finally contributing to teaching and research.

Students may have diverse learning styles and thus require multiple assessment approaches. While students may have diverse approaches to learning, teachers retain a role in promoting deep and achieving levels of learning. Therefore, diversity should not equate with superficiality.

### **Future Directions for Research**

*Techniques* for assessment have been a popular subject for research over recent years (Brandt, 1992; Halpern et al., 1993; Murphy and Torrance, 1988; Ozar, 1994). This research has contributed to the debate about the 'proper ends' of education but has tended to explore assessment as if it were a collection of parts able to be dismantled and understood out of context. According to Hyman (1994), this has left a gap in the research resulting in 'unanswered ... practical questions concerning assessment goals, methods, and applications for specific campus settings' (Hyman, 1994: 21).

Research approaches which move beyond a technical rational view of teaching and assessment are needed. Assessment as a classroom activity, as an aspect of the teacher's craft, as an inextricable part of teaching and learning, can be explored, understood and improvements made, if holistic, interpretive and critical approaches to research are undertaken. To gain a clearer picture of sound assessment practices relevant to the subject and the local setting, researchers should not just be testing outcomes of programs but observing individual teacher practice and student learning in process. Assessment practices operationalise an educational institution's values (Eisner, 1994; Rowntree, 1987) and a good way to analyse practices is through classroom description and observation. Descriptive observation of classroom activity, through methods such as case study (Simons, 1996; Yin, 1994; Donmoyer, 1990) or narratives (Jalongo and



Isenberg, 1995; McMillen, 1996; Sandelowski, 1994) would produce rich, evocative information likely to extend the conversation on this important component of teaching and learning.

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