

Fit for purpose or simply flabby? The need for alternative forms of assessment for enterprise education in England.

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Abstract

This paper is written from the context of publicly funded qualifications, exploring the impact that this has on assessment and practice. The phrase 'assessment must be fit for purpose' frequently appears in relation to national standards, the award of qualifications and requirements for reliability. The nature and meaning of the purposes of assessment are not always clear to users and in any case are constantly evolving in line with changing expectations and needs. Particular difficulties exist in relation to locally generated forms of enterprise education where recognition of achievement and the encouragement of enterprise can be difficult to reconcile with a requirement for compliance with national standards and systems. This paper describes current developments in enterprise education and its assessment for nationally recognised awards in England and considers questions of authenticity, reliability, and purpose. The functions of assessment in enterprise education are discussed and applications of connoisseurship and performance mastery in enabling local initiatives to meet national standards considered and reported on.

Fit for purpose?

A Google search using the terms *assessment "fit for purpose"* resulted in about 690,000 responses, narrowing this to the United Kingdom only still produced about 531,000 responses. Why is it that 'fitness for purpose' is often cited in decisions about what is a 'good' or 'unacceptable' approach to assessment, when the extent to which the term is used should raise the question of whose or indeed what purpose is it fit for anyway? Not only

are the purposes of assessment not always clear to users or receivers, they are rarely acknowledged or made explicit. As an example, traditional assessment systems in the National Qualifications Framework (England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) have attempted to fulfil both a desire for feedback on progression (of individual learner, groups of learners or curriculum) and a requirement that serves accountability and rank ordering. (Torrance, 1986) and therein lies a genuine tension of purpose. As Sanders & Horn, (1995, p.9) note:

The issue is not whether one form of assessment is intrinsically better than another. No assessment model is suited for every purpose. The real issue is choosing appropriately among indicator variables and applying the most suitable model to render them. It is necessary to determine what information is sufficient to each purpose before deciding upon the form of assessment to be used. When a variety of valid and reliable assessment methods exist, it is parochial and ineffectual to adhere to only one, asserting that it is in all instances superior.

The 'fitness for purpose' question is frequently more concerned with the outcomes of assessment and the public (aka political) 'value' of these than with explicitly stating what the purposes are and why the form or forms of assessment are appropriate to this. In Davies, M. (2005) the author quotes (Stoll et al, (2003a), and states that:

'Somewhere along the way, in the name of educational reform, policy makers may have confused structure with purpose, measurement with accomplishment, means with ends, compliance with commitment, and teaching with learning.'

There is a need for public recognition of assessment that is 'fit for purpose' (Tomlinson, 2004, p.23) and this is a somewhat polarised debate that seems set to continue within the qualifications world as policy makers, curriculum writers and academics debate what 'fit-for-purpose' really entails. On the one hand debate has swirled around school delivery –

mixing in standards of Literacy and Numeracy, media assaults on A level and GCSE probity, concern about trusting teacher judgements, coursework, even standards of behaviour. On the other, the UK Government has moved strongly to promote vocational education and training. It is driving parity of esteem and funding to vocational (and occupational) qualifications, for example through changes to school “league tables” and the mandatory inclusion of Key Skills. GNVQ’s and the Specialised Diplomas, to be delivered in schools in 2008. There are even so-called ‘applied’ A Levels. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has accredited some workplace qualifications for use pre-19 where assessment includes witness statements.

Until the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published the Code of Practice covering all funded qualifications, there had been little cross fertilisation between exams in school subjects and funded vocational and workplace/occupational qualifications and training. Each had its own domain, methods and culture. Further approximately two thirds of all qualifications for adults are not accredited, since accreditation is deemed to be inflexible for individuals and not easily adapted to meet local needs. On the other hand A Levels, GCSEs and National Curriculum developed highly complex and nuanced processes. This involves subject communities, and the only four Awarding Bodies licensed to offer these examinations and regulators, and is open to influence by Ministers. However as vocational awards have started to be taken widely in schools and by high flyers, there has been a clash of world-views. There are strongly differing communities of practice, interest and allegiance, so that agreement on ‘fitness for purpose’ is rather like Buddhism being judged through the lens of Christianity.

Assessment presents challenges because of the rise of vocational education. In England there is now tension between the qualifications

industry and public perceptions of 'acceptable' examination approaches to assessing local or personal performance. This is clearly seen in relation to enterprise education, which is currently a powerful policy driver across education and training. Enterprise has three factors – attitudes/behaviours, transferability of skills and performance – that are rarely assessed in academic examinations. This raises specific challenges in balancing repeatability of judgements (reliability) with attesting to national norms of performance (validity).

Enterprise is a fluid, portmanteau concept covering employability, experience of and performance in the work place and lifelong learning. It changes in relation to age of the learner but stresses the importance of:

*“ ... being able to do things rather than just know about them...”
(Confederation of British Industry Conference 2001, applauded comment from the floor on the widely held belief by employers that most recruits cannot function in the workplace to any acceptable level).*

It manifests in ways such as: new UK Government sponsored qualifications - Specialised Diplomas, new styles of centres – Academies, Modern Apprenticeships, entitlement pre-16 to enterprise education as well as revisions to the six Key Skills of:

Application of Number
Communication
Information and Communication Technology
Improving Own Learning and Performance
Problem Solving
Working with Others
(<http://www.keyskillssupport.net/organising/specstandardsguidance/>)

The growing emphasis on enterprise (and vocational) education and policies related to it has resulted in an important change in expectations and demands because for the first time employers now have a formal input into vocational qualification development and its public funding.

Research shows that, beyond secure Maths and English, employer expectations constellate around behaviours and attitudes. These are specific, often sector-related & prioritised. Employer expectations are that they will be taught to the majority of learners. At the heart of such expectations are notions of enterprise and employability. These have been codified at a generic level in the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (England), Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) framework and Wider Key Skills. Specified behaviours and attitudes are increasingly being included in National Occupational Standards, such as the UK The Small Firms Development Initiative (SFEDI) standards. While this does not lower the importance of sector specific vocational knowledge, skills and understanding, it does tax current assessment assumptions and systems to award against these 'personal' attributes and not skew appropriate approaches to teaching and learning that flow from their inclusion.

Enterprise is clearly seen in most cross-sectoral qualifications, for example management, marketing and customer service. While assessment must attest to candidates' knowledge and skills in, for example, sales *per se* – the quality of candidates' performance rests on applying transferable attitudes and behaviours. Whatever the assessment approach, it must give a receiver confidence in the credibility of the award and the awarding process. Such qualifications again throw into sharp relief the importance of clarity in the use of the phrase 'fit for purpose'. Purposes are frequently assumed or implicit rather than stated explicitly and agreed as a significant part of the processes of teaching, learning, and assessment. Further, in response to employer and adult learner criticisms of the perceived inflexibility of the vocational qualifications offered, England is about to launch a unit and credit based system for funded vocational qualifications. This is fundamentally different from the approach that, for example, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in

England has exercised in its regulatory role which to date, has only allowed whole qualifications to be accredited. Such changes offer significant challenges for traditional assessment approaches and expectations of credibility and reliability. Concerns range across whether assessing performance reliably based on ephemeral evidence is possible to whether gaining units over time really offers the same quality of 'pass' as sitting unseen papers on a given day.

Arts qualifications – a different paradigm

In the United Kingdom generally, arts qualifications have successfully grappled with such matters over many years. We suggest that the effectiveness of arts approaches provide a model for assessing enterprise (i.e. attitude and behaviour) in education and training contexts. Arts qualification structures, including mark schemes, levels (A-E or Pass, Merit & Distinction) arise from, and indeed develop, the community of practice from which the work comes. (For an exploration of why this is the case it is instructive to consider the work of Karl Popper and in particular the concept of world 3.¹) There is an expectation of change over time and a clear requirement for authenticity of practice. It is well accepted that arts teachers are able to rank work effectively. Recognising level boundaries is part of the process of awarding. Recognition in the context of community of practice has in its root Latin meaning to "... perceive something ... all ready known". This is opposite of psychometric testing and various forms of criterion referencing or multiple choice tests as it anticipates open ended responses, creativity and the use of judgement in situations where there are many variables. What is being applied is expert or critical judgement in the form described by Eisner (1998a) as

Popper is quoted by Rafe Champion (<http://www.the-rathouse.com/popobjectknow.html>) as saying his essay 'Indeterminism is not enough' in Encounter, April, 1973. "By "world 3" I mean the world of the products of the human mind. Although I include works of art in world 3 and also ethical values and social institutions (and this, one might say, societies), I shall confine myself largely to the world of scientific libraries, to books, to scientific problems, and to theories, including mistaken theories."

'educational connoisseurship'. Communities of arts practice, of interest and allegiance have actively and critically developed and exploited the use of connoisseurship as a means of assessment in UK examinations.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a connoisseur as "one aesthetically versed in any subject, esp., one who understands the details, technique, or principles of a fine art; one competent to act as a critical judge of an art, or in matters of taste (e.g. of wines etc.)". Three characteristics of a connoisseur may be inferred from this, (i) the person is qualified to do so, (ii) the exercise of critical faculties is based on knowledge and (iii) an ability to make comparisons in relation to perceived qualities. For Eisner 'educational connoisseurship' means an art of appreciation arising from expertise in the domain of education and educational criticism as the art of and the vehicle for disclosure of judgements to a wider audience (For an exploration of his thinking about this see, for example, Eisner (1985) and (1998b). Stating that:

*“Educational connoisseurship is the art of appreciation.
Educational criticism is the art of disclosure”*

Eisner describes connoisseurs as people who enjoy and understand and critics as "people who transform the contents of connoisseurship into a public language that makes it possible for others less sophisticated in that particular domain, to notice the qualities that critic writes about." Eisner puts forward the view that that anyone involved in education has the right and responsibility to be a critic, but that certain people must be trained in order for an authentic connoisseurship to be exercised.

The writings of Michael Polanyi (1958) provide valuable understandings in relation to connoisseurship, particularly in relation to notions of knowledge and its transmission through tradition, experience and forms of

apprenticeship. Gelwick (1996) in an overview of the life and work of Polanyi observes that:

“Apprenticeship is a central example in the philosophy of Polanyi for showing that knowing is a personal activity with tacit coefficients Professional training in a community of experts who teach through their example and demonstrations was one of the clues to how that knowledge of "things we cannot tell" explicitly is passed on. There is an ocean of tacit coefficients that support the articulate parts of our knowing, and Polanyi had learned this in his medical studies.”

In doing so, he provides us with a summary of Polanyi's insights that are applicable to both connoisseurship and communities of practice. It is this link between connoisseurship and the community of practice in which it is situated, which provides judgements with both credibility and authority. If either the community of professional practice or the wider community of practice to which this is related, does not accept that the connoisseur has demonstrated the expertise, authority and repeatability of judgement quality (primarily its comparability and consistency), then the judgements made will not be accepted as either dependable or credible. This means that it is the connoisseur who must meet the minimum standards for expertise and repeatability of judgement, rather than the task or the conditions for performance. This focus on the expertise and repeatability of judgement is important in any consideration of reliability but particularly in relation to assessments of the processes of enterprise and their resulting forms of performance.

This means that assessment of enterprise in education is more concerned with aspects of process than products, like assessment in the arts, it does not start with 100% and deduct marks for wrong answer. In practice there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers but only responses that for example, vary in the degree of appropriateness, validity of response and control. This creates an innate challenge to any notion of there being value in applying

some fixed 'correct' answer resulting from assessment in the arts and this is arguably true when assessing enterprise. This poses a challenge as employers expect to recognise that a 'pass' is a reasonably secure indicator of future performance or employability. This results in conflicting notions of what is and is not 'fit for purpose', a situation made more complex because the assessment industry is required to comply with national standards and systems, to promote forms of assessment and examination that conform to traditional notions of reliability and to protect their business and investments in a competitive market. Attempts to resolve these challenges by specifying 'observable' outcomes in relation to skills and competencies have not proved as successful as their proponents had hoped with employers and learners increasingly being led to question the value of such approaches, especially where judgements are required in complex situations with many inter-related variables.

Enterprise education is currently faced with either using assessment methods that are perceived as traditional and trustworthy but which lack authenticity (and frequently result in spurious notions of reliability, see for instance Cresswell (1986) who citing work by Pilliner (1969) and others indicates that no examination can ever have an accuracy of better than ± 1 grade); or using assessments of the kind seen in National Vocational Qualifications, which in somewhat different ways suffer similar problems as well as from a lack of credibility. In practice both of these alternatives might be described as 'flabby' as neither are fit for the purpose of assessing enterprise in educational settings.

What is needed is an explicit and agreed understanding not just of the purposes of enterprise education but also of what may be properly assessed, together with the limitations of such assessments. Without an explicit understanding of purpose that is shared by all involved, assessment lacks validity and consequently is unreliable. Moreover,

purpose needs to be continually redefined for various groups (e.g. the public, students, teachers, examination boards). For example, Robbins (1998) reporting on research into the dependability of examination coursework and assessment concluded that purpose is not static and that purpose is not always shared between teachers and the examining board or awarding body. Wilmut (1999) citing this research states that:

“... the values made explicit in a syllabus are not necessarily those which underpin learning in the classroom and the formative assessment used there.” (p.11)

So quite apart from any notions of the purpose of assessing enterprise education that employers or government ministers may have, notions of purpose held by awarding bodies, teachers and examiners are likely to be at variance both with each other and with public expectations. The consequence is that the public thinks one thing is being delivered, the examination board claims that this is being done and the teachers (and probably external examiners or moderators as well) assessing what courses have set out to deliver, are actually doing something rather different. The result of this is a reduction in the validity and reliability of the examination, and reduced public confidence in the system. These are problems are further compounded when the sort of perceptions noted earlier in relation to employers and the public in general become involved in an area like enterprise education where purposes and outcomes are still evolving.

Two things are being argued. Firstly, that there must be shared purpose if an appropriate form of assessment is to be selected and used, and that (i) this purpose must be agreed by key stakeholders, if (ii) consent is to be given, in order to (iii) allow the exercise of authority, which ensures (iv) the power to make the necessary judgements, in order that (v) appropriate outcomes that reflect agreed purposes may be achieved, as is illustrated

in Figure 1.

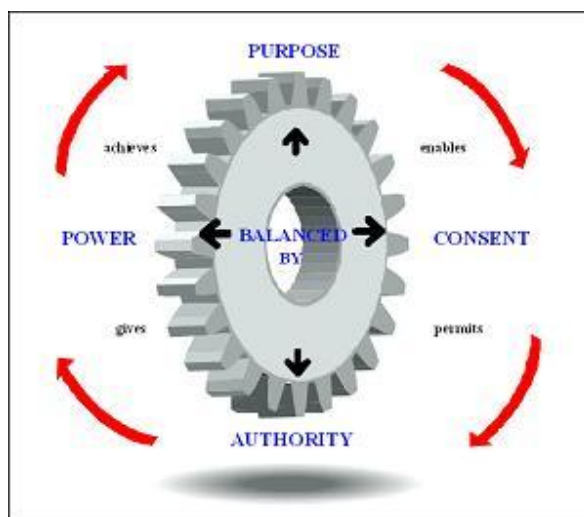


Figure 1. Purpose, Consent, Authority and Power

Secondly, and in a similar way, a connoisseurship model of assessment is only feasible if (i) for an assessment to be made, it is clear that (ii) the knowledge previously described of the assessor is sufficient, to enable (iii) experience to be applied in order to, (iv) create the decisions, that (v) allow assessment to take place. This is illustrated in Figure 2., and illustrates that assessment, knowledge, experience and decisions are balanced by each other and that all are necessary for the declaration of a result. In both cases the use of a gear wheel and arrows is intended to signify that these are processes and not a single events.

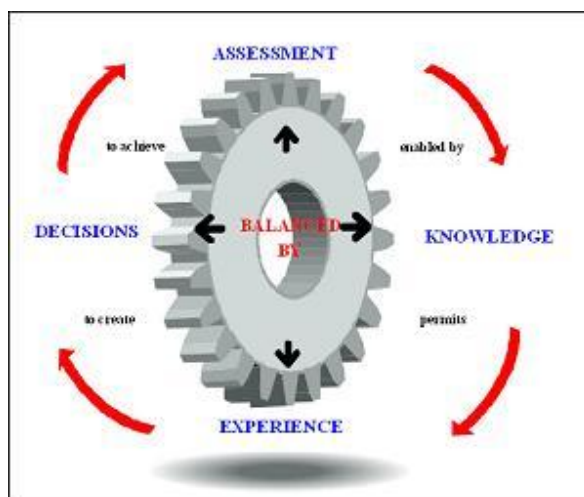


Figure 2. Assessment, Knowledge, Experience and Decisions

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England describes enterprise education as:

“a key element of the non-statutory work-related learning framework, aiming to encourage young people to be more enterprising. Enterprise education consists of enterprise capability, supported by financial capability and economic and business understanding.

Enterprise capability is the ability to handle uncertainty and respond positively to change, to create and implement new ideas and ways of doing things, to make reasonable risk/reward assessments and act upon them in one’s personal and working life. It can be described as: innovation, risk-management, a ‘can-do’ attitude and the drive to make ideas happen.”
http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/6th-form-schools/68_1989.htm Accessed 11/07/2007

In disparaging the worth of vocational education commentators routinely draw on negative sector comment about recruiting from media courses as examples of the mismatch is between what is taught and what employers need. Responses to QCA consultation show that for employers it is performance, such as described in Wider Keys, that employers regard as

missing. What is the purpose of Media Studies qualifications? Their popularity and uptake is increasing. The QCA qualifications database records qualifications using 'media studies' as a context for behaviour management skills as much as for occupational, job specific awards for say, lighting cameramen. In practice media studies are not only used for different cohorts of learners but for a broad range of purposes that are not necessarily specific to careers in the media sector.

Enterprise also inhabits a broad landscape. Enterprise entitlement, like work experience, is seen as part of general education at Key Stage 3 and not assessed. Unsurprisingly there are no GCSEs or A Levels syllabuses in a subject called Enterprise, since values, skills and behaviours can only be demonstrated in and through activity. However there are vocational qualifications drafted with explicit, assessment requirements for enterprise. Few would suggest that GCSE written examination papers can reliably award marks for innovation, risk-management, a 'can-do' attitude and the drive to make ideas happen, any more than a high grade in A Level Business Studies warrants a bank loan for small business start-up in floristry. Critical aspects of performance (or process) – be it musicality, a sense of placement in dance or empathy in customer service – go beyond knowledge, technique or skill (outcomes) which are more readily assessed by traditional means. Such local and personal qualities and behaviours are critical in reliably awarding performance. Can the current public system adapt to reflect employer expectations and reliably award performance in terms of behaviours and attitudes?

The dominance of traditional subject framing has not prove to be too great a hurdle for arts qualifications accreditation. Ranging from Foundation Diploma in Art & Design to Grade Exams in Dance, Performing Arts and Music, arts qualifications have derogated or 'interpreted' elements of the Code of Practice. National standardisation is not seen as problematic

because the community of practice are in on-going formal dialogue. Enterprise is similar, if less mature. There are no criteria (in a strict sense) in art and design qualifications – descriptors show an expert assessor the key discriminating factors that reveal a particular grade. There are additional formal processes that ensure standardisation.

Enterprise qualifications will need to refine their purpose and use of context, in turn allowing the arguments about fitness for purpose to be matched to requirements for reliability and manageability. It is no more effective to embed enterprise so completely that it is invisible nor to disaggregate enterprise so that it is de-contextualised. Usually qualifications use writing-up project work to evidence these behaviours and attitudes. However much of this activity is ephemeral, locally dependent and not amenable to report writing – a skill in its own right that can act as a gatekeeper for evidence. Musicality cannot be authentically marked off the page. So it may be neglected in favour of what ‘can’ be assessed easily.

Can the public pressure for certainty – e.g. no more coursework, traditional exams - be accommodated within a valid enterprise awarding process that addresses behaviours and attitudes? Does the current state of the qualifications industry allow more radical approaches to gain ground?

One approach pioneered by the UK based Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL) suggests that the sort of radical approach needed is possible. The GQAL Personal, Employability, Achievement, and Reflection for Learning Programme (PEARL) is a pioneering learning framework for assessing, delivering and measuring employability and the personal competencies or development of the learner. It is not a teaching and learning syllabus with curriculum content but rather a teaching and learning framework which also

acts as an assessment model. In essence it is a tool for modelling and building employability and personal development skills.

Personal Employability Achievement and Reflection for Learning awards are offered by the UK based Graded Qualifications Alliance² and recognise achievement and ability for employment, and social and personal development. These include (but are not limited to) skills of organisational, social, cultural awareness, problem-solving and creativity. The awards are accessible to learners in schools and colleges, marginalised groups and those who are already in employment. The awards use the progressive mastery model of learning common in Graded Examinations of Music, Dance and Drama. Assessment is of performance and uses a 'show me what you can do and tell me why you did it' approach which encourages assessment for learning and enables a final assessment by an independent assessor. Assessments take into account the learners performance, underpinning knowledge and performance over time. Programmes of study involve learners in discussions, group work tasks, practical activities and interviews. There are two awards at Entry Level and eight Grades covering National Qualification Framework Levels 1 – 3 that applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Learners enter for assessment at the Grade that is appropriate to their level of ability. Awards of a Pass, Pass with Merit or Pass with Distinction are available to those who match or exceed the minimum standards at each Grade. Accredited in 2007 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority as a pilot, at the time of writing approximately 2000 participants have either completed or are currently participating in the programme after its launch in Manchester, England.

² The Graded Qualifications Alliance is an Awarding Body accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England) that provides awards and qualifications focusing on the mastery of performance. Its Full Members are: The British Theatre Dance Association, Manchester College of Arts & Technology and the University of England.

This programme is described more fully in the paper: ***New demands, changing values: applications of connoisseurship to the assessment of personal qualities and attributes in diverse cultural and educational settings*** which is also being presented at this conference.

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