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HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE: MEASUREMENT, ASSESSMENT AND ATTAINMENT.

Some of the most contentious stories in education are the stories of assessment. Here the debate about educational values and purpose is brought into sharp relief as what seem like ever-more narrow forms of ‘credentialism’ are pitched against the role of education in social progress. ‘Assessment’ in all its various guises and interpretations is central to this debate.

In this chapter I utilise elements of the ‘5Rs’ framework as suggested by our editors, in order to: (1) highlight the ways in which the practice and uses of assessment have been applied through policy in recent years; (2) consider the effect this has had on teaching, learning and the culture of schools; (3) suggest ways in which this dominant, regressive narrative is refracted in practice and ways in which it can be questioned and resisted. I argue for a continuing renewal of assessment as a formative and interactive aspect of teaching and learning where more critical and empowering pedagogies and learning identities can develop. My experience as a primary school teacher, a university-based teacher educator and a researcher of education leads me to conclude that while the negative aspects of assessment systems for accountability are clear enough, assessment itself does not need to have a stifling effect on schools if teachers and learners focus their efforts on formative assessment which supports learning through enquiry. I believe that genuine formative assessment involving teachers and learners themselves can contribute towards a critical pedagogy that empowers learners and offers resistance and counter-balance to the dominance of a data-driven, outcome-led sensibility.

This consideration of policy, culture and renewal of assessment is necessary for a number of reasons, and not least because as Fisher argues, an ideological position such as that represented in the accountability culture ‘can never be really successful until it is naturalised, and it cannot be naturalised while it is still thought of as a value rather than a fact’ (2009, p.16). While my narrative analysis is located within the education system in England, this discussion is keenly relevant in a range of international contexts as assessment becomes an evermore central tool of control within neoliberal education policy throughout the world (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Smith, 2016). One of the defining features of neoliberal education seems to be that while its policies and character are mediated to a certain extent by governments and party politics, it has tended to transcend them through a range of international bodies, associations and fiscal alliances that promote it as part of their own agenda (Harvey, 2005; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Giroux, 2015).

The editors of the current collection propose the 5Rs of ‘remembering’, ‘regression’, ‘reconceptualisation’, ‘refraction’ and ‘renewal’ as a way of rethinking educational possibilities and offering a partial antidote to the rhetoric, promotion and ‘normalisation’ of the neoliberal reshaping of education that has occurred over the last 30 years or so. Through this process of, identification, characterisation and analysis within my theme of assessment, I seek the 6th ‘R’ of ‘resistance’ because, without underestimating the threat they are under, I do not accept that schools can no longer be a site of educational growth and social progress. I do not suggest that shifting the way that we think about and engage with assessment will bring down the wall of neoliberal education policy but assessment is a key brick in that wall which is worth trying to loosen if change is going to come. Teachers can be the central actors in such a task as they engage with, interpret and respond to policy at the micro-political level of the classroom through their interaction with the children and young people that they work with (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002).

To tell the story, I draw upon a bricolage of literature, policy and commentary, and include examples from my own experience alongside some narrative accounts from teachers gathered through a series of interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014. The extracts of narrative illustrate the ways in which policy change is ‘refracted’ individually and collectively. This draws upon the autoethnographic and life-history approach I have previously taken in shaping a theoretically developed understanding of how the professional identity of teachers and teacher educators are both formed and represented by narratives of experience (Hayler, 2011; Hayler and Edmond, 2013; Williams and Hayler, 2016). Centrally, the individual stories of experience need to be culturally located to avoid de-contextualisation and individualisation in this analysis. The aim, as Goodson (2013) makes clear, is to ‘provide a story of individual action within a theory of context’ (p.31). The concept of ‘refraction’ as explained by Goodson and Rudd (2012) offers the opportunity to consider these glimpses of narrative as examples of how individuals and groups respond in different ways to policies on assessment in schools. They offer some illumination of how practitioners make meaning of their own lives and work in the face of imposed reform. This challenges the deterministic analysis of totalising power and ideology where learners and teachers can be framed as merely passive and conforming subjects caught within the

waves of imposed change. As Bullough and Knowles contend in their study of becoming a teacher: 'Individuals are never passive receptors of social norms or presented content; they always remake them in some fashion' (1991, p138). Sociological studies of schools and the socialisation of teachers demonstrate that teachers remake policy, old and new, in a range of fashions (Lacey, 1977; Blase, 1988; Nias, 1989; Zeichner and Gore, 1990; Goodson, 1992; Kelchtermans and Ballett, 2002; Achinstein, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2005).

Lacey's (1977) concept of a 'sociology of the possible' as a lens through which the collective and individual 'strategic compliance' of teachers can be understood is most useful here as it implies a 'purposive, guiding, autonomous, element within individual and group behaviour' (p67), where policy/reform meets pedagogy within the classroom:

The individual actor, who is at the intersection of 'biography' and the 'social situation', has some freedom to manipulate and change the situation while at the same time being constrained to adjust to it (p.95).

REMEMBERING: ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL OF CONTROL

One way that we can begin to find our bearings in the 'blizzard of change' and gain some sort of sense of where we are going is to look back at where we have been (Goodson, 2015, p.2). Analysis of the historical context of educational assessment in England, can clarify the current position and the direction of travel. The period from 1960 to the mid - 1980s can be regarded as an era of 'relative autonomy' in schools, where teachers were accountable mainly to themselves and their peers and worked with curricula developed by head teachers and local authority advisors. Teachers 'performance' was informally assessed with an emphasis on ethical autonomy (Gleeson and Gunter, 2001). My own experience of formal educational assessment as a child was fleeting and failing at school in the 1960s and 70s although I did meet some teachers who got to know me well and had a lasting influence on my thinking and, eventually, my attitude to learning. The eleven plus examination, leading to streamed selection at age eleven, may have been what we would now call a 'high stakes' test but I do not remember failing it as being especially traumatic for me or my family. I did not take any CSE or GCSE national tests which are usually taken at age 16, until I was in my late 20s. Those teachers who demonstrated an interest and engagement with me as a person as well as a pupil were unlikely to have been driven by policies of assessment or surveillance but rather by the personal and sociological commitments that brought them into teaching in the first place (Butcher, 1965; Hoyle, 1969). Hargreaves argues that the growth of a competitive knowledge economy across the world has diverted schools and teachers from 'ambitious missions of compassion and community' towards the 'tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets and league tables of accountability' (2003 p.xvii).

The political and educational landscape has shifted considerably and there is no doubt that state education and the profession of teaching is under a kind of siege with a shortfall in recruitment and large numbers of teachers planning to leave the profession (NUT, 2016; Lightfoot, 2016). Nevertheless, some people still become teachers because they want to make the world a better place (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2005; Troman and Raggl, 2008; Marsh, 2015). Many of the teachers and students of teaching that I work with now continue to resist the standardised curriculum scripts and reach beyond the technical tasks of teaching in forming and building communities of learning. Further, it would be as wrong to present the three post-war decades as only a 'golden age' of teaching and learning in school as it would be to label the whole of the current generation of teachers as neoliberal clones with little interest in pedagogy or community. The situation was and is more nuanced and complex. Teachers may currently be swimming against the tide more often than their predecessors and needing to engage in different sorts of discourse to maintain agency, but creative and cooperative teaching and learning still goes on in schools. As elsewhere, collective professional action has been hamstrung, but it has not disappeared. Pockets of resistance continue to emerge within

trade unions (NUT, 2015) and through campaigning networks such as Reclaiming Schools¹, the Teacher Solidarity Research Collaborative² and the Campaign for State Education³.

Perryman (2006) highlights how the series of education acts that were passed in England between 1988 and 1994 reveal an intent to steer schools and teachers towards becoming a 'technical workforce to be managed and controlled' (p.148), rather than respected as autonomous professionals. The structural shift has continued to be from teachers' accountability to themselves, their colleagues and their students towards accountability to external bodies such as the Teacher Training Agency and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED). Individual and collegiate pedagogic creativity are styled as a problem rather than an asset in this scenario with assessment as the dominant tool of control.

Many teachers, like David, who became a primary school teacher in 1985 and is now a deputy head teacher, did not notice the shift happening at the time:

David: When the National Curriculum came in (from 1988) I thought 'OK'. I can work with that, do it my way within the system and the children will benefit and get the good results they need. I couldn't really see any tension between the curriculum and how I wanted to teach. But over the years we have had to do more and more prep for the tests. First at the end of year 6 and then pretty much all of year 6, and now it feels that the whole school experience from year 3 on is all about SATs in year 6. At some point, (which) I cannot place for the life of me, we slipped over and now it's all we talk about – and we do OK in SATs, always have done. Oh we still have the odd moment but the thrust is always towards the tests. It seems as though we sink or swim by them (Interview, Oct, 2013).

I became a teacher in 1991, at the age of 32, working in a primary school on a council estate near where I grew up. As a new teacher, the appraisal of teachers through a particular framework, which became compulsory in my first year, seemed like a continuation of the PGCE course that I had just completed. Discussions in those days were never based on Standard Attainment Task (SAT) results or projected SATs results for my class. Judy, who started teaching in 2004, tells a different story from 2006, by which time things had changed:

She (the head teacher) went straight to the SATs results from the previous year and asked me why I thought my class had done less well than the other two classes in Year 6. She knew, of course, that the class had a lot of children who had difficulties but when I raised this she said that we couldn't use that sort of excuse anymore. It was funny because I had heard a politician on the radio use exactly those words a few days earlier. She said I should have raised this earlier if I needed extra help to bring them up to the required level and that we would need to look at things more closely in future and set some targets for improvement (Interview, May, 2014).

In fact the children in Judy's class did make significant progress in a number of ways during the year she taught them. Even in the narrow terms of the tests they achieved higher levels overall than in the end of year tests given by the school the previous year. More importantly, as Judy says:

They had made real progress in being able to take things on in their learning - signs of growing confidence, motivation and enthusiasm. I had three children who had been identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties and two of them had really moved on according to the support service and educational psychologist reports – and their parents. But they didn't do well enough in SATs so she (the head teacher) saw them as part of the failure rather than the success of the school.

From the year 2000, systems described as 'productive autonomy' by Gleeson and Gunter (2001) were implemented, with teachers like Judy being held accountable through increasingly formal audits of outcomes and test scores that attempted to control and monitor teaching through the National Curriculum and management systems such as performance-related pay. The need to reform and monitor and micro-manage the teaching profession at every level of education represents a central shift in the governmental and cultural discourse of education. Avis suggested that these systems of accountability were now so pervasive (in 2005) that they could be seen as a 'regime of truth that

¹ <https://reclaimingschools.org/>

² www.teachersolidarity.com

³ www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk

refuses other conceptualisations of good practice, which therefore become silenced and are denied legitimacy' (2005, p.211).

While teachers can and do become practised in minimising the effect that 'regimes of truth' have upon their work by being strategically compliant (Lacey, 1977) or creatively subversive (Myhill, 2008), accountability-based, data-driven assessment has contributed increasingly to a culture of 'performativity'. Lyotard's (1984) critique of the post-modern obsession with efficiency has been developed by Ball (e.g. 2003, 2012, 2015) to examine, define and challenge the technology culture and modes of regulation that have come to dominate the discourse and practice of education. As Carr puts it:

Under this regime of governance, teachers are increasingly required to set aside personal values and commitment to education in order to fabricate a veneer of professional competence for which they are held accountable (Carr, 2016, p.28).

The main concern is that the regressive discourse of accountability changes the way that we all think about our lives and work and that teachers come to internalise and accept the situation 'as it is'. This is not a new concern in education. Lacey characterised this sort of 'internalised adjustment' as a social strategy in which the teacher believes or comes to believe that 'the constraints are for the best': he or she is 'really good', whereas 'strategic compliance' involves a strategy in which he or she is 'merely seen to be good' (Lacey, 1977, p72). Related and more recent constructs of subjectivity may also be sites of refraction, resistance, or as Ball puts it, 'refusal' (2015). In extending his previous discussion of neoliberal policy and its effect on education, Ball (2015) considers the notion of subjectivity as a site of struggle, resistance and 'refusal' through three modalities of truth: the truths 'told about us', 'the truths we tell about ourselves' and 'the truths we tell to others'(p.2). If as Foucault (1981) argued, the construction of the 'subject' is a central aspect of governance and control, Ball (2015) argues that it is also where we may begin to think about ourselves differently in refusing the 'script' of neoliberalism:

The starting point for a politics of refusal is the site of subjectivity. It is a struggle over and against what it is we have become, what it is we do not want to be (p.15).

At the centre of such an engagement with the self as 'subject' is the need to recognise and understand the 'internal adjustments' that we are all forced towards through the defining neoliberal process of 'normalisation'. Assessment and testing in education provides an illuminating example of this process in action.

In the accountability culture, high stakes tests are considered as a means to raise standards and increase public confidence in schools (Herbert & Hauser, 1999). While high stakes testing has a long history in UK schools, it reached unprecedented levels in terms of frequency, scope and uniformity in England at the end of the 20th Century. The periodic national Statutory Attainment Tasks (SATs) at ages 7, 11 and 14 years old were introduced as a central part of the scheme of examination and the programme of what Allen calls 'pupil tracking technologies' (2012). The said-to-be important and originally equal element of teacher-led assessment was quickly abandoned to make way for nationally, and increasingly internationally, comparable, externally marked tests in defining the levels of attainment assigned to each child.

High stakes testing has some powerful advocates such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank where a range of arguments have become prominent concerning the contribution of education towards economic productivity, as a priority in the face of an ever-growing, yet uncertain, market economy. Others have argued that high stakes testing can reduce educational inequality through the 'objectivity' of external marking which holds teachers, schools and national systems of education to account for the academic standards of their students (Hursh, 2005; Carr, 2016). This position holds that increased objectification and standardisation of high stakes testing makes it a superior form of assessment to teacher-led evaluation which is seen as inconsistent and unreliable. This lack of trust in professional teachers and schools to make and act upon their own methods of fair assessment has become a central feature of many education systems throughout the world and at all levels of education. Corno's (2000) metaphor of the 'Trojan Horse' of the national curriculum 'that was welcomed into our schools without knowing what harm was hidden inside' (Merchant, 2004, p.6) seems even more appropriate when considered alongside these forms of assessment wherever they appear.

Critics view the proliferation of standardised high stakes testing as damaging in promoting outcome-led educational achievement as a means to an end in itself (Lipman & Hursh, 2007; McLaren & Jaromillo, 2007). A major weakness of standardised testing, conversely seen as one of its strengths by advocates, is that such tests ignore all social-economic and cultural factors when making judgements about educational progress which is then connected solely and deterministically to judgements about the quality of educational provision. Teachers often feel that tests are

unfair to minorities, that they are too fragmented, misunderstood, and that they encourage scaremongering in parents and the public. Furthermore what Carr (2016) calls the ‘myopic’ focus upon high-stakes testing puts teachers under pressure to ‘teach to the test’ where the focus of teaching becomes the skills and knowledge that are required to gain ‘good’ test results rather than the more complex and abstract aspects of learning. In the push to improve ‘results’ in certain subjects, others may be ignored altogether. As Ciaran Segue argues in this volume while examining the ‘hidden injuries’ inflicted upon education in Ireland, while such a ‘narrow focus brings ‘results’, the reductionism inflicted on important aspects of the curriculum, immediately and longer term lead to impoverishment—of staff, students, and ultimately—citizenry’.

The distinct conflict between teachers feeling able to help pupils to learn and develop knowledge and skills that equip them for life, and the narrow focus on knowledge and skills that equip them for tests which are imposed upon them is a central site of debate over testing and the purposes of education more generally. The narrow reliance on testing can be seen as dehumanising students of all ages in reducing them to a numerical value. As explained by Peter Humphreys in the current volume, the process ‘colours and shapes everything that goes on within schools and is at the heart of de-humanising the experience’. For McNeil (2005), high stakes testing ‘fakes’ equity in rendering the inspiring diversities of children into the single indicator of a test score. Smith (2016a) argues that the testing culture has become synonymous with educational quality internationally through the growing influence of the Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) audit. Somewhat paradoxically, given the primacy of standardised testing in the PISA framework, Finland regularly comes top of the list and has often been highlighted as the global leader in education. Silander and Valijarvi (2013) note that Finland has not followed the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ accountability movement of making schools accountable for learning outcomes, which does not seem to dissuade policy makers in England and elsewhere from pursuing higher ‘status’ through increased testing. In fact as Meyer and Benavot (2013a) put it: ‘. . . Finland is the one country in the world that most distinctly deviates from the OECD standard reform package’ which informs the PISA framework (p.15). At its core the Finnish education model includes respect for teachers, valuing education as central in society and, ironically, limiting national standardised testing.

RENEWING ASSESSMENT AS PART OF A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The way in which learners perceive assessment is one of the key factors that can either strengthen or break their belief and confidence in their own capability and agency (Harrison, 2013). As schools in England have become more data-driven, for the reasons previously discussed, too much of classroom practice has become dominated by the need to produce summative performance data for evaluating school effectiveness, target setting and monitoring of ‘performance’ (Tiznak and Sutton, 2006). In their insecurity and anxiety to meet the summative outcomes schools often incorporate data collection systems that go beyond the statutory requirements where teachers are asked to record levels and sub-levels of attainment at several points in each school year. This leads to a situation where negative messages are amplified and where a perceived lack of success leads to feelings of helplessness and decreased motivation. Reay and Wiliam’s (1999) example of the 11 year old who told them that ‘you are nothing’ if you do not attain level 4 at SATs, illuminates the anxiety and learner despair that such a system can foster (Dweck, 2000). Assessment itself does not need to have this effect on learners. When teachers focus their efforts through formative assessment it can support learning and contribute towards the development of positive learning sensibilities.

Clearly, as Allen (2012) warns, it should not be assumed that ‘low-stakes testing’ techniques which sit under the formative assessment umbrella will automatically counter-act the systems of accountability and power enacted through high stakes testing. Restricted interpretations and applications of assessment for learning as ‘top and tailed’ by ‘learning objectives’ and ‘success criteria’ in some ways replicate the narrow outcome-led thinking for which formative assessment is said to be an alternative. I do however argue that genuine formative assessment involving teachers and students themselves presents possibilities for the development of critical pedagogy that empowers learners. Freire conceived learning as an act of knowing that required the presence of ‘authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects’ (1989, p.49). If, as Freire argued ‘knowledge involves a constant unity between action and reflection upon reality’ which is the kernel of critical consciousness, the educator’s role is to empower students to reflect upon their own worlds: to assess and self-assess. In doing so, teachers need to facilitate processes that help students in building their ability to ‘become’ (Freire, 1989, p. 52). For Freire, dialogic assessment is at the heart of pedagogy that is itself central to a formative culture that makes critical consciousness and social action possible (Giroux, 2015). Therefore the challenge is to develop a framework that situates assessment alongside concepts of both critical inquiry and achievement. We do not need to look far to find some of the components of such a framework.

Black and Wiliam’s (1998) review of formative assessment was a key influence in beginning a process of change in classroom assessment in the UK and other parts of the world. I use the term ‘formative assessment’ here in reference,

not to a particular, exact protocol or system but to a range of principles, approaches and activities that build upon assessment that is about teachers getting to know the people they work with and those people getting to know themselves. Central to these approaches is the active involvement of students in their own learning and the recognition of the effect that this has upon motivation and critical engagement. Sadler (1998) provided a model for teaching-learning-assessment that shows how learning develops when students are empowered with assessment knowledge and expertise. In this way, it provides an opportunity for dialogue with critical pedagogy about student empowerment and learning. Assessment in this context takes place alongside and as an integral part of teaching and learning. In order to contribute to the agency of learners, it is essential that formative assessment involves practices that help both learners and teachers to focus on the current state of understanding and make decisions about which steps to take next (Black and Harrison, 2004). These practices include the development of enquiry-based learning through the development of questioning, self and peer assessment, and dialogic feedback (Black et al, 2003). When assessment is developed collaboratively within a classroom community, students can come to consider learning as a journey where notions of quality and experience can be understood and identities as capable learners developed (Shepard, 2000).

Swann (2013) proposes a problem-based alternative to the formulation and use of aims, objectives and targets that has become the default and all-pervasive starting point for planning and assessment in schools. She points out that the use of objectives is consistent with maintaining the systems of accountability for both learners and teachers, and further identifies that this is a model that undermines the 'open-ended nature of human endeavour' in general and the personal and social change involved with learning in particular (p.44). Students become dependent on teachers to tell them what to learn and how to learn it, while teachers themselves become dependent on policy makers to tell them what to teach and how to teach it. Teachers' professional judgements and pedagogic preferences are supplanted by political decree. (See Swann, 2012 for detailed discussion on the corrosive effect of objectives and targets more broadly). In the present volume O'Brien argues that learning outcomes represent a particular conception of knowledge as commodity and that by adopting these as a default approach, 'teachers (unwittingly or otherwise) uphold the right to manage education in *that way*'.

Learning itself, however, is always an active process and it needs to build upon the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that the learner already possesses and brings to any given situation. Based on Popper's (1999) conception that all life is a 'problem', the problem-based approach personalises learning by asking students to generate a range of 'How can I . . .?' or 'How can we . . .?' questions from where a course of action can be planned and a range of 'trial' solutions tested and examined. Development of knowledge and understanding can then be assessed by both student and teacher through asking 'What happened?' or 'What is happening?' The central feature of the model is the empowerment of the learner and the teacher within the process of teaching and learning that runs counter to the dominance of the top-down approach. I would argue that such an approach adopted as part of formative assessment can empower teachers' creative agency and therefore itself offers one site of resistance to the culture of accountability in that it is a means of encouraging professional teachers to formulate their own meaningful problems and questions and then to encourage the learners they work with to do the same. This does not make teachers 'un-accountable' for the teaching and learning within their classrooms but it does mean taking teachers seriously in recognising their abilities to act independently and responsibly.

By encouraging students to focus on their own learning trajectory rather than continually comparing themselves with others, formative assessment encourages a learning-orientated rather than performance-orientated sensibility (Dweck, 2000). When assessment is formative it has the potential to contribute to a student learning identity which moves away from the fixed mind-set and a view of learning as being about tests alone. This offers a potential way out of the downward spiral for many learners as something that can re-focus attitudes to assessment, education and school. Assessment can become something that can help one learn rather than a process that highlights difficulties. Perhaps inevitably, given the dominance of the data-driven thinking, while teachers, schools and students seem to like the idea of formative assessment, they have often found it difficult to implement meaningfully. It requires schools to make this approach to assessment a priority. The complex nature of the practical implementation of formative pedagogic approaches can make it seem like a mountain to climb for schools and teachers. But it does seem like a mountain worth climbing. Teachers themselves can be reinvigorated in their teaching (Harrison, 2013). The most fundamental barrier to implementation is likely to be that teachers find it difficult to fully conceptualise the approach before they begin to develop it in their classrooms. They are therefore unable to perceive the changes needed in their day to day practice where developing a more 'strategic' compliance would be fruitful (Lacy, 1977).

While widespread radical change in formative assessment has been difficult to develop, especially where a commitment from leadership is lacking, it still happens: The Wroxham School in Hampshire has established an environment where 'assessment of progress takes place at the school within a culture where dialogue about learning

is key⁴.’ The school has abolished ability grouping, not reported national curriculum levels to children or to parents for over a decade, and has established an extensive ‘Transformative Learning Alliance’ of local schools with a focus on creating ‘learning without limits’ (Swann et al, 2012).

I leave the children to choose their own level of challenge, that’s working really well and it’s good for their self-esteem . . . and they are ready to celebrate their successes and their risk-taking (Leonardo, teacher. Choice & Challenge project⁵).

As Harrison says ‘the emphasis needs to be placed on helping all learners develop and sustain a capacity to learn that not only lasts through the years of compulsory schooling but benefits them throughout their lives’ (2013, P.76).

Back at my old school, Sally and her colleagues have maintained close links with the community and made connections with teachers in local schools:

Getting the parents on board was the turning point for us. It turned out that they are much more interested in learning and the positive experience of learning than they are in the SATs scores. The overwhelming message here and in the other local schools is that they do not want us to teach to the tests. They told OFSTED that as well. And, of course, we’ve done better in the tests since we stopped worrying about them anyway (Interview, May, 2014).

In teacher education where I now work we have choices to make. We have problems of our own of course, with the sector under pressure, if not erasure, through the same waves of reform, but we need to decide where we stand and what we believe in (Lunnenberg and Hamilton, 2008; McNamara et al, 2014). I challenge myself and others to address the issues raised here within our own contexts. As Keesing-Styles (2003) argues, our intention must be to generate a dialogic approach to assessment that promotes critical reflection. Such an environment will encourage our students of teaching to examine their own contexts and to make progress in developing their own critical pedagogy. We need to promote assessment as learning that is consistent with democracy in fostering a more integrated approach to theory and practice, or what Freire termed as praxis: theory in action. The approach must value and validate the experience of learners. Such an approach creates challenges and discomfort but opens up creative possibilities for the renewal of assessment.

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⁴ <http://thewroxham.org.uk/>

⁵ <http://wroxhamtla.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/-BeyondLevels-----Assessment-Research-Projects-2014.pdf>

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