

Review of Studies in Educational Evaluation, Volume 31(4)

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Studies in Educational Evaluation (ISSN 0191-491X) is published four times a year and has been in circulation since 1974. It is published by Elsevier Ltd. for The School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Israel. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* (SEE) content includes evaluation studies of educational systems around the world as well as articles furthering theoretical discussions and empirical studies associated with the evaluation of educational institutions, personnel, and programs. SEE also publishes book reviews, evaluation study abstracts and articles related to emerging evaluation trends in particular countries and regions.

The most recent issue (Volume 31, Issue 4) was published in December of 2005 and begins with an examination by McNamara and O'Hara of the emerging evaluation framework implemented by Ireland's Department of Education and Science (DES) for the nation's Primary and Post Primary education systems. Strong trade union concerns over robust evaluation methods used in England drove the DES to create a program which stressed self-evaluation over strict external control and inspection. The 1999 Whole School Evaluation pilot project evolved

into a 2003 framework—Looking At Our School (LAOS) which examines quality in five areas: Learning and teaching in subjects, Support for students, School Management, School Planning and Curriculum Provision. Each of these areas is broken down into 143 “Themes for Self-Evaluation” in which the school evaluates itself on a four-level scale. The evaluation process and results would be examined occasionally by a visiting team of inspectors to comply with the external review process of LAOS. The authors note key problems with the framework to date including the lack of clear guidance for schools with regard to the evidence that must be presented to justify the school’s own ratings of self-evaluation themes, a lack of defined involvement from parents and students and an overly elaborate framework that may test schools’ already scarce resources.

The second article details a study performed by Güzel and Berberoğlu investigating variables that were expected to be related to reading literacy and mathematical literacy skills. The authors used a linear structural modeling framework for the analysis of OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data for three nations performing at different levels—Brazil, Japan and Norway. The study found the strongest effect on reading literacy to be ‘communication with parent’ in Japan, ‘attitudes towards reading’ in Norway and the ‘use of technology’ in Brazil. The effect of educational resources, such as computers, on literacy were found to have no significant or weak but negative relationships in both Norway and Japan, suggesting the novelty effect that gradual introduction of technology may be having in Brazil. A second dissimilar finding was the positive influence of a self-disciplined lesson environment in Japan, whereas data from Brazil tended to demonstrate higher reading performance in a

disordered and noisy classroom (the authors inferred that relatively large classroom sizes in Brazil may account for this contradictory finding).

In the third article, Törnroos advances a methodological approach for gathering opportunity to learn data that exhibits a high correlation with student achievement. The author compared three measures of the opportunity to learn with student achievement in Finland based on data gathered from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): a measure of the proportions of mathematics textbooks dedicated to different topics, teacher questionnaires regarding topics taught and their duration, and an item-based analysis of the textbooks. The item-based analysis involved examination by a team of five researchers and mathematics/science teachers to determine whether items included in TIMSS 1999 were adequately covered in each textbook. The study determined that learning opportunity data required more than one year of data in order to generate strong correlations to student achievement. When this was done, Törnroos found that item-based textbook analysis yielded the highest correlations of the three alternatives. Challenges to the utilization of such learning opportunity measures to explain student achievement include factors such as instructional quality, differences in potential curriculum implementation (textbooks) and actual classroom topics covered, as well as the uniformity of national learning opportunity data. The author concludes by calling for similar studies utilizing international assessments in order to generalize the usefulness of item-based textbook analysis as a learning opportunity measure.

The fourth article describes an experiment conducted by India's Department of Educational Measurement and Evaluation (DEME) to introduce a scheme for student assessment in primary classes based on continuous and comprehensive

evaluation. Various forms of continuous and comprehensive evaluation had been attempted before by the state controlled education system, usually with cumbersome procedures and unclear guidance on instrument development and record keeping. This effort introduced a simpler, more systematic evaluation scheme involving four schools in different regions of the country. Students were assessed in both Scholastic and Co-scholastic (Co-curricular and personal social qualities) areas using routine formal and informal testing techniques. This scheme emphasized both formative and summative evaluation in order to identify learning difficulties and provide remedial instruction and retesting (a feature that was lacking in current practice). The continuous nature of the assessments shifted teacher practices more toward oral testing and observation than before. Also different from current techniques was an attempt to obtain a more rounded picture of student development by evaluating personal social qualities based on the existence of behavior indicators. Prior to implementation an intensive orientation program was provided for the primary teachers. For purposes of the study, a sample of 1000 students, 100 parents, 50 teachers as well as administrative faculty was utilized. Based on the results and feedback from parents and teachers, it was concluded that this particular scheme for school-based evaluation was feasible in primary schools which possessed the prerequisite infrastructure (this was also reflected in the fact that the subjects continued with the particular evaluation plans after the study had concluded). In addition, the experiment revealed issues to be addressed including the time-consuming nature of the continuous record-keeping and reporting, need-based training for teachers and competencies-based textbooks.

SEE Volume 31 concluded with an article summarizing a qualitative approach to evaluation of the Olympic Education Program (OEP) in Greece. All previous

evaluations of OEP had been quantitative in nature. OEP has been implemented in all Greek school levels since 2000 and aims to teach students the history of the Olympic Games, its cultural importance to Greece, respect for values in sports, and exercise and health studies. The study conducted semi-structured interviews of a stratified sampling of 55 primary and secondary school principals. Interview questions were driven by prior quantitative research in order to confirm, refute or extend previous findings. The authors found that the results supported and enhanced previous studies. Lack of equipment and facilities had been identified in past evaluations as limiting the OEP, but interviews revealed the specific parts of the program where the real need existed. In addition, interviews identified that where school management lacked detailed information about OEP, principals were more likely to oppose continuation of the program.

SEE website: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/0191491X>

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