

Abstract

Assessment without fear
Wouter Modderkolk, M.Ed.
University of Applied Sciences Leiden



Assessment of ability is an inherent aspect of education around the globe. However, so is the debate on the sense or nonsense of this assessment (Biesta, 2017; OECD, forthcoming). It is being argued that current educational systems focus too much on the 'qualification' purpose of education (Biesta, 2012; Robinson, 2015) and therefore on quantifiable outcomes in relation to standardized norms; an understanding of the purpose of education that is too narrow. Educational experiences should not simply focus on 'producing' youngsters who are qualified to participate in society's labor market, but rather challenge them to develop their full potential and humanity.

Contemporary Waldorf teachers intend for their pupils to become authentic adults who find purpose and a sense of direction for their own lives, and are willing to make a positive contribution to the development of mankind (De Meyere & Mayo, forthcoming). Youngsters are therefore encouraged to develop personal answers to questions regarding their humanity, such as "What can I do?", "Who am I?", "Who are we?" and "How do I want to be". One of education's challenges is to provide pupils with experiences awaken the willingness to develop answers to these questions. Such development requires trust from their teachers, parents, society and eventually from themselves (Robinson, 2015). Yet, assessment in schools is often related to fear, rather than trust (Modderkolk, 2019). At least partly, this fear seems related to the strong emphasis that is placed by society and policymakers prompted by institutions such as the OECD (see figure 1) on conformity of an individual's development to general norms and standards (Robinson, 2015). One might argue that the fear of falling short stimulates youngsters to perceive themselves as 'objects' that need to submit to a system, rather than as 'subjects' (Biesta, 2018) who willingly, actively and intentionally participate in the world. That is not to say that assessment cannot be a powerful developmental tool for teachers (William & Black, 1998; Alexander, 2005). This lecture focusses on how assessment in schools might contribute to, rather than counteract, the process of youngsters developing as subjects in the world. It provides practical examples from action research in a secondary Waldorf school in the Netherlands of practices that allow teachers and pupils to observe and reflect on differences as well as commonalities in the development of pupils, while encouraging pupils' engagement with questions of humanity. The examples show that assessment founded on a basic attitude of trust in our students, teachers, and the education system, can function as stimulant for the development of youngsters towards adulthood (Krijger & Modderkolk, 2019).

References

Alexander, P. A. (2005). *Psychology in Learning and Instruction*. Pennsylvania: Pearson.

4th International INASTE Congress:

Realizing Humanity.

Perspectives in Education / Perspektiven für Bildung und Erziehung

May 18 – 20, 2022 / Vienna

Biesta, G. (2010). *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. London/New York: Routledge.

Biesta, G. (2017). *Beautiful Risk of Education*. London/New York: Routledge.

Biesta, G. (2018). *Tijd voor pedagogiek [Time for pedagogy]*. Utrecht: University of Humanistic Studies.

De Meyere, A., & Mayo, A. (forthcoming). *Intentions towards adulthood in Waldorf educational praxis*.

Krijger, A., & Modderkolk, W. (2019). *Achter eenzelfde cijfer schuilt een ander verhaal... [Behind every grade is another story ...]*. Leiden: Leiden University of Applied Sciences.

Modderkolk, W. (2019). *Vertrouwen of controle? [Trust or control?]*. Leiden: Leiden University of Applied Sciences.

OECD. (in press). *Assesment Framework of the OECD study on social and emotional skills*. Parijs: OECD.

Robinson, K. (2015). *Creative schools*. London: Penguin.

Wiliam, D., & Black, P. (1998). *Assessment and Classroom Learning*. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, , 5(1), 7-74.