

## Assessment in Scotland: in search of social justice.

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In common with many countries internationally, educational policy is clear: Scotland is determined to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for every citizen. Education in Scotland could be construed a success story, heralded in the newspapers as the 'Best Educated Country in Europe' (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Yet, Scotland wrestles with the complexities of an education system successful with 80% of its students but less successful with the 20% of learners who face the most significant social and economic challenges (OECD, 2007). This is an unacceptable position for a country that takes pride in its egalitarian traditions. Scotland's history is one where equity of opportunity has played a major role. Traditional ideas such as the 'lad o'pairs' and the 'democratic intellect' remain key to the country that Scotland would like to become. There are strong partnerships in Scotland amongst people in policy, practice and research communities who share a commitment to improve the current position. The question is how?

Assessment has a role to play. However, the contribution can be to enhance social justice or social injustice. Assessment research, and the learning that emerges from that research, has a major role to play in informing which of these roles assessment will play. This presentation tracks the efforts of one country, Scotland, in its attempts to explore how assessment might contribute to social justice as part of the direction of travel of the Scottish Curriculum, 'Curriculum for Excellence'. The first part of the presentation focuses on the Scottish political and social context, the nature of partnerships and the importance of dialogue. The second part explores the challenges faced in Scotland, how current policies are attempting to address these and where gaps are emerging between policy aspirations and practice in schools and classrooms. Recently, the Scottish Government dedicated £100 million to tackle educational inequalities. This section will

- reflect on the assessment measures used to inform views of education in Scotland
- offer examples of where assessment research has been used nationally to promote social justice through better alignment between curriculum and assessment aspirations and practice (Hayward et al, 2012, Hayward, 2014)
- analyse examples of where and how Scotland has learned and is still learning from international thinking and practice on social justice and the social outcomes of learning
- present evidence where researchers and local and national policy makers working in partnership with schools and communities have made progress in closing achievement gaps in parts of Scotland that are the most economically deprived.

Finally, the presentation will reflect on lessons learned in Scotland over 25 years of research on change processes in assessment, the nature of partnership and will identify possible implications for future models of research and development. Better use of assessment evidence is a crucial part of how societies can begin to learn in sustainable ways rather than engage in cycles of innovation that like the myth of Sisyphus result in their being condemned forever to roll boulders uphill only to have them roll back down.

### References

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