

Chapter 2 Literature review.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the literature discourse currently in circulation on evaluation and assessment, with a focus on their relevance within the post primary education context. The established definitions of evaluation, and assessment will be discussed and different formats described. This will be observed in the context of current curriculum aims in Irish post-primary education, with a focus on visual art. The changes in the concept of assessment in Irish post primary education will be outlined along with their relevance and relationship to developing critical thinking. The literature considering how to define and assess critical thinking and metacognition will be discussed also. The overall purpose of this discussion is to give the reader an understanding of the context of the varied approach to assessment that will be undertaken in this study in order to answer the question of what assessment methods students find valuable.

2.2 Evaluation and assessment Theory

There is much literature written on both the theory of evaluation and assessment and their practical implications and outcomes. Eisner (1985) defines evaluation as value oriented. He uses this definition to differentiate between evaluation and testing, stating testing is simply measuring and generates quantitative description. Evaluating, in his argument, is qualitative, judgemental, and intrinsic to daily life (Eisner, 1985). This is expanded by Hickman (2015) to consider evaluation's role in conception of self-esteem. Mason and Steers (2007) argue along similar lines to Eisner on judgement on behalf of the assessor but go further to question the limits that external assessment criteria place on assessment and production of the arts in schools.

Evaluation has been considered to be informal, diagnostic and linked to formative assessment, whereas the term assessment traditionally refers to summative, teacher or external based grading (Sefton-Green and Sinker, 2000). There are questions raised as to the compatibility of art and assessment and whether they can coincide (Rayment and Bitton, 2007). McAllister (2018) argues in favour of set objectives or criteria claiming a lack of a hierarchy of information causes a disconnect in theory and application. As the classroom is mainly an informal setting Wragg (2001) advocates using both of these approaches, intertwining them to cover all aspects of learning.

Within the new Framework for Junior Cycle (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) an aim can be seen to educate in a more rounded and inclusive way (MacPhail et al, 2018). The key skills laid out in the JC specification involve a wide range of skills across multiple areas of thought (NCCA, 2012). This emphasis on teaching in a more rounded and open manner could be observed in terms of facilitating student's individuality in accessing the curriculum. The desire for individual approaches within curricula is often attributed to research in learning style theories (McAllister, 2018; Soifermann, 2019). Kolb (1971), Honey and Mumford (1986), and others have researched on interpreting this individuality and published on the discussion of how different learners' mind-set and personalities applies to the classroom (Pritchard, 2009). Kolb first developed his theory of experiential learning in 1971 and developed the learning styles inventory to frame personal experience (Kolb, 2014)

There is much scholarly debate surrounding Learning styles theory as it has often been criticised on its validity as a result of most of the research to support it being anecdotal evidence (Soiferman, 2019). Hansford (2019) poses questions as to the validity of results seen in studies of learning styles noting that the statistical advances in students learning mirror statistical advances from using focused and specific pedagogy. He states it is potentially the instruction with a focal point

that translates to the improved learning as opposed to the pedagogy itself. Reville (2015) also criticises the evidence of these methods as non-empirical and calls for a return to whole class teaching. However, the studies in favour of inclusive methods suggest that the sense of control and awareness of the learner's environment and metacognitive engagement can lead to improved learning via the self-esteem and motivation generated (Pritchard, 2009).

2.3 Critical thinking.

The new JC framework (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) expects students to think and reflect critically, with the critical interpretation of texts stated as one of the statements of learning. Critical thinking has long been observed to be an important skill within education and is now being considered something to teach explicitly as students must be aware of their learning and thinking for critical thinking to be possible (Fischer 2011). Philosophers such as Friere (1970) have considered it as the building blocks of an educational approach. It is essential to facilitate learners understanding of their own thinking and learning, giving them the capability to learn from their own experience and formulate their own ideas.

The definition of critical thinking has been built on for much of the last century by philosophers such as Dewey(1909), Glaser (1941) and Ennis (1989) and is considered to be understood as an active mind state that is reflective and aware of its own thinking, often referred to as metacognition (Fischer, 2001). Questions about whether critical thinking is fully realised in the institutions that claim to teach this skill relate to how to define valid success criteria to evidence the ability of critical thinking (Moon, 2008).

Assessment for learning methodologies attempt to address this by using student self-assessment as reflection exercises to view student's ability to think about how they work and think (Peddar and James, 2012). Studies show that creating inclusive assessment tasks that are social, personal and collaborative can promote self-reliance and self-regulation (Harrison et al., 2015).

2.4 Assessment of learning versus Assessment of learning.

Assessment is often divided into two approaches distinguished by their purpose. Assessment of learning is a summative approach and can be interpreted as being for the benefit of others, displaying student's academic performance to prospective institutions, employers or for teachers to track progress (Brookhart 2001; Black et al., 2003). Assessment for learning is a methodology aimed at making the student critically aware of and more involved in their learning process, intended for the benefit of the student (Black et al., 2003). AFL promotes active reflection and constructive feedback as a means for facilitating and developing learning (Pickford and Brown, 2006). This is considered especially important in art where self-evaluation and self-assessment are an integral part of artistic practice (Hickman 2015). A collective guide on art critiques by numerous art schools in England (Rowles, 2013) agree on critique's central role in art and design practice to enable articulation of learning, progression and concepts.

Black and Wiliam (2009) outline three processes underpinning AFL as; clear goals understood by learners, awareness of their current performance and the difference between it and their aims and knowledge of what to do to attain the goals set so as they can work to achieve them (Groenendijk et al, 2018, p. 3).

Fischer (2001) suggests students should be conscious of being assessed so they can observe how to assess themselves as they go. If students are led to consider and think about their work as they make it, they will be able to observe the progress they have made and the learning that has taken

place. He argues that using assessment this way can be used to promote thinking and learning as an active process, developing critical thinking skills.

This notion of metacognition has been defined as 'knowledge that takes as its object or regulates any aspect of any cognitive endeavour' (Flavell, 1978, cited in Noushad, 2008). This can be further expanded into two branches of metacognitive knowledge; where declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge inform the use of metacognition in problem solving, and self-regulation, formed by planning, monitoring and evaluation (Special Education Support Service, 2009).

The Intention for formative assessment to make students critically aware is to enhance students learning autonomy and ability to think about how they learn (Harrison et al., 2015). In a study by Peddar and James (2012) this is seen as an important part of teaching by many teachers, although it often does not align with the actual teaching happening in the classroom. They argue that an overhaul of classroom roles is required to successfully implement AFL practices in the classroom and bring practice in line with the value teachers place on learning autonomy.

2.5 Evaluation and assessment in Irish post primary education.

The push for inclusion of assessment for learning in Irish curricula attempts to create a balance between the 'deafening noise' of the formal summative state exams and the 'whispers of other assessment discourse' (Looney, 2006, p. 352). Stapleton (2015) laments the absence of balance in the Leaving certificate program claiming that high stake examination in visual art must adopt varied approaches to cover the different learning outcomes being examined. Scanlon *et al* (2018) state the lack of formalised internal assessment in senior cycle does not take advantage of the ideal position the teacher holds for these forms of internal assessment in practice-based subjects.

The Junior Cycle Visual Art specification has an emphasis on balanced and varied assessment practices mixing both formative and summative techniques (NCCA, 2016; McPhail et al, 2018). Evidence of this is seen with the introduction of two Classroom Based Assessment (CBA) projects in second and third year of post primary junior cycle curriculum which provide descriptors of progress to students. The second CBA is developed into a final project assessed by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) at the completion of the junior cycle programme. Prior to the final project, CBA 2 culminates in evidence of assessment for learning in the form of a presentation of the CBA work followed by peer and teacher feedback (NCCA, 2016). Such critiquing exercises are considered to promote understanding of students work and learning, questioning and judgment of their work and development of critical and visual language by bridging the philosophical and the practical (Rowles, 2013). The correlation of interpreting and creating promotes a competence in metacognition (Groenendijk et al, 2018). These differences in assessment have been defined in distinctions between assessment of learning (AOL) and assessment for learning (AFL) (Black et al, 2003).

2.6 Conclusion.

From the literature available on the topics of evaluation, assessment, curriculum and critical thinking we can see how these topics are intertwined, with each supporting the other. Assessment can be seen as an active tool, directly influencing curriculum and learning. As such, the reforms of the Junior cycle to facilitate self-assessment and formative assessment elements within the framework are understandable. Awareness of the variation of student learning abilities can be understood and the individual and personal learning of students can be facilitated by teachers through planning a variation of activity. As assessment comes more to the forefront as a learning

tool in Irish education, the need to vary assessment and evaluation techniques and observe and record their effects becomes more apparent, as seen in the literature.

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