

Chapter 2

Assessment as a Dimension of Globalisation: Exploring International Insights

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Abstract This chapter explores assessment as a dimension of globalisation, particularly linking themes of the knowledge economy, impacts of technologies, and international-national competitiveness. An inductive analysis was undertaken to explore international themes of assessment examining similarities and differences across nations. The themes to emerge involved the impact of globalisation in terms of the inter-relatedness of national economies, which has elevated the importance of transparency for accountability and national competitiveness. Additionally, the pursuit of quality education is discussed particularly in relation to standardised testing, classroom assessment practices, and teacher professionalism. Debates and controversies encompassed: the purposes of assessment, high stakes testing, what is valued is assessed, cultural sensitivity, teachers philosophical orientations, and societal trust and teacher accountability. Socio-cultural aspects were identified in terms of student diversity. The media also emerged as influencing the debates about assessment and public support for education.

Keywords Globalisation • National competitiveness • Standardised tests • Teacher accountability • System accountability • Professionalism • Politicisation of assessment • Moderation • Professional development • Teacher judgement • Socio-cultural diversity • Purposes of assessment • Media influences • Cultural sensitivity • Beliefs, ethics and relationships • Assessment debates

2.1 Introduction

During the reading and editing of this text I became fascinated with the similarities and differences that were evident in themes surrounding assessment, which led me to ponder whether or not these were universal. As this book was designed for an international audience I decided to undertake an inductive approach to exploring a

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sample of assessment related papers from different countries to gain insights about aspects of possible alignment and interesting differences.

Not surprisingly, globalisation appears to have had a significant impact across many aspects of education, and assessment and evaluation have not escaped this trend. The term 'globalisation' frequently denotes the linked nature of the world and this has been borne out through the inter-relatedness of national economies wherein the failure of one nation's economy affects others. Similarly, these globalised linkages across various nations place many in positions of competition, sometimes fighting for supremacy within very small margins. Competition usually filters directly down to education systems wherein quality of outcomes, teaching, and leadership are main accountability indicators, highlighting the importance of assessment and evaluation data in monitoring and reporting on 'quality', and making decisions that will positively influence national education systems, and in turn, national economies.

Another feature of globalisation which has emerged is the movement of workers and displaced or disenfranchised peoples seeking better lives in more stable countries. This transience has resulted in greater diversity in schools including: racial, ethnic, linguistic, intellectual, physical, and religious diversity. Diversity represents greater complexity for educators in supporting the learning of all and devising appropriate assessments to support learning and ascertain student outcomes.

With globalisation the culture of accountability has emerged: accountability of the politicians and economists to ensure the security and stability of optimal lifestyles for their citizens, accountability of leaders for institutional outcomes, filtering down to accountability of educators to ensure students reach their potential becoming engaged and productive citizens. Hence, within this atmosphere of accountability, or at least the perceptions of responsibility, educators must create and use assessment data to make informed decisions and guide pedagogical approaches.

Linked to the conceptions of accountability and responsibility is that of professionalism. Educators are expected to maintain and enhance their professional knowledge and capacities and yet when they demonstrate a lack of understanding, misuse data, practice unfair or inequitable approaches, or are unable or unwilling to innovate their assessment approaches this creates a loss of societal confidence in educators' professionalism. Hence, educators have an inherent responsibility to remain abreast of, and engaged with, trends and innovations in assessment thus ensuring their competence to engage in informed debates. This highlights the pivotal importance of educator preparation and ongoing professional development.

An emergent theme is the influence and uses of the media. We know that a key dimension of globalisation has been the virulent influence of technology which has impacted educational systems in multitudinous ways. For example, educators use technology for teaching, learning, administration, communication, collaboration, and research. Technology-facilitated media can be a powerful influence on societal and governmental perceptions, particularly when they use assessment data to create awareness, useful debate, or controversy, and with current sophisticated technological forums, the media's influence is almost limitless.

The aforementioned themes have emerged from the literature across different national contexts and they serve as the foundational themes for this chapter which examines assessment as it pertains to various dimensions of globalisation.

2.2 Evidence-Based Approach

This chapter presents an inductive analysis of a selection of research studies reporting on ‘assessment’ in its many and varied forms across different nations. Once a wide range of sources had been collated an inductive activity was conducted whereby key points from each paper (representing an assessment/evaluation issue from a particular country) were selected and clustered according to similar themes, while noting significant differences between various cultural contexts. Each paper was colour coded to enable the tracking of country and individual study. The themes that emerged served as the framework for the chapter and enabled deeper discussion and exploration of the nuances of difference across national settings. A distinct limitation of this approach was that not all papers on assessment from each country were selected although an effort was made to see if the assessment issue was relatively prevalent or representative, that is, were many authors writing about the same or similar issues.

2.3 Impact of Globalisation

In this inductive analysis the conceptualisation of globalisation came to the fore. Globalisation is a ubiquitous term that appears to be used in many different fields to explain any manner of issue or contention. Hence, it was important to identify what globalisation is and how it may be influencing nations, education systems, and ultimately assessment in its many forms.

Rajagopal (2009) described globalisation as “the combined influences of trade liberalization, market integration, international finance and investment, technological change, the increasing distribution of production across national boundaries and the emergence of new structures global governance (sic)” (pp. 1–2). He also noted the significant impact of technology in driving change: “by accelerating communication, transport and travel, drives the world toward a converging commonality” (p. 1); while Winter (2011) identified technology as influencing the “knowledge economy” (p. 298). Clearly technology means greater and easier access to information which equates to power, particularly when information can be harnessed to drive innovation thereby gaining advantage within this global consumer society.

Toakley (2004) explored globalisation in terms of the intersection between international economics, sustainability, political influences, environmental impacts, technologies, and the role of universities within a knowledge economy. From his

extensive discussion of globalisation I extracted the key elements of: technology, linked international economies and marketisation, migration, and the knowledge economy to illustrate how the world has changed from the Industrial Revolution to the present. Although there are many other factors linked with globalisation, such as sustainability and environmental issues, these are not within the scope of this chapter.

Globalization is a natural outcome of the sustained technological and economic growth, which originated with the Industrial Revolution in Britain during the 18th Century. This path to continuing economic growth spread initially to continental Europe and North America, and brought with it the creation of large towns and substantial social change. (p. 311) ... At the beginning of the 21st century, virtually all of the command economies have collapsed and capitalism is in its ascendancy Globalization ... has involved the expansion of markets from local, national and regional to an international context. (p. 314) ... there has been another transition where a substantial section of the workforce is involved in processing information [now encapsulated within 'the knowledge economy']. (p. 315) ... Migration from developing countries (whether legal or illegal) will not solve [developing nations'] problems of overpopulation, and it also results in the loss of valuable skilled labour. However, it can contribute to solving the skilled and unskilled labour problems of developed countries with declining and aging populations. As can be seen from recent events in Europe, the migration of substantial numbers of people can be a source of cultural tension, and in the case of United States the ingress of large numbers of migrants from Mexico has depressed unskilled labour wage levels (p. 316). (Toakley, 2004, pp. 311–316)

Not all scholars are proponents of globalisation as some countries fear the pace of change and are struggling to compete with their larger, wealthier, and more powerful counterparts, while some nations are disturbed with the contentions that arise due to migration of populations, and yet others are worried about the imposition of:

a deadening cultural uniformity ... that local cultures and national identities are dissolving into a cross-regional consumerism. That cultural imperialism is said to impose American values as well as products, promote the commercial at the expense of the authentic, and substitute shallow gratification for deeper satisfaction. (Rajagopal, 2009, p. 4)

Similarly, technology is creating dramatic change with “new hybrid cultures” (Rajagopal, 2009, p. 5) emerging, the English language arising as the predominant information medium, and cross-border collaborations and recreation purposes (socialising and gaming activities) now possible. However, technology can also produce national security threats, youth subcultures which conflict with previous generational mores, and demand for greater literacy in English potentially depreciating the value of native linguicism.

The aspect of globalisation that was directly relevant to education systems was the implication from the knowledge economy which translates into national competitiveness frequently manifested in national testing that governments use to monitor educational quality. Emerging from the inductive analysis was the theme of national competitiveness arising from the inter-relatedness of global economies' encompassing international comparisons, and the politicisation of assessment and the movement towards greater system accountability. Associated with the politically-charged aspects were societal debates related to teacher accountability and educator professionalism underlining the importance of effective preservice preparation and

subsequent ongoing professional development. Concomitant with the migration of peoples were the themes of socio-cultural diversity and the influence of the media. These various themes within the frame of globalisation are explored in the subsequent sections.

2.4 Global Economies – International Competitiveness

As Toakley (2004) described, nations now compete on the global economic stage, where many are not equal players. Rajagopal (2009) stated, “Open trade, competitiveness and emergence of global markets for standardized consumer products are the new commercial reality which has driven the developing nations with a high magnitude of change in the economy and consumer culture” (p. 1). As a result, government leaders seek to improve their country’s position in this globalised market and education is frequently perceived to be a significant factor in manoeuvring their workforce and industries into more competitive positions. With education systems factoring into governmental conversations about quality and ‘skilled’ workers, it is hardly surprising that national testing programmes such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s (IEA) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessments take on such importance. PISA assesses reading, mathematics, and science across 65 countries with approximately 510,000 students participating across the globe (OECDa, n.p.). TIMSS assesses the mathematics and science knowledge of 4th and 8th grade students which roughly equates to children aged 9–10 and those 13–14 years of age, respectively; while PIRLS assesses reading and literacy of 4th grade students (IEA). The most frequently cited national or international test is the PISA test. This is possibly because the OECD, established in 1961, is an internationally focused organisation with 34 member countries, and its mission “is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world (OECDb, n.p.) ... [and] to build a stronger, cleaner, fairer world” – arguably highly desirable goals to most nations (OECDc, n.p.). The value of these tests for many governments includes the capacity to monitor the quality of their own education system (Eurydice, 2009; Pepper, 2011; Ross, Cen, & Zhou, 2011; Zhang & Kong, 2012), to explore similarities and differences between countries (Eurydice, 2009; Schleicher, 2011), and to potentially learn from high performing countries with the view to initiating reforms and/or innovations (Sarjala, 2013; Schleicher, 2011; Schleicher & Stewart, 2008). These comparative approaches have even extended to the development of dynamic databases designed to track the different ‘quality indicators’ in education across various countries to facilitate more accurate and aligned comparisons (Poliandri, Cardone, Muzzioli, & Romiti, 2010).

2.4.1 *International Comparisons*

Zhang and Kong (2012), commenting on the Shanghai context identified that in the 1980s politicians linked education to national economics so it is not surprising that national tests were of interest to governments. Acar (2012) in Turkey, Matsuoka (2013) in Japan, and Ross et al. (2011) in China specified that PISA data enabled the tracking of international competitiveness by examining student outcomes in line with curriculum modifications that were designed for greater alignment with the expectations of knowledge-based economies. This is even more pertinent for the European Union (EU) with its lowered borders, inter-related economies, and more mobile citizenry; as The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (Eurydice, 2009) reported:

Improving the quality and efficiency of education is at the centre of education policy debate at both national and EU level. It has a crucial role to play in Europe's Lisbon strategy to build its future prosperity and social cohesion. It lies at the heart of the EU's goals for education and training in the period up to 2020. (p. 3)

Likewise, China is responding to international competition in the quality education agenda by instituting “another wave of reform ... defining and redefining educational quality” (Ross et al., 2011, p. 34). Sarjala (2013) from Finland reported that national testing like PISA enabled the cross-national comparison of student learning approaches. Schleicher and Stewart (2008) noted differences between high and low performing countries. Their analysis revealed high performing countries invested in the professional development of teachers, recruited strong teacher candidates, promoted educators' discipline knowledge, and abandoned “traditional factory model” conceptualisations of teaching wherein educators were at the “bottom of the production line receiving orders from on high” in pursuit of contemporary conceptualisations of professionalism whereby teachers were considered “knowledge workers” (n.p.). Ungerleider (2006) from Canada reflected that many countries are now aiming for more coherent assessment systems which are multi-layered from classroom to schools to entire districts or regions and on to the national and international levels.

Another potential use of international comparisons is the capacity to explode common myths. Schleicher and Stewart (2008) continued their comparison noting that data from Japan, Korea, Finland, and Canada revealed improvement was possible even in disadvantaged socio-economic status (SES) localities, refuting counter claims from the US. They also stated that the prevalence of immigrant student populations did not correlate to poor performance in PISA; nor was performance simply a matter of education funding reflecting that only Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Norway spend more per student than the US and yet the US was not competitive with countries like Finland or Alberta, Canada (Schleicher, 2011). Similar to Schleicher and Stewart's (2008) commentary, Ungerleider also noted that high quality education systems and their equally professional educators did not use diversity in school populations as an excuse for poor performance.

“Knowledge is seen as a codifiable commodity which is produced, measured, marketed, sold and distributed in the market place: ‘productive knowledge is believed to be the basis of national competitive advantage within the international marketplace’” (Ozga & Lingard, 2007, p. 71). Winter, reflecting on the UK school system, drew upon the World Bank (2005, cited Winter, 2011) comments to note that the knowledge economy required schools to reject the traditional conceptualisations of curriculum subject specialisation to one of ‘knowledge as skills’ “toward broader curriculum areas, skillcentred approaches, and non-academic sources of relevant knowledge, with the aim of constructing more relevant and inclusive secondary curricula” (pp. 300–3001). Hence, international comparisons are more likely to influence policies (macro level) rather than practices (micro level).

2.4.2 Cautions with National Testing Data

Even with the potential for international comparisons Zhang and Kong (2012), Cowie, Jones, and Otrrel-Cass (2011) and Wainer (2011) offered cautionary insights about the conclusions that can be drawn from national testing data. Zhang and Kong indicated that findings from Shanghai’s PISA data may not be representative of China as a whole, while Cowie, Jones, and Otrrel-Cass reflected that high PISA scores in New Zealand masked concerns with Māori and Pacifica students’ achievement. Methodologically, Wainer recommended those using test data should be more familiar with the inherent strengths and weaknesses of particular testing instruments and administration approaches. Similarly, Garner (2013) from the US stated that while data were important, equally important were informed consumers of test data, highlighting the need to “educate consumers” to become ...

critical, knowledgeable consumer[s] of statistics who can ask the right questions about the numbers and make a judgment about the validity of the numbers and how appropriately they were used ... we should keep in mind how tests are received by innumerate users and factor in this consideration as we explore more thoroughly indirect and even direct uses of tests. (p. 39)

2.4.3 Exploring Contemporary Issues

Another purpose of national testing programmes is to provide data that enables the exploration of contemporary internationally-relevant issues. For example, Brunello, Rocco, Ariga, and Iwahashi (2012) examined the efficiency of tracking or streaming students in the European Union, while Sarjala (2013) noted the importance of stakeholder cooperation throughout the education sector in Finland in order to create educational equality as an economic necessity. Commeyras and Inyega (2007) and Vikiru (2011) in Kenya, and Gove and Wetterberg (2011) in Liberia utilised

systematic testing programmes to provide data for informed decision making regarding the all-important issue of English language literacy in East and West Africa, which was articulated as crucial to educational success and students' personal career options, as well as national–international competitiveness.

Another contemporary issue was the skills agenda, which was particularly pervasive across the European Union potentially due to the movement of workers across its 28 member states. Raisanen and Rakkolainen (2009) discussed the importance of assessing key competencies such as “learning-to-learn skills, communication skills, social skills and entrepreneurship ... skills required in the labour market” (p. 36) in vocational programmes in Finland, while the wider Finnish education system also focused on media skills in addition to the previously cited ones (Eurydice, 2009). Similarly, the Scottish system assessed problem-solving, team work, and information communication skills, and Winter (2011) identified that in England new curriculum and policy guides emphasised “thinking and social and emotional skills”, particularly, higher order thinking skills including metacognition, as important in preparing students for future careers (p. 300). Drawing upon UNESCO and OECD documents Winter highlighted the need for students to acquire “‘knowledge-how’ (or skills/competency-based knowledge)” (p. 301) rather than fact-based knowledge that the teaching of discrete subjects in secondary schools currently provides. Shafiq’s (2011) shocking discussion of the “skills crisis” in Jordan and Tunisia – literacy skills, higher order thinking, and individual responsibility – indicated their skills shortage has suppressed economic growth and development and was also linked to “the surge of youth participation in extremist activities such as violent protests and suicide bombings” (Krueger, 2007, cited in Shafiq, 2011, p. 1). “Queen Rania of Jordan, for example, refers to the situation as a ‘ticking time bomb’ and stresses the urgency of adopting skill-enhancing policies” (p. 1). Clearly, the skills agenda in these Arab nations is not simply a matter of promoting career success but is also a matter of stability, peace, and national security. Across all these countries the concern was expressed that many teachers were ill-prepared to teach and assess skills which creates a further dilemma in integrating these pivotal twenty-first century skills expectations into school curricular and instructional practices.

If the expectation is then to remain competitive, nations must have high quality education systems that support knowledge and skill development; and it is also just as important to evaluate their systems and to have assessments that can inform and report on students' outcomes in line with national and state/provincial curricular goals (Raisanen & Rakkolainen, 2009).

2.5 National Scene – Politicisation of Assessment

The previous section explored the international comparative uses of student data such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS in order to monitor competitiveness within the international arena. National testing also serves individual governments in their

accountability mandate to their societies (Hulpia & Valcke, 2004). With increasing calls from the public for transparency in reporting on the quality of systems, along with the justification to society for government spending on education, national examinations were deemed to be an appropriate measure of everything from the adequacy of the curriculum to teacher effectiveness to student achievement (Poliandri et al., 2010). Indeed, the vast majority of nations across the globe have introduced some form of national testing. During the 1960s–1970s Sweden, France, England, Wales and Northern Ireland introduced national testing. Moreover, the years 1990–2010 saw the wholesale introduction of national testing in Latvia, Estonia, Spain, Belgium’s French community, Romania, Belgium’s Flemish community, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Norway, Germany, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, and Italy, in chronological order. In noting the prevalence of national testing in the EU it was interesting to find that in 2008/2009 only Belgium’s German-speaking community, the Czech Republic, Greece, Wales, and Liechtenstein did not administer national tests (Eurydice, 2009). Aside from the EU other countries have commenced national testing for example, New Zealand (1995), and Australia (2008) after their introduction of a national curriculum. Similarly, Song’s chapter in this book describes China’s long history of national testing commencing with the Imperial Examination administered by the Emperor around the year 606 and national testing being re-instituted with the National Matriculation Entrance Examination in the early 2000s. Similarly, the US instituted Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) in 1926 while the prevalence and value placed on standardised testing dramatically increased with the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001.

In the information age, society and governments have become more informed and more aware of the need to monitor and be accountable for student success, with education perceived to be a key measure of the likelihood of national competitiveness and prestige; and as Barber (2004) noted discussing accountability in the UK: “We want to raise the bar and narrow the gap. This means we want a system of strong external accountability which can make a decisive contribution to the achievement of that widely shared moral purpose” (p. 7). Therefore, national tests have assumed considerable importance to parents, leaders, education and system leaders who are charged with the responsibility for their system performance. Governments must respond to their society’s perceptions of educational quality; for example, Ross et al. (2011) stated that even though China is emerging as a strong international player, “the Chinese public has expressed consistent dissatisfaction with educational quality” (p. 24). Similarly, Matsuoka (2013) indicated that testing masked underlying societal issues within Japan explaining that their education system reinforced status differences where only the wealthy could afford to provide additional tutoring to ensure the success of their children leading “to the unequal distribution of learning opportunities” (p. 65). Griffiths, Vidovich, and Chapman (2008) in Australia also discussed the importance of parents as a voice in education reforms, referring to them as “customers in the education marketplace” (p. 167) further emphasising our increasingly marketised society. In contrast, Finland’s commitment to the tenets of a democratic civil society, with its notions of responsibility, is demonstrated by ensuring the welfare of its students through complimentary

lunch programmes, seamless support throughout schooling, access to services for no cost (Sahlberg, 2012), greater flexibility to move between vocational programmes and academic streams (Raisanen & Rakkolainen, 2009), and investment in the professionalism of their educators. All of these commitments to educational quality have yielded success in the PISA rankings (Schleicher & Stewart, 2008).

Accountability also relates to monitoring the impact of reforms. Zhang and Kong (2012) discussed how the Shanghai government uses PISA data “to establish very specific targets for change ... to make accurate decisions, to deepen reform and development and to promote education equity and excellence and promote ‘the life-long development of each student’” (p. 158). Other reforms that were cited in the literature included Kenya’s English and Kiswahili literacy reforms (Commeyras & Inyega, 2007), reforms to support differentiation for Aboriginal students in Australia (Fenwick, 2012), and the outcomes-based education (OBE) reform movement in Western Australia (Griffiths et al., 2008). Additionally, the development of standards usually accompanies the accountability movement as these are deemed to be useful in assisting leaders to determine how closely the system and its stakeholders are aligning with the criteria for success, with expectations for action to address lower performance. In Hungary for example, since 2008 schools that do not perform well in the national tests have to prepare an improvement action plan to address their low performance. The focus on improving schools has led to school authorities in Belgium’s French community, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, England, Scotland, and Iceland, requiring schools to carry out internal critical analyses of their exam results to identify appropriate action (Eurydice, 2009). So one can argue that some form of accountability at the system level is a force for positive action; however, the outcomes of these accountability measures are largely dependent on educational stakeholders genuinely engaging with enhancement initiatives to make a difference to student outcomes. As Sahlberg (2012) identified, “The equitable Finnish education system is a result of systematic attention to social justice and early intervention to help those with special needs, and close interplay between education and other sectors – particularly health and social sectors – in Finnish society” (p. 21). This is similar in Alberta (Canada) and the EU (Eurydice) where many stakeholders including ministry personnel, parent councils, professional developers, leadership associations, university professors, and union officials come to the table around policy decisions and professional development initiatives, which has resulted in high performance in the PISA rankings.

2.6 Debates and Controversies

Although it is readily acknowledged that accountability is an embedded element of any society within our globalised world, there are many issues that surround this concept. For example, Wang, Beckett, and Brown (2006) from the US noted that no assessment – standardised or teacher-developed – is perfect, which is why there is so much controversy surrounding assessment. Debates continue surrounding misunderstandings of the purposes and uses of different assessments and how these can

be high stakes for various stakeholders. As well as these issues, this section examines the values that underpin assessment in terms of what is assessed is valued, ensuring cultural sensitivity, and teachers' beliefs, ethics, and relationships.

2.6.1 Purposes of Assessment

One hotly debated topic is the purpose and uses of assessment data. This issue encompasses whether or not important stakeholders understand the different purposes of various assessments, ensuring the “fitness-for-purpose” of different forms of assessment (Eurydice, 2009, p. 63), and being vigilant that resultant data are used for the purposes for which the assessment was originally designed to prevent misaligned or misguided decisions. An associated issue is ascribing value or worth to various types of assessment (James & Pedder, 2006). A current trend across the world is to demonise summative forms of assessment due to misconceptions of the negativity associated with labelling students, reducing them to numbers, or placing them into a ranking hierarchy; and conversely, elevating formative feedback due to perceptions of its value in informing teaching and learning and its potential to motivate students. This type of “evil versus good” debate in assessment repudiates the needs of different stakeholders to have various forms of data to make decisions at different levels of society (Sahlberg, 2012).

2.6.2 High Stakes

Volante and Beckett (2011) commented on the concerns with the high stakes associated with large-scale testing programmes in North America, particularly in the US, where schools can be closed, and teachers and school leaders fired or demoted due to poor school performance. Even though these punitive measures are not enacted in Canada provincial exams are high stakes for students in their final year of school as they serve as a gatekeeping mechanism for eligibility for entry into post-secondary programmes. Along the high stakes theme Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, and Jones (2007) also discussed their concerns about students with special needs sitting high stakes testing in the US. They found that students with disabilities are “particularly vulnerable” if they fail to achieve “proficient levels” in these exams and suffer the consequences if they make schools “look less effective” which raises the stress students' experience in taking these tests (p. 164).

2.6.3 What Is Assessed Is Valued

Another debate of large-scale testing programmes is that what is tested is valued, which in turn can influence teaching behaviours. It may be argued that a test is evaluating the learning outcomes of students in alignment with curriculum

standards and so teachers teaching to the test will by default be teaching to the curriculum standards. Even so, Barber recognised that systems must reinforce the teaching and assessment of broader educational outcomes, not simply those tested through standardised tests. Provided that all curriculum areas are included in standardised tests there can be little criticism if teachers teach to the test. An additional issue now arising around the world, particularly noted across Europe, is what assessments are necessary for evaluating students' development of skills. One may question whether standardised pen and paper tests validly assess all skill development, and if they do not, this then elevates the importance of innovations in assessment, such as performance and authentic assessment, which should be teacher-led. Therefore, what is valued is assessed but there must be clarity regarding what is valued and what forms of assessment can most effectively assess these diverse criteria.

Encompassed within the political nature of large-scale testing are suspicions about how these data are used or portrayed. Garner (2013) commented, "statistics can be misunderstood ... perverted, or misused (p. 36) ... there are those who cynically manipulate numbers and report numbers purely to achieve their own goals, just as some politicians use test scores to forward their agenda, whether the test score is appropriately used or not" (p. 38). Drawing upon Best's thoughts (2001, cited in Garner) Garner states that "many bad statistics are produced by 'selective, self-righteous efforts to produce numbers that reaffirm principles and interests that their advocates consider just and right'" (p. 38). Thus there is the potential for distressing and destructive relationships between those who manipulate numbers and those who uncritically accept numbers.

2.6.4 Cultural sensitivity

Ungerleider (2006) indicated that system administrators must examine the appropriateness of standardised tests for different populations. For example, he pondered the suitability of a test for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, students situated in rural and metropolitan localities, girls and boys, immigrants and native born students, as well as linguistically diverse student groups. Reiterating Ungerleider's concern, Volante and Beckett (2011) in Canada identified that standardised testing programmes can be culturally inappropriate for indigenous students who are unable to interpret or misinterpret the test questions due to differences in cultural understandings. As an interesting example they posited a test question that required students to identify the deleterious effects of smoking, while pointing out that for many Canadian indigenous groups smoke and smoking are inherent aspects of sacred ceremonies – hence, students' cultural filters would impede their capacity to fully respond to the question in the way the test developer expected. Likewise, Friesen and Ezeife (2009) recommended greater collaboration with "Aboriginal Elders and other leaders in order to develop appropriate assessments founded on culturally responsive instructional and assessment practices" (p. 35) and for teachers to

consider students' social and cultural backgrounds when formulating their assessment tasks to ensure a "high degree of cultural validity" (p. 31). Commeyras and Inyega (2007) iterated similar sentiments but applied to the Kenyan context. Fenwick (2012) in Australia explored the potential for performance assessment as a more suitable assessment strategy for indigenous students. Similarly, in New Zealand, Harris and Brown (2009) proposed that teachers "consider divergent stakeholder interests when selecting assessments for [Māori and possibly Pacifica] students, balancing the needs of the society, the school, and the pupil" (p. 365). They also stressed that Māori students should not be considered a homogenous group as they too represent diversity within their own cultural cluster, similar to the diversity among Australian Aborigines and the North American First Nations groups.

2.6.5 *Beliefs, Ethics, and Relationships*

Another controversy revolves around teachers' beliefs about assessment, their ethical stance in assessing particular students, and the relationship they have with students. Cowie et al.'s (2011) New Zealand study reported on the broad impact of teachers' assessment practices recounting this in terms of social, emotional, cognitive dimensions:

The assessment relationships students have with the teacher, tasks and one another shape their opportunities to learn and they impact on the identities students develop as learners and knowers ... This is the case irrespective of whether the assessment is summative and of learning or assessment is formative and for learning. (p. 354)

Even though most teachers choose to enter the teaching profession for altruistic reasons – helping children and young people to learn – we must recognise they are human beings with biases. One of the main reasons for parents' and society's concerns with trusting teacher judgements is because many of us have personally encountered poor assessment, been the subject of teacher bias, or have not had positive relationships with teachers. Harlen (2005) in the UK discussed these issues and identified that many studies reported teacher bias directly related to student characteristics, such as "behaviour (for young students), gender, special educational needs; overall academic achievement and verbal ability" which influenced teachers' judgements in assessing specific skills (p. 262). Harlen's analysis was further corroborated in the Alberta Student Assessment Study where students and parents reported concerns with teacher bias in relation to inappropriate coalescence of behaviour with academic achievement, gender – wherein boys were graded more harshly frequently due to teachers' concerns with their behaviour, while teachers themselves acknowledged issues in assessing students with cultural and linguistic diversity, and students with special needs, particularly those of the gifted and talented (Scott, Webber, Lupart, Aitken, & Scott, 2013). Likewise, Green, Johnson, Kim, and Pope (2007) from the US articulated their concerns with the variability of teachers' ethical behaviour with assessment. They highlighted Strike's (1990, cited in Green et al., 2007, p. 1009) suggestion that moral concepts should be addressed

in preservice education, particularly related to the principles of “Do No Harm” and “Avoid Score Pollution”. Do no harm relates to how poor assessment can damage students indicating that this could also be related to Payne’s (2003, cited in [Green et al.](#), p. 1000) concept of “Assess As Ye Would Be Assessed”; however, do no harm may actually be a passive concept where active engagement with the ethical issues may be required. For example, teachers may need to actively interrogate their biases towards certain groups of students i.e., special needs or indigenous students and address their inaccurate or inappropriate assessment approaches. “Avoid score pollution”, which may on initial glance appears to highlight the inappropriateness of conflating behaviour with academic achievement judgements, is actually a deeper principle. Drawing upon Popham’s (1991, cited in [Green et al.](#)) and Haladyna and his associates’ (1991, cited in [Green et al.](#)) premises, Green et al. suggest:

any practice that improves test performance without concurrently increasing actual mastery of the content tested produces score pollution. That is, the score on the test does not represent actual student achievement in the content area and is ‘polluted’ by factors unrelated to academic attainment. If scores do not reflect mastery then harm has been done. This situation is akin to lying. For example, practicing beforehand with actual test content would produce score pollution. In essence, this is a validity issue. Test scores no longer measure generalized mastery but simply ability to memorize specific test items. (p. 1001)

Therefore avoiding score pollution includes teaching to the test that involves teachers only teaching the test items rather than the full curriculum content.

An interesting aspect of the ethical and moral dimensions of assessment was explained by Friesen and Ezeife (2009) in Canada and Saunders and Vulliamy (1983) in their comparative study of Papua New Guinea and Tanzania, where they pointed out that parents will frequently reward or punish their child or allocate resources for tutoring or further educational opportunities based upon teachers’ assessments of students’ capacities. Hence when viewed through this lens, teacher assessment can be perceived as just as “high stakes” as standardised tests. [Friesen and Ezeife](#) continued stating that biased teachers can actually perpetuate the cycle of failure for indigenous students rather than promoting positive educational experiences that can create productive futures for these students.

Beets (2012) in South Africa explored the importance of teacher-student relationships and described this in terms of the morality of teachers’ practice where assessment should be utilised to “enhance both teaching and learning in the interests of each learner and ultimately society” (p. 81). He identified that positive relationships with students implied high levels of trust which could only be founded upon “unconditional caring with the sole intention to scaffold and guide the learners’ journey” (p. 80). He continued by stating:

Supporting learners through educational assessment practices to reach their potential level of development implies a relationship of trust – a deep human engagement between a more knowledgeable other (in this case, a teacher) and learners who commit themselves regardless of differences at various levels to use the processes inherent to, and insights gained from, assessment retrospectively (feedback) and prospectively (feedforward) to enhance learning. (p. 79)

Green et al. (2007) also emphasised the importance of trust, reporting that the teacher-student relationship could be irreparably damaged by assessments and practices students perceive as “unfair or unfounded” (p. 1009). An aspect of creating a trusting relationship is effective communication. This was implied in Griffiths et al.’s (2008) Australian study where they identified the demotivation that students experienced when they were not progressing through the outcome levels within each year, which led them to posit that teachers were not providing sufficient ongoing feedback to students regarding the differentiation contained by standard descriptors within the levels, and their achievement in relation to these standards. Vikiru’s (2011) Kenyan study found that “students found it strange to be involved in the planning and assessment of their own learning” (p. 134) which again indicated teachers were not overtly facilitating student empowerment with assessment. All of these studies reinforced the importance of communication in building positive relationships around assessment.

This brief foray exploring some studies that touch upon teachers’ beliefs about assessment, teachers’ ethics in assessment and the ethic of care and relationships they create with students underpins some of the concerns that parents and society have with trusting teachers to make accurate and fair judgements about their children. Of course this has implications for teacher preparation programmes and for professional development in addressing these concerns, which can in turn have a significant influence on societal perceptions of the credibility and professionalism of educators.

2.6.6 Accountability of Teachers – Societal Trust in the Profession

A sometimes confused debate is conceptualisations of accountability of systems and schools versus accountability of teachers and leaders. This confusion entails systems versus people and as such gives rise to passionate debate and inflammatory rhetoric as illustrated by Beets’ comment that teachers’ concerns with “their own performativity in terms of the stated performance indicators and their accountability towards the education authorities have a higher priority than the interests of learners, their parents and ultimately society” which he felt constituted an ethical dilemma (p. 71). As I have previously identified, it is reasonable and necessary for governments to want to monitor the quality of their educational systems and effectiveness of schools/jurisdictions as transparency is a key responsibility in meeting societal demands for accountability. This is why standardised testing is prevalent and useful for checking the pulse of the nation’s systems and international competitiveness; while teacher assessment is valuable and influential for guiding and promoting learning, informing teaching decisions, and reporting on student outcomes. Therefore, even though standardised testing in many countries is not designed to scrutinise individual teacher’s behaviours it is aimed at monitoring the effectiveness

of the curriculum and whether or not standards are being maintained for all; whereas Ungerleider (2006) stated that these tests “must be predicated on enabling teachers rather than controlling or ‘fixing’ them” (p. 879). Standardised test data can inform curricula development, policies, resourcing decisions, and highlight particular needs of vulnerable groups in society (e.g., indigenous and/or gifted and talented students), which is generally outside the sphere of influence of individual teachers. If standards fall or quality indicators are found to be declining then it is hardly surprising that policy makers will query what is happening at the micro level, that is, between teachers and students, as this constitutes the baseline data.

While many rail against teacher accountability using terminology like “neo-liberal” (Winter, 2011), and “managerial and market” accountability (Griffiths et al., 2008), educators cannot escape societal expectations that as public servants they too, like police, nurses, doctors, and the military, are accountable for the work they do in the service of society. Harris and Brown (2009) found New Zealand’s teachers were highly critical and suspicious about government imposed testing programmes as they perceived these to be irrelevant to their work with students and “clashing with their personal beliefs about effective assessment” (p. 370). Harlen (2005) indicated policy makers in England, Wales, and Scotland were increasingly willing to reduce the impact of large-scale testing programmes and considered “making greater use of teachers’ judgements for summative assessment” (p. 246). On a counterpoint though, Harlen reported that the review by no means constituted “a ringing endorsement of teachers’ assessment [as] there was evidence of low reliability and bias in teachers’ judgements” (p. 245). Bolt (2011) and Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2010) identified a range of issues in Australia in supporting teachers to be more consistent in judging students’ work against curriculum standards. They found that without moderation and school communities of practice to continue professional development efforts, teachers were less able to make consistent judgements even with well-articulated standard guides. Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith proposed that “standards intended to inform teacher judgement and to build assessment capacity are necessary but not sufficient for maintaining teacher and public confidence in schooling” (p. 21). Wang et al. (2006) sought the middle ground stating “If used prudently, standardized tests can complement teacher-made tests to provide a more comprehensive description and valid assessment of student achievement” (p. 321). Similarly within the Canadian context, Ungerleider (2006) endorsed Wang et al.’s notions about finding a middle ground where teacher’s suspicions about standardised testing can be allayed through greater involvement in acquiring useful information about teaching and learning, analysing results and planning implementation of improvements in instruction. He stressed that leaders have a significant role to play working with teachers to identify the connections between teacher and school data and policies and practices.

Aside from the tensions surrounding teacher judgement, there are also concerns with teacher assessment knowledge. There can be no doubt that while many teachers have a broad understanding of instructional approaches, many lack the knowledge of and expertise with a variety of alternative assessment approaches (Geçer & Özel, 2012; Scott, Webber, Aitken, & Lupart, 2011). This deficit leaves them feeling

uncomfortable in defending their judgement to parents and highlights the need for assessment related professional development. Gove and Wetterberg (2011) found that many teachers did not know how to teach and assess reading and they recommended professional development to increase teacher expertise in Liberia. Harlen indicated that teachers in the UK failed to take advantage of their autonomy from standardised testing; however, they tended to emulate standardised tests within their routine continuous assessment. This indicated that they lacked expertise in varied and innovative forms of assessment and misinterpreted the ways to include formative feedback.

Garner (2013) further identified concerns in US teachers' perceptions of value ascribed to formative over summative assessment. She stated that there is a tendency for teachers to believe testing imposed from external sources (summative) "is bad" as they ...

insist that it is possible to reduce children to mere numbers (with the incorrect assumption that the purpose of testing is to reduce children to numbers). ... If teachers, administrators, and parents don't believe that testing can improve schooling, they ignore the test or design clever ways to circumvent or even undermine the test. How can any direct or indirect uses of testing operate under such disbelief and resistance? (p. 37)

Griffiths et al. (2008) discussed the problems of implementing policy reforms in Australia without providing teachers with the necessary professional development to be able to understand how to change their assessment practices in line with OBE legislation:

With no clear and substantive unpacking of how assessment becomes part of a productive pedagogy, teachers find it difficult to understand that assessment can fulfil purposes other than producing a mark against which learners will be promoted or kept back in a specific grade. (p. 70)

They noted the problems with outdated teacher knowledge which compounded the difficulties they encountered in assessing within a new paradigm. Clearly, there is the need for professional development of teachers in relation to not only expanding their assessment repertoire to more innovative forms, but also in gaining a deeper understanding of the purposes of different forms of assessment and the impacts these may have on different stakeholders who require the information that these assessments yield.

A more pertinent question is not whether or not teachers should be accountable, rather ... What resources and professional development are in place to enhance educator capacity and professionalism in carrying out this important role? (Schleicher, 2011) The question of teacher responsibility is emerging more strongly now as many systems are moving towards greater weighting for teacher assessments. For example, Denmark and Finland have recognised the importance of teachers and their assessment capacities and are focusing on building professional capacity and "confidence in professional accountability" using external school performance measures as data that serves "to encourage teachers and schools to develop more supportive and productive learning environments" (Schleicher & Stewart, 2008).

2.7 Professionalism and Professional Development

Increasingly there are discussions within society about the professionalisation of educators (Schleicher, 2011) with some arguing that teachers are merely technicians while others promote notions of professionalism as an ideology to drive positive change. Drawing upon Webber and Scott's (2013) discussion of the conceptualisation of professions and professionalism, they used Brandeis' (1912) early three-point definition of what constitutes a profession. First, professions require "preliminary training" that is "intellectual in character" and involves the development of understandings instead of simply focusing on skill development alone. Second, professions entail the pursuit of altruism rather than simply self-serving, while the third point encompasses notions of the rejection of performance or success measured purely in terms of financial gain. Webber and Scott continued, describing 'professionalism' using Parsons' (1968, cited in Webber & Scott, p. 115) definition that encompassed "fiducial responsibilities ... with a 'service orientation'"; that is, the trust that society places in educators to ensure the wellbeing and care of students, as well as Torstendahl's (2005, cited in Webber & Scott, p. 115) complementary characteristics of responsibility to the institutional arrangements of their employers and the responsibility "to discuss among their colleagues how to perform their duties".

It is pivotal to note that definitions of professionalism relate to education and training that is intellectual in nature with the view to ensuring best practice in the service of students and ultimately society. Schleicher (2011) endorsed these sentiments when he explored the differences between high and low performing education systems, reporting that in high performing systems there was a shared commitment to professionalised teaching, the application of "evidence-based practices", and a sense of "professional pride" (p. 62). Additionally, attention was paid to the selection of high quality teacher candidates who were provided with excellent preparation and induction, as well as subsequent on-the-job professional growth opportunities. Rewards and recognition were integrated into systems so that the pursuit of excellence was promoted with the expectation that all teachers would be well equipped for facilitating the effective learning of students under their care. He identified that the Singaporean system allows for multiple career pathways including master teacher, content specialist, or principal.

Ungerleider (2006) discussed further issues with ensuring effective preservice preparation where he asserted that university professors were going to have "to operate in a changed milieu" whereby they must collaborate with their colleagues in order to identify what knowledge, skills and attitudes or beliefs teachers must develop for contemporary school contexts (p. 882). Therefore, teachers must gain knowledge of alternative and authentic assessments (Cowie et al., 2011; Fenwick, 2012; Friesen & Ezeife, 2009; Geçer & Özel, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2008; Raisanen & Rakkolainen, 2009), as well as how to make consistent judgements supported by systematic moderation processes (Bolt, 2011; Harlen, 2005; Hulpia & Valcke, 2004; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2010; Sahlberg, 2012; Vikiru, 2011), and embed into their pedagogical philosophy an ethic of care and high moral process with a clear

understanding of how these beliefs and values would be demonstrated in assessment practices (Beets, 2012; Green et al., 2007; Harris & Brown, 2009; Katsiyannis et al., 2007; Scott et al., 2013; Webber & Scott, 2013). Volante and Beckett (2011) though were concerned that many educators look to university programmes for their professional preparation and development, however, all too often assessment is not encompassed in programmes, or the content is outdated, or too theoretical to be of much use. Scott et al. (2011) recommended university professors and leaders must engage with the contemporary issues of assessment by reviewing the currency, innovativeness, and pragmatism within their preservice and graduate programming to address these deficits.

2.7.1 Moderation

Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2010) offered this description of moderation:

teachers' judgement practice in the context of standards-driven reform with a focus on how the stated standards are used by teachers ... The processes and social interactions that teachers rely on to inform their decisions have been identified. The ways in which these teachers talked through and interacted with one another to reach agreement about the quality of student work in the application of standards have been analysed with evidence of differences in the way that they make compensations and trade-offs in their award of grades dependent on the subject area they teach. ... moderation meetings ... are designed to reach consistent, reliable judgements. (pp. 22–23)

Moderation emerged as a crucial approach in promoting more consistent and valid teacher judgements about students' work particularly when aligned with standards and criteria. Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2010) and Bolt (2011) in Australia, and Harlen (2005) in the UK, all discussed the merits of moderation approaches. The advantages of moderation were described by Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith as "intrinsic to efforts by the profession to realise judgements that are defensible, dependable and open to scrutiny" (p. 21), while Harlen indicated that it is a leader's responsibility to enhance the dependability of teachers' assessment by "protecting time for planning assessment, in-school moderation (p. 267) ... for teachers to meet and to take advantage of the support that others, including assessment advisers, can give" (p. 262). Naturally, moderation has leadership implications as teachers must be released from the classroom in order to participate in these collaborative moderation processes.

2.8 Socio-cultural Issues – Diversity in Schools

At this juncture it is relevant to return to the overarching theme of this chapter – globalisation and its influence on education and assessment. As previously noted, globalisation has influenced the socio-cultural dimensions of schools due to the

migration of peoples which has resulted in significant changes to the demographics of school populations around the world. Additionally, due to government policies addressing children with special needs, many students with exceptionalities now have greater access to mainstream education. This means educators have an increasingly complex task in supporting the learning of a wide range of students who have varied learning needs. This section explores the assessment issues for students with special needs, as well as those in lower socio-economic status situations, and acknowledges the concerns for indigenous students which were discussed in the section under “cultural sensitivity”.

The term ‘inclusion’ has arisen to represent the more diverse classroom and the expectation that teachers will differentiate their instructional and assessment strategies in order to meet all students’ learning needs (Jordan, 2007). Differentiated assessment entails modifying an assessment to enable students to access and engage with the task. This may include altering the wording of tasks, including accommodations to assist students to understand and engage with the task, changing the task altogether by raising or lowering the cognitive demand, considering the cultural dimensions, and/or allowing students to demonstrate their understandings in a variety of ways and using a range of media or technologies. The following sections examine the literature that emerged from different nations regarding socio-cultural diversity in schools.

2.8.1 Students with Special Education Needs (SEN)

The Eurydice report (2009) stated that across Europe there was variability as to whether or not SEN students were included in standardised testing programmes or if their inclusion was optional. Indeed, including SEN students in standardised tests has been highly controversial in the US where some students have been excluded from testing because they can influence the school results and this is can have negative consequences for all stakeholders (Katsiyannis et al., 2007). SEN students in Slovenia have modified tests or can take the test using accommodations including audio visual aids, braille, more time or breaks allowed during testing, “assistants on hand to offer support”, and the use of technology or “specially adapted equipment or resources” (p. 40).

France has diagnostic assessments which enable teachers to modify their instructional approaches and personalise their assistance to SEN students (Eurydice, 2009). Wang and his associates (2006) in the US felt that adaptive technologies held real promise in meeting the individualised learning needs of SEN students. Lebeer et al. (2012) reported on the concerns of assessment for children with special education needs (SEN) across various countries in Europe. They felt that assessment for these students was particularly important due to the potential motivation and esteem issues that could arise from poor assessment practices. They indicated that in Romania accessing psychological assessments was difficult and protracted, which was exacerbated by the high demand for these assessments resulting in overload on

psychological services. Additionally, they expressed concern with the “too negative” formulation of the psychological assessments, and in the Virgin Islands there was a lack of pragmatic guidance for teachers within these assessments (p. 82). Not surprisingly they reported these assessments “should be formulated in an optimistic way, giving clear indications as to the construction of an academically and socially challenging individual educational programme” (p. 89).

2.8.2 Other Socio-culturally Diverse Students

Other socio-culturally diverse students that were cited as at-risk due to poor or inappropriate or insensitive assessments were those in low socio-economic status locales, English language learners, and gifted and talented students. Friesen and Ezeife (2009) emphasised the issue of validity where students have no experience with the aspects in a test which can apply to any of these socio-culturally diverse students. Fenwick warned that when standards and assessments were devised with lower expectations for students in low SES areas or other socio-culturally diverse demographics, this actively impeded these students from rising above their circumstances as low expectations became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Low SES students were the focus of a major Australian government funding and research initiative with the view to avoiding and addressing low expectations (MCEETYA, 2008). In the UK, teachers are able to assess ELL students through teacher assessment rather than placing them into the national testing programmes before they are ready (Eurydice, 2009). De Boer, Minnaert, and Kamphof (2013) reported that the Netherlands government had made gifted and talented education a priority with the view to enhancing national competitiveness.

2.9 Media Influences

A surprising dimension to emerge from many countries, namely Australia, Finland, Liberia, the Netherlands, UK, and US was the influence of the media on education policies and assessment debates. The media has had a significant role in our globalised society largely due to the influence of technology facilitating the ease and speed of information dissemination. This analysis revealed that the media can be a force for positive action or a highly destructive one depending on how it is harnessed, how succinct and accurate the reporting is, and whether or not the issue at hand has the capacity to be sensationalistic.

The research from Liberia showed the influence of the media can be a two-edged sword. The education system effectively utilised the media to garner public curiosity over a reading initiative, disseminating the purposes and processes involved, and garnered support for the project. Leaders publicised a competition and gained support from influential members of the community to gain funding for the project – a

positive outcome from media support. However, Gove and Wetterberg (2011) reported that the necessity for the English language project was not simply a matter of student learning, rather, they highlighted the pivotal role the media had played in inciting people to violence after the election of 2007–2008, which was exacerbated by tribal rivalries inherent in linguistic difference. Hence, this project was significant in using the media in promoting peace and tolerance.

Unfortunately, the media is about selling papers and maintaining or increasing readership; hence, it is in their best interest to devise stories that provoke controversy and contentious debate rather than to simply serve the informational needs of the public. Garner described Best's (2001, cited in Garner, 2013) lament about the media's sometimes erroneous or skewed reporting of educational statistics:

the media like to report statistics because numbers seem to be factual, little nuggets of truth. The public tends to agree; we usually treat statistics as facts. In part, this is because we are innumerate. Innumeracy is the mathematical equivalent of illiteracy. (p. 38)

Erroneous reporting can arise due to the conflation, ambiguity, or incertitude regarding the purposes of different types of assessments which can lead to applications of data for which the assessment was never designed. Therefore, the media can play on the ignorance of the public regarding sectors or industries in society about which they have little or no insider knowledge which limits their capacity to make informed judgements about the merits of a debate; and education is an easy target because everyone has gone to school.

Barber (2004) in the UK identified the importance of positive self-marketing to the media from within the public service sector where he cautioned that overt criticism from within the sector tends to negatively colour the thinking of the public about that sector as a whole. Similarly, in the Netherlands, Segers and Tillema (2011) found students and their parents were confused and disillusioned about the high stakes examinations due to the “vivid debate on the quality of examinations” that was widely publicised in the media (p. 53). Sarjala (2013) noted the media scepticism regarding governmental policy directions, even though these were largely uncontested within the parliament. The media in Australia has had a long and very contentious relationship with education policy, frequently portraying teachers in a poor light, and lambasting curriculum and assessment reforms to the point where parents and the public doubt the quality of their school system, openly question teacher judgements, and curriculum and assessment implementation efforts. Griffiths et al. (2008) reported this as the media “steering from a distance ... [having] symbolic power over policy processes” (p. 170). They continued stating this has seriously damaged teachers’ professional self-belief and confidence and has made educators resistant to further change.

Potentially the most contentious and damaging educational report is ‘annual league tables’ where school rankings are reported with little explanation or discussion of the criteria used in the ranking process (Schagen & Hutchison, 2003). Unfortunately, there are usually fewer reports about schools who have improved their effectiveness in student achievement than those which have lost ground due to various factors. While acknowledging parental rights to select schools and make

choices based on the information that is available – frequently those of league tables – the ramifications for schools where parents move their children can have serious consequences in terms of funding, which exacerbates opportunities for students in those schools who are unable to move (Eurydice, 2009; Griffiths et al., 2008). Unless governments take action to provide more support to poorer performing schools, league tables or similar ranking systems can reinforce status differences within civil societies (Schleicher, 2011). Even though censorship of the school data is not desirable in a civil society, it is important to consider the potential damage that can be wrought from indiscriminate or misleading conclusions that can be drawn from ‘selected’ data. It is then important for school and system leaders to be proactive in educating the public regarding these school data, as well as in presenting positive portrayals of exemplary educators and schools, thereby providing the opportunity for balanced public perceptions of educators and the sector (Schagen & Hutchison, 2003).

2.10 Concluding Thoughts

There can be no denying that globalisation has changed and continues to change the world we live in and the fabric and expectations of society. Assessment with its overt flavour of accountability and politicisation is a modern-day reality for everyone but particularly for students, educators, and leaders. Curiously, this inductive analysis revealed debates and discussions that focused on the political dimensions of assessment, accountability of systems and teachers but only peripherally included leaders in these debates. The leadership focus tended to be on political leaders or system leaders, but little on school leaders or jurisdictional leaders. Therefore this book, with its emphasis on leadership for enhanced assessment in schools and across districts, seeks to address the dearth of literature about the assessment leader. I hope that readers will find valuable theoretical and practical insights into leadership for enhanced assessment.

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