
The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture

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This article is about classroom assessment—not the kind

The historical framework I present here is familiar to you. Most of us have learned to assess students in a traditional

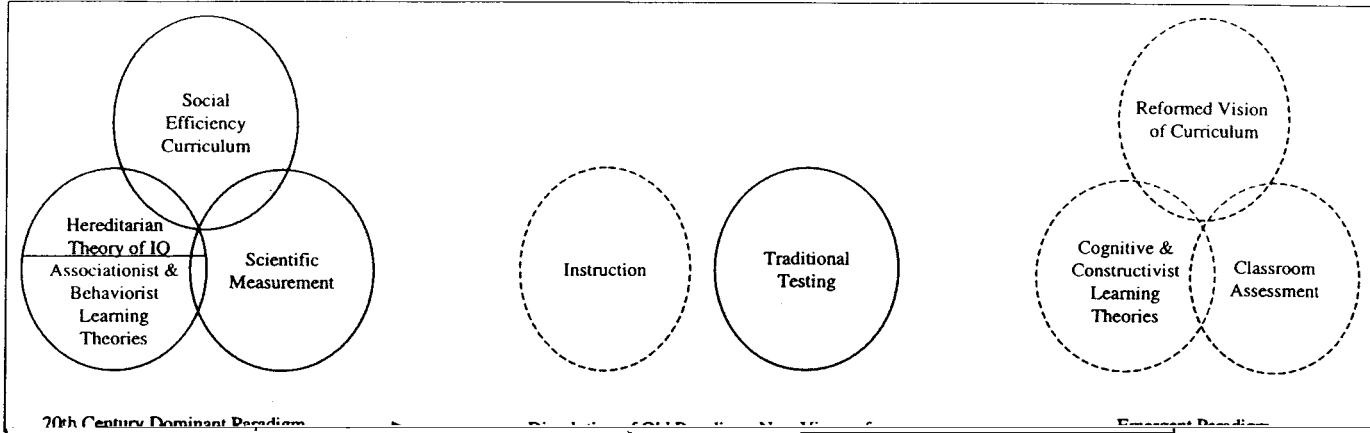


FIGURE 1. A conceptual diagram illustrating the relationship between 20th-century dominant paradigms and emergent paradigms.

The Curriculum of Social Efficiency

Scientific management of schools like factories

1. James had 5 cents. He earned 13 cents more and then bought a top for 10 cents. How much money

1. Below is a list of statements. Indicate by a cross (X)

[The page contains numerous horizontal lines for writing, which are mostly obscured by heavy black redaction bars.]

Reformed Vision of Curriculum

- All students can learn.
- Challenging subject matter aimed at higher order thinking & problem solving
- Equal opportunity for diverse learners
- Socialization into the discourse & practices of academic disciplines
- Authenticity in the relationship between learning in and out of school



Can you see 3/5 of something?

the use of assessment *for* learning, which I consider in the next section, it is important to recognize the pervasive negative effects of accountability tests and the extent to which externally imposed testing programs prevent and drive out thoughtful classroom practices. In presenting these ideas to an audience of educational researchers and teacher educators, I used the image of Darth Vader and the Death Star to illustrate the negative effects of accountability testing.

Again, these ideas are not new. It is likely that teacher educators say something about this litany of complaints in

“every teacher who wants to practice formative assessment must reconstruct the teaching contract so as to counteract

teacher preparation courses. But, what do diatribes against testing teach candidates about more meaningful forms of as-

the habits acquired by his pupils” (p. 92). Tunstall and Gipps (1996) have studied classrooms in Great Britain where

are able to hate standardized testing and at the same time reproduce it faithfully in their own pre-post testing routines,

cussing work and criteria with students as a means to redistribute power and establish more collaborative relationships with students.

knowledge, using a checklist or pre-test version of the intended end-of-unit test may not be very accurate unless I already have sophisticated experience with the teacher's measures and conceptual categories. Open discussion or "instructional conversations" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) are

Transfer

There is a close relationship between truly *understanding* a concept and being able to *transfer* knowledge and use it in new situations. In contrast to memorization—and in contrast to the behaviorist assumption that each application must be

will be judged). More importantly, however, giving stu- tivation and a sense of how to develop a classroom culture

dards require speaks to a different and even more funda- role of assessment are likely to be at odds with prevailing

have to be reexamined. Thus we face the challenge of trying to find out what works at the same time that we are at

ity testing programs—what the content should be, whether there should be high-stakes consequences, and so forth. In

² Sadler (1998) uses the term *formative assessment* to mean assessment "that is specifically intended to provide feedback on performance to improve and accelerate learning" (p. 77). He acknowledges that teachers may have difficulty using feedback in positive ways because

Lepper, M. R., Drake, M. F., O'Donnell-Johnson, T. (1997). Scaffolding techniques of expert human tutors. In K. Hogan & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Scaffolding student learning: Instructional approaches & issues*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

cause of students' negative coping strategies developed in response to past practices.

Madaus, G. F., West, M. M., Harmon, M. C., Lomax, R. G., & Viator, K. A. (1992). *The influence of testing on teaching math and science in grades 4-12*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Center of Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy, Boston College.
Mathematical Sciences Education Board. (1993). *Measuring up: Prototypes for mathematics assessment*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.