

Chapter 50

Assessing the Quality of Education for All: The Case of South America and the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

Assessment of education has been identified as an important component of educational systems in South America and the Caribbean. Promoted and guided by UNESCO's Education for All global initiative, a vast network of international organizations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to assess the quality of education in a significant number of countries in the region. This chapter attempts to answer why education should be evaluated, and how the quality of education is assessed in Latin American and the Caribbean. An overview of educational assessment processes, resources, networks, and issues within this reason are examined. Additionally, it proposes a value-based community partnership model for education.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the field of education has experienced an increased interest and use of assessments, measurement analysis, and evaluation methods (Levinson, 2011). Central issues of accountability, added value models, and the

use of theoretical frameworks were among the factors contributing to the increasing concern of worldwide educators and policy makers. In this regard, educators, administrators, and decision-makers are now measuring how much students are learning and meeting set standards in an attempt to measure the overall effectiveness and

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efficiency of educational systems. Additionally, experts are encouraging the use of assessment for learning as a powerful teaching strategy to support student learning (Wiliam, 2006). While teaching and learning in K-20 education is the main focus of this book, this chapter will examine how education is assessed in Latin America and in the Caribbean. Exclusive types of assessment strategies used within the classroom will not be examined; however, the chapter will explore a more universal definition of assessment, the quality of education, and current trends in both regions.

Despite the desire of stakeholders who long for accountability through the raising of educational standards for the well-being of *all* students, it will be argued that the use of assessments to determine educational quality should be based on common values shared not just by administrators, but by teachers, students, parents, and any other vested stakeholders. While different educational standards and legislation are in place within different geographical regions, all of these educational standards must be aligned with the beliefs of the community. If educational standards do not match the community's sense of educational value, worth, and does not provide stakeholder governance, then possibly any standards that are put in place may become meaningless. Therefore, the argument will be made that educational assessment practices go far beyond norms, policies, and compliance, and are really an issue of human rights.

Promoted and guided by UNESCO's *Education for All* global initiative, a vast network of international organizations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations now collaborate in an effort to assess the quality of education in a significant number of participating countries. The region of Latin America and the Caribbean has witnessed various initiatives proffering more education opportunities to all individuals. At the primary level, Post (2011) discusses the initiatives of the EFA Movement and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that attempt to increase school enrollment of working children.

Post's (2011) empirical findings, conclude that "employment and classroom learning are not perfectly compatible" (p. 275). In addition, two other conclusions were found to be important: (1) a closer examination of parent involvement and education must be undertaken in order to grant children more time to be students and not just workers, especially within a primary school setting; and (2) working students usually attend low-performing schools, therefore, governments should prioritize assistance to these schools (Post, 2012).

At the adult level, Gadotti (2011) argues that adult education is still a key issue in the Latin American and the Caribbean for both formal and non-formal education within the public and private sector. He adds that adult education should be understood as a human right, therefore should cease when individuals reached a certain age. Gadotti bases his ecopedagogic perspective, on Freire's legacy, and this ecopedagogic approach or "Pedagogy of the earth" (Gadotti, 2001 as cited in Gadotti, 2011, p.21) refers to a pedagogy concept that views the individual as just not living in the world, but being part of the world. Therefore, within an ecopedagogic framework, adult learning is placed in the context of human relationships and interactions, creating a sustainable holistic vision and a dynamic balance between human beings and nature (Gadotti, 2011).

Therefore, two questions guide the discussion in this chapter: (1) why do we evaluate; and, (2) how is the quality of education being assessed in Latin America and the Caribbean? In order to answer these questions, a brief introduction of the region in terms of impact, size and countries, concepts of K-20 education and Education for All (EFA) using a value-based approach, a review of how the quality of education is assessed in the region, and an overview of networks in place to assist in the assessment of quality education will be discussed. Major conclusions are presented at the end.

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