

0395

Key Stage 3 National Tests abandoned in 2008 - what is the aftermath?

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Background

The statutory tests in English, mathematics and science at age 14 in England were withdrawn at the end of 2008 after dominating the school assessment scene for 15 years. The Government's Chief Adviser, Sue Hackman, wrote to Headteachers, in a letter dated 13th January 2009, stating that the decision had been 'widely welcomed'. The letter stated that 'Teacher assessment data will continue to be collected as it has been collected in the past'. The available evidence indicates that the dominance of the tests during the previous 15 years had militated against the development of good teacher assessment. Torrance (1998) confirmed that the teacher assessment, instead of complementing the national tests, replicates them. The above-mentioned letter also stated that "*The national Assessment for Learning Strategy - now in its first year - is underpinned by £150 million Government funding over 3 years. It offers every school an introduction to Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP), a criterion-referenced tool for making sound judgements about learners' achievements in relation to national standards*". This paper is based on a qualitative case study of teacher assessment in Key Stage 3 science in two schools, one rated 'outstanding' and the other 'good' by the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspectors.

Research Questions

How have the two case study departments responded to the sudden withdrawal of the tests? What has replaced them? And what is the impact on pupils' learning?

Methods

A two site qualitative case study examines the above questions through interviews with teachers, heads of department, and pupils. The development and use of APP has been followed carefully in the case study schools. The study began in January 2009 and is to conclude in July 2010 after studying the progress of APP for a whole academic year. It is an exploratory study intended to chart the progress of the post-national tests period through a 'thick description' of practice in the two case study schools. APP is claimed to be based on an Assessment for Learning approach. This claim is examined as part of the study.

Frame

The interview data is analysed through coding, and explanation of events and processes follows Geertz's 'thick description'. The APP literature is reviewed and compared and contrasted with the contemporary literature on Assessment for Learning.

Research findings

There appears to be a vacuum left by the removal of the tests and while APP is being developed. In this context the research findings will be timely and are intended to inform future development of actual practice. It is envisaged that the thick description of the state of practice in the interregnum will highlight the needs of teachers in relation to developing teacher assessment skills which would support learning.

References

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