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Beyond the Tyranny of Testing: Relational Evaluation in Education

Kenneth J. Gergen and Scherto R. Gill

Abstract

Measurement-based assessment in education is byproduct of a bygone era. As grades and test scores now become the very goals of education, learning suffers, along with human relationships and well-being of students and teachers. In this book, we propose an alternative to the current assessment tradition, in which schools are no longer conceived as factories, but as learning communities and sites of collective meaning-making. Prioritized is relational process that assessment practices tend to undermine. Relational process is constituted in our well-being, from which we draw understandings of the world, what counts as knowledge, learning, meaningfulness and goodness. A relational orientation to educational evaluation is thus proposed, highlighting evaluation as co-inquiry and value-creation. It aims to stimulate learning while simultaneously enriching the vitality of relational process. To illustrate, a wide range of innovations in evaluative practice is offered to bring these ideas to life. Case studies are drawn from both primary and secondary schools, demonstrating how evaluation can sustain continued engagement in learning and relating. Likewise, a relational approach also applies to evaluation of teachers' practices and schools' progress as a whole. As the book shows, the former enhances teachers' professional development, the latter nurtures the learning communities. Additionally, a relational shift in evaluation opens a space for systemic transformation, including the flourishing of interactive and dialogic teaching and learning practices, flexible, varied and co-created curricula, as well as a culture of mutuality and collaboration. Such a transformation speaks to the demands of a rapidly changing and unpredictable world.