Translating assessment findings into education policy and practice

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Main topics

• What is translation?
• How assessment data are used to inform education policy, what education policies are commonly informed, and barriers to the use of assessment data
• Aims, processes, and challenges of translation
• Translation examples
What is translation?

- Assessment, reporting, dissemination
- Policy analysis, dialogue, strategic decisions
- Teaching and learning
- Policy implementation

Based on Cresswell, 2015
How assessment data are used to inform education policy

Monitoring and policy evaluation

- Use of assessment data on outcomes of the education system to inform decision-making
- Use of assessment information to establish, improve and reform existing monitoring mechanisms

Tobin et al., 2015
Examples of outcomes

• Achievement levels, performance standards
• Gender differences, socio-economic differences, ethnic/language differences
• Educational pathways, drop-out rates, grade repetition
• Attitudes, perceptions, behaviours
• Use of evidence from assessments to improve effectiveness, e.g. most often in implementing curricular or programmatic reforms

Tobin et al., 2015
• Use of assessment data to create awareness and to give priority to an issue for reform, most often concerning quality aspects of the education system

Tobin et al., 2015
• Least frequently assessment data are used at the stage of policy formulation, and the selection of a policy strategy

Tobin et al., 2015
What education policies are informed by large-scale assessments?
System-level policies

- Most frequently data from large-scale assessments in the Asia-Pacific region are used to inform system-level policies.
- System-level policies provide a framework for evaluating and monitoring the quality of education systems.

Tobin, et al., 2015
Resource allocation

• Second most frequently, assessment results in the Asia-Pacific region influence policies on resource allocation.

• Such policies most often concern in-service professional development programs for school leaders and teachers.

Tobin, et al., 2015
Teaching and learning

- There is less evidence from the review of large-scale assessment data in the Asia-Pacific region having an impact on teaching and learning policies at the school and classroom level.

Tobin, et al., 2015
Barriers to the use of large-scale assessment data

- Perceived low technical quality of the assessment program
- Poor timing of the assessment program and non-integration into policy processes
- Lack of in-depth and policy-relevant analyses to be able to identify and diagnose issues
- Inappropriately tailored dissemination to stakeholders
- Lack of dissemination to the public.

Tobin et al., 2015
Aims of translation

• To promote and support the effective use of assessment data

• To inform the development of high quality policy aimed at improving educational progress for all learners

• through facilitating an understanding of the assessment and its findings, including the analysis and interpretation of the data on education outcomes and associated factors.
## Processes of translation

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Challenges of translation

- Identifying relevant content/findings for education policy and practice
- Describing and interpreting content/findings in a meaningful way
- Forming conclusions and recommendations based on evidence
- Anticipating practical implications
- Using appropriate dissemination strategies
Identifying relevant content

• Typically policymakers are the primary audience for large-scale assessment results that inform system-level policies

• However policy options may target different stakeholder groups at the national and local level

Best et al., 2013
Translation can help to

• understand achievement levels, in order to identify different policy options to improve achievement for the population or subgroups

• understand the school-level resources available and identify where resources are needed

• identify (in-service) professional development needs of teachers and other teaching related factors
Describing and interpreting

- A clear description and meaningful interpretation of the findings will improve the reception of policy makers:
  - What is the current situation?
  - What are the issues?
  - What is the evidence?
Forming conclusions and recommendations

Considerations should include:

• Relevance of key results for broader policy, practice, and research

• Validity of the recommendations

• The assessment team’s ability to formulate useful implications or recommendations based on the assessment data

Kellaghan, Greaney & Murray, 2009
Forming conclusions and recommendations

• Assessment results may not readily suggest specific policy options or strategies that decision-makers should adopt in response to identified issues
• Consideration of other research findings to support evidence and greater understanding
• Importance of involving stakeholders for forming recommendations
Anticipating practical implications

• Implications may refer to
  – relevant education policy and practice (system-wide or targeted response),
  – areas for further research, or
  – suggestions for future cycles of the assessment program.

Kellaghan, Greaney & Murray, 2009
Consider...

- Results and data are permanent while policy is often temporary, and specific to current political context
- Political will to receive and respond to new information from an assessment
- Risks for potential political conflict between key stakeholders groups
- Feasibility and cost-effectiveness of follow-on initiatives or reforms
- How policy changes will be evaluated

Kellaghan, Greaney & Murray, 2009
Using appropriate dissemination strategies

- The focus of translation is on the relevance and meaning of the results for a particular audience.
  - Policy makers
  - Teachers and schools
  - Media and the public
Translation strategies

- Discussions, seminars, and workshops with various stakeholder groups
- Policy briefs
- Specific reports
- Media and the public
Discussions and workshops

• Important factor for influencing the use of assessment results in education reform and decision-making
• To allow a variety of viewpoints to be heard
• To support the identification of appropriate policy or action following an assessment
Policy briefs

• OECD PISA in focus: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus.htm

• ACER’s Policy insights (Centre for Education Policy and Practice): http://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/
• Promotes the interconnection between research, policy and practice, and
• examines ways in which research can be informed by a thorough understanding of the perspectives of policy makers and practitioners.

http://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/
What aspects of the assessment are interesting for...

✓ teachers?

✓ schools?

http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=ozpisa
Points to ponder

- Do you think there are substantial differences in the performance of different groups of students in your school, as described in this chapter?

- What are some reasons you can think of that would help explain gender differences in reading literacy?

- One of the things that Australia needs to do to improve our overall reading literacy is to address the issue of the underachievement of disadvantaged students. What are some ways that schools can help students who are from lower levels of socioeconomic background?

- The results showed that Australian students were weaker on tasks that required accessing and retrieving, and integrating interpreting skills. What could you do to help students improve their skills in this area?
Exhibit 23: Team games Q1

The red team and the blue team played a game.

Here is the ball they played with.

What shape is this ball?
A. It is a cylinder.
B. It is a sphere.
C. It is a cube.
D. It is a pyramid.

Key: B

Difficulty: 175 (Level 5)

Suggestions for teaching

One teaching and learning activity that could be generated from *Team Games Q1* (Exhibit 23) would be to explore shapes described by each of the multiple choice options for this item. Students could first be asked to draw three different examples of each of the shapes listed (cylinder, sphere, cube, pyramid). Then the different solutions to that task could be compared and discussed, as a way of exploring the different properties of each of these four classes of geometric objects, and also as a way of exploring the ways different members of each class can vary. For example, the only mathematical variation possible among different spheres is their radius. But for pyramids, the area of the base can vary, as can the height. In addition, the shape of the base can vary (we use ‘pyramid’ as the label for objects with bases that can be circular, triangular, square, pentagonal and so on); and it is possible to have a pyramid whose apex, when projected, lies outside the plane of the base.
ACER’s Teacher Magazine

Translates survey results into useful advice for teachers.

Student and parent reports

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

Media and the public

• Media are an important source of information for the public
• Can help create support networks in civil society
• However, reluctance of the media to go beyond the initial reports which give very basic comparisons.
• At the same time, this simplistic reporting will often focus on negative aspects of the results.

Cresswell, 2017
The challenge to those funding and implementing large-scale assessments is to foster continuing interest into the vast amount of information which is available and to focus discussion on issues that are significant for a country (Cresswell, 2017).
ACER’s [rd] disseminate results from major national and international studies for the general public:
https://rd.acer.edu.au/
Evaluating translation efforts

• As part of a broader evaluation of the reporting and dissemination strategy


