

Professor Gemma Moss, UCL Institute of Education,  
International Literacy Centre



## **WHAT ARE ASSESSMENT DATA GOOD FOR? WHAT ARE THEY NOT GOOD FOR?**

**An English perspective**

# THREE DIFFERENT PURPOSES THAT SHAPE THE USE OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

- School improvement
- School accountability
- Assessment for Learning
  
- The disentangling of *data for school accountability* from *data for school improvement* and *assessment for learning* remains difficult.
  
- What the data do in the world depends upon who uses them, how, for what purpose.
- The Practitioner Forum has the potential to influence this



# SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT IN ENGLAND

- Data can be used to
  - Target resources where the need is greatest
  - Foster school improvement through interrogation of what the data says
  - Example: the National Literacy Strategy
- This can work well when
  - good partnership-working fosters open and productive conversations between local authorities' school improvement staff, their education data teams, and school leadership teams
  - All parties are encouraged to ask intelligent questions of the appropriate data, and to reflect upon how to feed the answers most productively back into practice.
  - There is high trust between all parties



## GOOD DATA USAGE WILL

- make available, for public discussion and scrutiny, full reliability data on the administration and scoring of any tests
- controls for age and other contextual factors (such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, EAL and SEN), using suitably fine measures when comparing pupil performance
- Recognise the statistical uncertainty in the data and make allowances for this
  - Statistical terms that express uncertainty are often not understood outside the statistical community



# SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT OR ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

- Some questions to consider of any assessment:
  1. Is it a fair test?
  2. What is being tested and why?
  3. How reliable will it be?
  4. How will the results be interpreted and used?
  5. What is the likely impact on pupils and schools?



# ASSESSING ASSESSMENTS

## 1. Is it a fair test?

- Discussions of fairness are typically concerned with whether those taking a test have had similar opportunities in terms of access to the curriculum, preparation, familiarity with the test format and the way the results are interpreted and used (Gipps & Stobart, 2009)

## 2. What is being tested and why?

- Are the contents age appropriate and how is this being established and defined?
- Modern validity theorising centres on construct validity: what is the construct, domain or skill that is being tested? Only when we know this can we decide whether the assessment is fit for purpose.
- Two major threats to validity are not adequately sampling the domain and assessing elements that are not part of the construct.



# ASSESSING ASSESSMENTS

## 3. **How reliable will it be?**

- The research evidence suggests that, in any early years assessment system, multiple assessment measures are required and results should be interpreted with caution (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2006).

## 3. **How will the results be interpreted and used?**

- The widely accepted definition of validity as **‘the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores for proposed uses of tests’** (AERA *Standards*, 2014, p.11) emphasises the use to which results are put. A test can be well-constructed and scored but these results can then be misunderstood or mis-used.



# ASSESSING ASSESSMENTS

5. **What is the likely impact on pupils and schools?**
  - The Practitioner Forum can play a useful role here in discussing their interpretation and use
  - The opportunity for professional input and debate in Scotland is to be welcomed ...





# DRAWING ON ACADEMIC EXPERTISE IN PROFESSIONAL AND POLICY DEBATE

- BERA's response to the contested introduction of baseline assessment in England
  - Convene an expert panel to review the proposals
  - Experts with varying range of views on the role of assessment
    - Assessment for learning
    - School Improvement
    - Statistical modelling
  - Outcome:
  - <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/a-baseline-without-basis>

