

## Assessment and quality assurance in schools

### Foreword

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I am pleased to present this special issue of *Quality Assurance in Education (QAE)* focusing on *Assessments and Quality Assurance in Schools*. Educational leaders around the world understand the dynamic and the ongoing changes school systems are undergoing, and they are using assessments as basic tools to promote professionalism and develop proper quality assurance within schools. The different views in regard to assessments, quality assurance and their contribution to educational processes emphasize the diversity among school systems. Nevertheless, these differences are amenable to study, and researchers can present and share their insights in order to allow educational leaders and policymakers to learn one from another. This special issue integrates nine different views of this topic. The variety of views developed from the diverse academic environments in which the researchers conducted their studies, but more than that, from the diverse cultures they share.

While educators use tests and other forms of assessment to learn about the quality of their students' learning processes, there are many elements that could be assessed and studied to scientifically define the quality of educational institutions. Moreover, in addition to the composition, structure and functioning of these institutions, many internal and external factors should be assessed as well.

Understanding the contribution of the variety of assessments to quality assurance processes in schools is the basis for this special issue. From that point of view, authors were called to submit papers which presented a variety of aspects of assessments and their contribution to the quality assurance in various school systems around the world.

The initial idea for this special issue was developed as a result of the meetings of the *Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance* network, of EERA/ECER (European Educational Research Association/European Conference on Educational Research), which took place during the annual conferences in Dublin (2016) and in Copenhagen (2017). The main aims of the network are to stimulate scientific research and academic discourse on the definition, structure, implementation, assessment and impact of educational improvement and quality. Studies related to this network may refer mainly to schools and also to other formal or non-formal educational institutions, to supra-national or international organizations and to informal initiatives that promote or affect education. Discussions among the network members and the professional researchers who participated in the conferences over the years led toward the need to publication of this special issue. Although not all the authors are members of the network, they all share the motivation to study and to promote the quality of education in schools.

The need to study the effectiveness and quality of schools is not innovative. Ever since education became a structured process, philosophers, psychologists and educators have dealt with the need to improve curricula to attain better achievements. Nevertheless, [Dewey \(1938\)](#) was the main educational theorist who pushed for the responsibility of society to improve education and to maintain the quality of students' learning processes. But, he also claimed that changes within education can be implemented only after carefully examining the existing system. Although Dewey did not develop a quality theory of education, his guidelines were

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clear; he insisted that the examination of what exists along with understanding our goals, is the key to maintaining the quality of education in schools. Feuerstein *et al.* (2006) emphasized the role of the society in maintaining school quality by pointing out that if learning processes are inefficient and therefore quality is compromised, mediators in society must change their teaching methods to allow all learners the quality education they deserve.

There is a strong consensus among researchers that evaluations and examinations with clear criteria increase students' motivation to achieve higher grades and to receive rewards of excellence (Butler, 2006). Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that developing excellent learners with high academic achievements is not necessarily the sole proof of a school's quality. The process of evaluating and assuring school quality first requires a better understanding of the culture in which the schools function, learning the variety of curricula in the country and understanding the rationale and goals of those curricula and society's goals for education in general. Only after this basic learning can proper evaluation and quality assurance begin.

As mentioned above, this special issue was developed initially from the request of different groups of researchers to present different perspectives for assuring the quality of schools. Among all the factors of quality assurance, the authors of the nine papers in this special issue present the following five topics:

- (1) Teachers' and principals' evaluations as a criteria for quality of education.
- (2) Teachers' and students' use of language: can this be a criterion for quality of education?
- (3) Excellence in school as a basis for quality assurance.
- (4) Inclusion of children with special needs and its influence on understanding quality of education.
- (5) Creativity, modern education and quality assurance.

While there is no doubt that to assure school quality all factors that relate to schools must be evaluated, it is not that simple when in practice principals and teachers need to cooperate during the evaluation process. For many years, researchers presented positive correlation between students' academic achievements and teachers' evaluation scores (Sanders *et al.*, 1997), a fact that is the main cause of resistance among educators, who claim that they can hardly control the cognitive ability learners are born with and therefore they cannot be evaluated according to their students' academic achievements. Assuring school quality requires teachers and principals' cooperation both within the evaluation process and with implementing the results, therefore the role of internal evaluator was developed and educators' perspectives are carefully studied. Those issues are presented within the papers *School principals' perceptions and requirements of school evaluators*, *Teacher evaluation following reform: the Israeli perspective* and *The relevance of teacher factors in understanding tertiary education*.

For many years it has been accepted that the role of language is significant throughout all thinking and learning processes (Vygotsky, in Kozulin, 1990), communication (Moghaddam and Araghi, 2013), and how society evaluates professionalism (Wilson *et al.*, 2015). But, is this the reality in practice among teachers in schools and higher education institutions? Researchers present their results and discussions in the papers *Summative evaluation of online language learning courses*, *Assessing teachers' use of language and their teaching quality* and *The video cover letter: Embedded assessment of oral communication skills*.

The main factors in learning are the internal motivation and intuitive creativity learners have. Reducing these elements is considered by educators as the major risks in modern and structured education. Thus, it is known that well-structured education based on the integration of pedagogy and updated knowledge is the key for success in academic assignments. The two papers that deal with these topics and their relation to quality assurance in education are *Measuring impact of organizational culture on creativity in higher education* and *Leading an excellent preschool: What is the role of self-efficacy?*

One of the basic perceptions educators share while planning and implementing quality assurance in education is that education should be available for all types of students. With this understanding, the paper *Professionals' attitudes toward children's participation: Implementing educational reforms* presents the possibility of integrating learners with special needs through special learning programs in schools.

Quality assurance in education and in schools is a complex domain that includes a variety of factors and dynamic changes that cannot be always controlled or predicted. Learning about the different perspectives and the different ways quality assurance can be practiced is the way to plan the process fit to each educator. This special issue contains a sample of nine papers that may open up opportunities for new discussions and new paths for better quality assurance in schools. I hope the readers find the updated information useful and knowledgeable.

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### About the Guest Editor

Dr Heidi Flavian is a Senior Lecturer at the Achva Academic College, currently serves as the Head of its Special Education Department. She also teaches courses on the inclusion of children with special needs, learning strategies, differential assessments, mediation for thinking development, neuro-pedagogy and interculturalism both in the college's BEd and the MEd programs. She has also been a

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Senior Trainer at the Feuerstein International Center since 1996 and presents this center around the world while teaching cognitive modifiability theory and the dynamic assessment approach.

Understanding the important of educating everyone to maintain the quality assurance of education leads her to study the field of thinking processes among children with special needs, specifically learning disabilities among children and adults, attention deficit disorders and the strategies to overcome these disorders in school and on a daily basis and inclusion of people with special needs in schools and through a variety of domains in society. She publishes her research in several international journals, presents at international conferences, serves as a reviewer for two international journals and as a Link-Convenor of ECER's Network 11 "Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance".

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