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REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES



Issue 1

Spring 1995

About the Newsletter

The **Review of Assessment Activities** is a newsletter that will be distributed quarterly in response to the interest expressed by members of the OECD/INES Project's Network A — an interest centering, naturally enough, on “what is going on” in countries other than one's own. The newsletter will provide all members with a means of informally exchanging information on measuring student outcomes. Issue 1, for example, is devoted to informing members about the assessment activities of member countries, with particular attention paid to assessment activities being conducted this quarter.

Future issues will be devoted to various topics of interest, on which your thoughts are more than welcome. Perhaps we might even add a column called “Reader Response,” which might include a letter or two covering topics addressed in previous issues of the newsletter.

Information on quarterly assessment activities will be the overall goal of each issue. Any changes in the activities of member countries also will be addressed, with the hope that all issues will be made meaningful through your feedback and suggestions (and corrections!), and through your thoughtful contributions.

Assessment Activities: An Overview

In some countries, the main purpose for national assessments is to determine whether the national goals or standards for education are being achieved (in **Canada, France, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States**).

A variety of other purposes are served by assessment activities. **Austria's** decentralized assessment practices, for instance, are the primary responsibility of teachers, who continually evaluate a student's progress throughout the academic year, the object being to determine if students are ready to progress to the next grade. **Denmark** offers two non-compulsory “leaving examinations” for students at the end of grades 9 and 10. **Portugal** is

exploring ways to evaluate its curricular reform; and the **Netherlands** uses its own assessment to describe the content of its curriculum and student attainment at the end of its required elementary education program.

Assessments also are used to identify improvement areas. For example, **France** and **Norway** use a diagnostic assessment to assist teachers in determining students' learning needs, whereas **New Zealand** uses its assessment to determine where to modify the curriculum.

A broad range of ages and grades are assessed, as shown in Table 1. Some countries use a "basket" approach, assessing students on an annual basis in all of their core subjects (**France, Norway, Sweden,** and the **United Kingdom**); others use a "cycle" approach, assessing students on one or two core subjects that rotate each year (**Canada** and **New Zealand**); and still others assess students when they feel it is needed and on the subjects needed (**Finland** and **Ireland**).

The most common subjects assessed are mother tongue, mathematics, foreign language, and science, although a much wider variety of subjects actually are assessed – including health, economics and the arts.

Upcoming Changes

Changes in assessment activities also are planned. Due to recent developments in curricula and syllabi, **Sweden** is implementing a criterion-referenced scoring procedure to replace its current norm-referenced scoring; and these new scoring procedures are expected to be in use by the 1997-1998 school year. **Norway** also anticipates changes to its assessment activities as a result of changes in curricula.

New Zealand plans to introduce assessments at three key transition points – upon entrance to primary, intermediate, and secondary schools – and plans to assess performance against the "typical" national performance by utilizing nationally developed resource banks, which are compilations of nationally validated items that can be used to judge student performance relative to the "typical" performance of students nationally on these items and tasks.

Finland's revised assessment may examine the impact of recent cuts in its educational resources; and the country may assess a wider range of subjects in order to reflect the availability of more elective classes.

Table 1: Summary of Assessment Activities

COUNTRY	STUDENTS TESTED	ASSESSMENT APPROACH/TIMING	SUBJECTS TESTED
Austria		As part of international research projects only. Students are evaluated by teachers to see if they can advance to the next grade.	
Belgium (Flemish)		As part of international research projects only.	
Belgium (French)	All students in grade 3.		A performance test on literacy and numeracy.
Canada	Thirteen and 16 year olds.	Annually, in one of the three subjects listed.	Mathematics, reading and writing, and science.
Denmark	Students in grades 9 and 10 who elect to take the assessment.	Annually, in all subjects listed.	Danish, mathematics, English, German, and French.
Finland	Mainly grades 1 to 9; sometimes grades 10 to 12 are tested.	Not regularly, about 5 to 10 year intervals.	Mother tongue, mathematics, foreign language, and attitudes.
France	Grades 3, 6, and 10: diagnostic assessment of all students; for 1994-95, grades 6 and 9: outcomes assessment for a sample of students.	Annually, at the start of each school year (diagnostic assessment); every few years (outcomes assessment)	French, mathematics, language, history, geography, science, economics, civics, work methods, and school life.
Ireland		Assessments are conducted as needed.	Reading and math have been tested in the past.
Netherlands	Students at the end of elementary education.	Five-year cycles; each year tests a different group of subjects.	Mathematics, music, language, physical education, science, social studies, visual arts, English, and traffic education.
New Zealand	A nationally representative sample of 8 and 12 year olds.	Four year cycle, with different topics each year.	Science, art, music, language, math, social science, health, and technology.
Norway	A sample of students in the middle cycles.	Annually, in all subjects listed.	Reading, mathematics, and English (also a survey is given to teachers about school organization, leadership, and parent-school relations).
Portugal	A sample of students in grades 4, 6, 9, and 12.		Mathematics and mother tongue.
Spain	Students at the end of cycles.	Every four or five years.	Academic subjects and self-satisfaction, personal development, self-concept, and family-education system relations.
Sweden (currently)	Grades 8, 9, 11, and 12.	Annually, in all subjects listed.	English, Swedish, mathematics, French, German, science and problem solving.
Switzerland		As part of international research projects only.	
United Kingdom	Seven, 11, and 14 year olds.	Annually, in all subjects listed.	English, mathematics, and science.
United States	A nationally representative sample of grades 4, 8, and 12.	Annually, in different subjects each year.	Civics, reading, geography, history, arts and sciences.

Assessment Activities This Quarter

A variety of assessment activities occurring this spring are summarized in Table 2, including the following test construction, development, and revision activities:

- **France** is revising its diagnostic assessment instruments;
- **New Zealand** is developing its assessment of 8 and 12 year olds;
- **Portugal** is continuing work on test construction for grade 6, and is beginning construction of a Portuguese test for grades 4 and 9;
- **Spain** is designing and planning a study of pre-school education and of family-education system relationships;
- **Sweden** is constructing its tests of Swedish, English, and mathematics; and
- The **United States** is beginning the development of its 1996 "Hands On" assessment in science.

Coordination, preparation, and consensus activities are occurring in the following countries:

- **France** is contacting schools and preparing to publish and distribute instruments for its diagnostic and outcomes assessments;

- **New Zealand** is engaging in consensus building activities and is sampling, assessing items and tasks, and training teachers in instrument development and administration;
- **Spain** is building consensus needed to implement studies of their new vocational training system and compulsory secondary education system; and
- The **United States** is building consensus on the objectives of its civics test.

Assessment Activities	Countries
Test construction, development and revision	France, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United States
Coordination, preparation, and consensus building	France, New Zealand, Spain, and the United States
Piloting	Belgium (French), Canada, and Portugal
Data collection	Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom
Scoring and analyzing	Canada, France, Spain, and the United States
Reporting results	United States

Piloting is being conducted as follows:

- The **Belgian French** community is revising their test of literacy and numeracy, to be pretested in June;
- **Canada** is conducting field trials for its SAIP program in science, which include written and practical tests; and
- **Portugal** is sampling and pilot testing its assessment of grade 6 students.

In the data collection arena, the following activities are taking place:

- **Denmark** is administering its *Folkeskole* (Leaving Examination);
- **Finland** is trying, through its data collection, to determine the impact of recent changes in their economic situation;
- **France** is administering its outcome assessment;
- **Norway** is collecting data on their student assessment and teacher survey;
- **Spain** is collecting data for students at the end of primary education and for a school climate feasibility study;
- **Sweden** is collecting data for its new national tests of grades 11 and 12 in English, mathematics, as well as its new problem solving test; and
- The **United Kingdom** is conducting national tests and assessments done by teachers.

In terms of scoring and analysis:

- **Canada** is scoring the written portion of the SAIP science assessment pilot test;
- **France** is scoring and coding students' responses to its outcome assessment;
- **Spain** is analyzing data from its physical education feasibility study; and

- The **United States** is scoring and analyzing its 1994 reading, geography, and history tests.

Additionally, the **United States** is reporting the results of its 1994 tests in reading, geography, and history; and the **Netherlands** has several assessments in various stages of completion.

Reports

In future issues, we would like to include basic information on upcoming assessment reports that Network A members can request from a country's designated contact. Please let us know if you have reports that you are willing to make available to Network members, and that you would like to see highlighted in future issues.

Anecdotes

In future issues, we would like to include memorable, and quite possibly, humorous, stories about your own experiences in conducting assessments. Please send brief anecdotes to us for possible publication.

This newsletter is prepared by Eugene Owen, Network A Chair, and Jay Moskowitz, JoAnn Blue, Scott Brancolini, Shelley Kirkpatrick, and Ray Varisco of the American Institutes for Research's Pelavin Research Center.

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