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Meaningful Learning in a New Paradigm for Educational Accountability: An Introduction

Linda Darling-Hammond

Stanford University

United States



Jon Snyder

Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education

United States

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Abstract: This special issue furthers the conversation begun in the August 2014 of edition of *Education Policy Analysis Archives* in the article [Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit and Linda Pittenger](#). That paper posits that as schools across the country take on the challenge of preparing all children for success in college, career, and life, states must in turn move toward creating more aligned systems of assessment and accountability. The authors recommend “an accountability approach that focuses on meaningful learning, enabled by professionally skilled and committed educators, and supported by adequate and appropriate resources, so that all students regardless of background are prepared for both college and career when they graduate from high school” (p. 1). This issue focuses particularly

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upon accountability for meaningful learning with subsequent issues focusing on professional accountability and resource accountability.

Keywords: meaningful learning; new paradigm; educational accountability; college readiness; professional readiness.

Aprendizajes significativos y un nuevo paradigma de responsabilidad educativa

Resumen: Este número especial continua la conversación iniciada en el 08 2014 de la edición de la Archivos Analíticos de Política Educativa (EPAA) [Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit and Linda Pittenger](#). Ese artículo planteaba que mientras las escuelas de todo el país asuman el reto de preparar a todos los estudiantes para ser exitosos tanto en los estudios universitarios, carreras profesionales, y la vida, los Estados deben a su vez avanzar hacia la creación de sistemas alineados de evaluación y de responsabilidad educativa. Los autores recomiendan “un enfoque de responsabilidad educativa que se centra en aprendizajes significativos, apoyado por educadores profesionales cualificados y comprometidos, con el recursos adecuados y apropiados, de manera que todos los estudiantes independientemente de su origen se estén adecuadamente listos para completar los estudios universitarios, y carreras profesionales, cuando se gradúan de la escuela secundaria” (p. 1). Esta primera parte de la serie se centra particularmente en la responsabilidad por el aprendizaje significativo mientras que la segunda y tercera parte se centran en la responsabilidad profesional y la responsabilidad educativa y asignación de los recursos.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje significativo; nuevo paradigma; responsabilidad educativa; preparación para la universidad; preparación profesional.

Aprendizagens significativas e um novo paradigma de responsabilidade educacional

Resumo: Esta edição especial continua a conversa começada em agosto 2014 na Arquivos Analíticos de Política Educativa (EPAA) [Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit and Linda Pittenger](#). O artigo argumenta que, enquanto as escolas de todo o país assumem o desafio de preparar os alunos para ser bem sucedidos, tanto na universidade, as carreiras profissionais e a vida, os Estados devem virar-se para a criação de sistemas alinhados avaliação e responsabilidade educativa. Os autores recomendam “abordagem de responsabilidade educativa que se concentram em aprendizajes significativo,s apoiado por profissionais qualificados e educadores comprometidos, com recursos adequados e apropriados de modo que todos os alunos, independentemente da sua origem estejam devidamente preparados para completar os estudos universitários e carreiras profissionais quando se formarem no ensino médio” (p. 1). Esta primeira parte da série centra-se especialmente sobre a responsabilidade pela aprendizagem significativa, enquanto a segunda e terceira partes focalizam a responsabilidade profissional e responsabilidade educativa e alocação de recursos.

Palavras-chave: aprendizagem significativa; novo paradigma; responsabilidade educativa; preparação para a faculdade; preparação profissional.

Meaningful Learning in a New Paradigm for Educational Accountability. An Introduction

In August 2014, *Education Policy Analysis Archives* (EPAA) published *Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm* by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit and Linda Pittenger (2014). That paper posits that as schools across the country take on the challenge of preparing all children for success in college, career, and life, states must, in turn, move toward

creating more aligned systems of assessment and accountability. The authors recommend “an accountability approach that focuses on meaningful learning, enabled by professionally skilled and committed educators, and supported by adequate and appropriate resources, so that all students regardless of background are prepared for both college and career when they graduate from high school” (p. 1).

For an accountability approach to be truly responsible for the outcomes our children deserve and our communities require, it must support a system that is cohesive, integrative, and continuously renewing. It should enable schools to offer high-quality education, reduce the likelihood of harmful or inequitable practices, and have means to identify and correct problems that may occur.

The authors suggest that, “While considerable discussion and debate will be needed before a new approach can take shape, this paper’s objective is to get the conversation started so the nation can meet its aspirations for preparing college- and career-ready students” (p. 1).

In this issue, and the subsequent two volumes of EPAA, we hope to further that discussion and debate by focusing, one issue at a time, on each of the three elements of a truly responsible accountability system: 1) meaningful learning, 2) equitable and wisely used resources, and 3) professional capacity and accountability.

In this issue we focus on Meaningful Learning. The issue opens with an insightful article by David Conley that makes several important contributions to the needed discussion and debate: (a) making the case for the importance of deeper learning (i.e., meaningful learning); (b) explicating the importance of assessment in supporting the achievement of students; (c) providing a brief history of educational assessment in this country; (d) offering a framework for and mapping out the current status of educational assessment practice and policy; and (e) providing recommendations for future research, practice, and policy initiatives related to assessment that could improve student opportunities for deeper learning.

The next two articles add to the conversation by bringing a focused look on particular policy contexts. Scott Marion and Paul Leather provide an overview of New Hampshire’s efforts to implement a pilot accountability system designed to support meaningful learning for students *and* powerful organization change for schools and districts. Their paper provides an example of an accountability system designed to support more meaningful individual and institutional learning. It concludes with a discussion of the challenges and opportunities of the state’s role in supporting the local expertise required for the system to meet its accountability responsibilities.

Dallas Dance frames the recommendations of the Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium, which has developed an accountability proposal to the federal government for use in the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the latest incarnation of which is more commonly known as No Child Left Behind. This proposal includes many of the same elements as the new paradigm for accountability offered by Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, and Pittenger.

The issue also includes four brief videos to bring both different perspectives and a different medium to add to the conversation. The first, “Success Happens at the Local Level: District Strategies for Accountability,” augments the comments of Dallas Dance, described above. It provides the perspective of a local district administrator about what is possible and what is needed for all our students to be ready to pursue a future of their own choosing upon graduation from high school.

The second is from Stephan Turnipseed, who is president emeritus of Lego North America. In “Meaningful Learning is Good Business,” he talks about the importance of knowledge and skills beyond those tested by the exams required by the current accountability system. He also discusses the harm done by the high stakes attached to those exams.

The last two videos feature Gemma Venuti, a graduate of Urban Academy, a high school in New York City that enacts many of the assessment strategies suggested by the Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, and Pittenger article. The first of these, “A Student’s View on Standardized Testing,” gives her perspective of the effects of the current national accountability approach. The second, “Meaningful Learning Through Performance Assessment,” offers her views on the effects of the more authentic approach to assessment suggested in this series.

Together this set of articles and commentaries offers perspectives from policymakers and practitioners working at the federal, state, and local levels to transform the narrow test-and-punish accountability of the NCLB era into an accountability focused on meaningful learning that is engaging and empowering, using more authentic assessments in more educative ways.

We look forward to continuing this essential set of conversations with you in this and the next two issues.

Linda Darling-Hammond and Jon Snyder

Reference

Darling-Hammond, L., Wilhoit, G., & Pittenger, L. (2014). Accountability for college and career readiness: Developing a new paradigm. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(86), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n86.2014>.

About the Authors and the Guest Series Editor

Linda Darling-Hammond

Guest Series Editor

Stanford University

ldh@stanford.edu

Linda Darling-Hammond is Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University where she is Faculty Director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Her latest book is *Beyond the Bubble Test: How Performance Assessments Support 21st Century Learning* (Wiley, 2014).

Jon Snyder

Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, Stanford University

jdsnyder@stanford.edu

Jon Snyder is Executive Director of SCOPE and former chief academic officer/dean of the College at Bank Street College of Education.

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