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Uneducated guesses: using evidence to uncover misguided education policies, by Howard Wainer, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011, xvi + 176 pp., £16.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-691-14928-8

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range and depth of critical debate, which emerged from academic thinking and from the classroom itself. Ultimately, this book seeks to challenge past and present orthodoxies that have continued to restrict the scope of music education.

No apology is made in Finney's critique of new definitions of child centredness for the years post-1988, the year of the inception of the National Curriculum. The move from local authority-led education to centralised government-led legislation resulted in music teachers, along with other subject teachers, being presented with a target-oriented model of learning. In Finney's words, the music curriculum had become 'focused on a form of knowledge detached from the knower'. His optimism for the future lies in some of the pedagogical approaches currently being developed, including musical exploration and dialogue that connects strongly to pupils' informal learning practices beyond school, and teachers' involvement with community and professional organisations in an attempt to create a bridge between school and the outside musical world.

Finney's readable and accessible text is interspersed with carefully gathered and examined oral testimony and observation, all undertaken within a school context. Pupils' perceptions of their experiences of music education, dispassionately documented but keenly analysed, remind us all that there is no place for complacency as the search goes on for a curriculum that seeks to interweave pupils' individuality, playfulness and creativity into the tightly controlled, institutionalised domain of school.

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Uneducated guesses: using evidence to uncover misguided education policies, by Howard Wainer, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011, xvi + 176 pp., £16.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-691-14928-8

This book is a collection of stories of how educational decision makers have misunderstood and misused statistical evidence. Eleven case histories from the United States are discussed.

Wainer's writing style, as always, is clear and entertaining and this makes it quite accessible to non-specialists. The focus is on the use of tests and covers the use of tests for admissions, evaluating teachers, resource allocation, question choice in exams and others.

Reading the chapters I often found myself nodding in agreement, sometimes disagreeing, occasionally feeling frustrated by a lack of detail, but overall pleased that someone with Wainer's communication skills had taken up the cudgels.

His first chapter is about colleges that use SAT scores (effectively 'general intelligence' scores) for admissions but allow applicants to withhold them if they wish. Unsurprisingly, he finds that those who decide not to submit their scores in fact have, on average, lower scores than those who do and go on to get lower first-year grades. The 'inescapable' conclusion he draws is that voluntary withholding of such

scores should be avoided. Well, perhaps. But maybe there are other considerations. As he points out elsewhere, high school grade point averages (assessment by the school) predict performance just as well as the SAT, and these are available anyway. It is possible that a college does not wish to place a great deal of emphasis on the SAT when making selections, but we get no glimpse of any such counter-case. Of course, if you firmly believe that an 'objective' test is the best possible selection device, as Wainer clearly does, then any such counter-argument would seem irrelevant.

In the second chapter, Wainer has a go at attempts to substitute 'assessment' tests for 'aptitude' tests for college admissions. His argument sounds rather strange to educators in the UK where it is assessment (of learning) tests that are used for selection purposes. One would like to know exactly what it is about 'aptitude' tests that apparently makes them more useful for American students, but we are only quoted a correlation with later achievement.

Chapters 3 and 4 are interesting. Here Wainer looks at the use of a short version of the SAT test (PSAT) to predict how many students would be likely to benefit from an advanced placement (AP) course and relates this to the costs involved. This is not necessarily intended to be used for individual students, but as a resource allocation procedure, and demonstrates how some rather simple calculations can aid this. There is some rather dubious discussion about assigning weaker students to 'easy' courses such as psychology, but the underlying argument is worth taking notice of.

The next chapter is about test equating, or comparability. This provides a useful discussion of the technical issues and the need to be aware of the assumptions that always need to be made when two or more tests are administered to different groups yet a common selection decision is required based on any student taking just one test. Right at the very end of the chapter Wainer mentions 'legal restrictions' that limit what can be done – presumably he is referring to gender and racial discrimination legislation – and suggests that these could be changed if 'sufficient evidence can be provided'. This is very much the voice of many testing advocates who would want to eliminate socio-cultural judgements from the debates, leaving it solely to 'technical' issues – a stance that in my view is highly questionable.

Chapters 6 and 7 on question choice in exams is a rather good example of how so many US educational researchers, and Wainer is no exception, only seem willing to use evidence from the United States itself. Thus, for example, there is a great deal of research and practice in UK exams that allow choice of questions. Yet none of this is referred to, and one wonders if this is because it is not 'psychometric' using formal equating methods, but rather involves professional judgements.

Chapter 8 is one of the best in this collection. It describes how a simple use of ancillary statistical information was used in a legal case to exonerate a teacher of 'cheating' when her students did exceptionally well in a test.

Chapter 9 is about judging teachers on the basis of the performance of their students. This is a big issue in many educational systems. A lot has been written about it, and in the UK it goes under the rubric of educational league tables. A pity then that Wainer's discussion is so thin. He discusses at length what in the United States is known as 'value added' analysis, which is not at all how the term is used elsewhere. His strictures about the use of such analyses thus refer only to what, in my view, is a rather simplistic procedure, and ignores the extensive work done elsewhere. More importantly, he fails to point out the key weakness of attempts to rank teachers (or schools). This is that when uncertainty (confidence) intervals are introduced most comparisons cannot be distinguished from chance.

Chapter 10 is a nice case study of how selection effects can distort an analysis, in this case of students choosing colleges to attend.

Chapter 11 likewise is a very nice analysis of what students could do to maximise their test performance on a computer-administered test, and why proposals to make such tests more 'friendly' are flawed.

The book ends with some fine aspirations. He quotes with approval physicist Richard Feynman: 'It doesn't matter how beautiful your theory is, it doesn't matter how smart you are. If it doesn't agree with experiment, it's wrong'. Unfortunately life isn't that simple, especially in the social sciences. It is not so much the idea that evidence is important – few would disagree – but how to choose that which is appropriate and then how to interpret it. Still, Wainer's efforts to press for the use of evidence are very welcome. Sometimes they hit the mark rather neatly, but sometimes also, as I have argued, they fail. But do read this book and make up your own mind.

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Case study research in practice, by Helen Simons, London and Los Angeles, Sage, 2009, 189 pp., £22.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7619-6424-7

Case study as an approach to social and educational research has been around a long time. Some of the earliest methodological papers written on case study emanate from the 1920s. In the 1960s and 1970s it resurfaced as an important way of understanding the projects and other initiatives spawned by the curriculum reform movement. It was in this context that Helen Simons began working with Barry MacDonald on case studies of innovation as an important strand in the evaluation of the Humanities Curriculum Project (1967–1972). As such, Simons is one of the most experienced case study researchers in Britain. Drawing on her experience of the evaluation of the Humanities Curriculum Project, she wrote one of the first published papers on innovation and the case study of schools (Simons 1971). Since then she has been continuously involved in exploring and advancing the methodology of case study as a means of understanding education, and in *Case Study Research in Practice* she distils 40 or so years of experience of doing and writing about case study research. Case study, says Simons, 'is the study of the singular, the particular, the unique.'

There is, of course, no watertight definition of case study and over the years it has been variously described as a method, a methodology, a paradigm, a research strategy and the like. Simons prefers the term 'approach', which she says indicates that 'case study has an overarching research intent and methodological (and political) purpose, which affects what methods are chosen to gather data'.

The book is primarily aimed at students and is obviously written as a textbook, but it will be of interest to others involved in case study research. Although the focus of the book is case study in education and educational research, it is relevant