

Assessment, Surveillance and Control: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper focuses on aspects of New Zealand's senior secondary assessment policy, known as The National Certificate of Educational Achievement's (NCEA), which functions as a system of surveillance designed to assure equity and quality of the national education system. To achieve these imperatives, reforms made by the government over the last thirty years have sought to fashion public institutions after business models and employ the language and technologies of management to ensure aims within budget constraints. However, it can be argued, in agreement with Michael Foucault, that these management technologies function in a panopticonic fashion by providing a paradigmatic surveillance model for our current administration of knowledge delivery and proof of knowledge attainment. Arguably representing the dominant ideology, these imperatives not only suit political agendas, but may also diminish a focus on other expressed ontological and epistemological goals. It further argues that such a prison is a model for understanding how these management practices in secondary education function to control, classify and contain students-- who are subjects of the system. For example, secondary educational policy rhetoric maintains that schools are expected to adopt practices, which encourage students to be confident, connected, lifelong learners. The practices required to foster the kind of deeper appreciation for knowledge and information skills that result in lifelong learning confidence, do not always fit neatly with concurring practices of measurement for qualification and quality assurance measures. Some policy initiatives intended to survey quality and equity through standardization of knowledge, moderation of assessment and national reporting of student achievement, arguably supersede other valuable epistemological goals with unintended and potentially devastating consequences for students.