

Working Together for a Rich Assessment Program for Students *Student's Assessment; a Possibility for Teachers' Professional Growth*

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Abstract: Educators, curriculum specialists are emphasizing that teaching goals must encourage to students skills such as critical thinking, reasearch, and problem-solving. Student's assessment is an integral part of instruction (teaching) process which gives students the chance to express freely their thoughts, ideas; to reason and take part actively expressing their abilities and skills during the teaching process. Skills and knowledge can be acquired through a teacher-student cooperation aiming to achieve a final goal.

Assessment is a daily process for teachers; they are familiarized with techniques used to gather information from students and to communicate it to their parents, students and other teachers. Then, why do we have to work together for students' assessment?

Some more reasons...

- Possibilities for professional growth are going to be ofered to all teachers to support them and to improve their abilities do diagnose learning needs and to assess student achievements and performances.
- Learning and continuous progress requires the aplication of a several teaching strategies by the teacher. An integral part of these strategies there is a wide specter of techniques of student's assessment which help in the process of these forms of knowledge assessment.
- Teachers are under continuous pressure to raise the level of responsibility towards students, parents, tutors, and other community members. A well-detailed plan on student's assessment can help teachers to accomplish their professional duties better.
- Student's assessment is one of the teacher's responsibilities that requires a high level of expertise and a high level of professional judgment. The improvement of assessment practices serves to the improvement of teacher's professionalism too.

Redimensioning of assessment programs must be treated as an important part of teaching and learning process.

To prepare a rich student's assessment program, teachers should improve their teaching programs aiming **their adoption to students' needs of learning**. Teachers can make their choices in one or more from the following aspects:

- Curriculum
- Teaching Practice
- Learning Environment

The practices that teacher use to make learning more meaningful and to fit them to each student, need a continuous monitoring of student's progress and observation of the factors which effect his/her performance.

The adoptable dimension is not destined only for special needs of students, but also for the importance of the programs' adopting for all students.

The specific techniques of assessment and the way they are used in student's assesssment programs must be at the same line with the content of curriculum, pedagigical methods and the learning environment which must be within the framework of the adoptable dimension.

Each student is unique in his/her kind, having his/her weakest and strongest points and certain skills.

Evaluating them in the same way might harm them. It is important to remind that when assessing a student, different obstacles which can interfere in assessment process (like physical disabilities), mustn't interfere and effect in this assessing duty.

The practices of assessment must be at the same line with the changes of curricula and teaching processes offered to all students. Adopting of assessment techniques might ask a change of factors such as usage frequency, criteria for judgment of student's performance, the necessary time to complete the assessment activities and the kinds of assessment techniques. Some of these changes can include:

- Demonstration of skills and knowledges rather than doing a test or completing a report;
- Use of oral assessment techniques for students with difficulties in reading and writing;
- More time to do the tests and other tasks;
- Ofering instructions for teaching in simpler terms and language;
- Being focused on a small number of techniques of assessment or change of frequency of data collection on assessment information;
- The processing of types of criteria used for predictabe answers and the level of accuracy required for these answers;
- Reduction of prediction on the quantity of the completed work;
- Asking to good students to give more than one solution to a problem.
- Modifying of the test's answers and other tasks, adopting them to the student' weaknesses;
- The reduction of student's fatigue and stress ofering familiar practices and environment in the process of testing.

One of the teachers' challenges is defining the knowledges and skills that already exist in a waited level related to the grade and the student's age, and from the other side: knowledges and skills that needs attention to facilitate their development.

Both objectives can be fulfilled through the diagnostic assessment.

Diagnostic assessment includes an intensive effort to gather information on students' learning.

Throughout a formal assessment are included the results of standartized tests of students' achievements as well as informal assessments based on curriculum for more information about learning within the class.

The advantage of the informal diagnostic assessment is that it is directly related with teaching. The use of teachniques of diagnostic assessment provides information about the real level of a student's performance; it helps in selection of educational objectives and goals; it makes possible the proper documentation of a student's learning and it orients the assessment in the future.

In all kinds of assessments, especially in diagnostic assessment, the assessment instruments of the teacher such as assessment scale, checklist, and anecdotal records are important and very helpful to measure the results.

When assessment techniques are used systematically to specify, record, and analyze the student's performance, some information needs to be gathered about the strongest points of the student and his/her education needs. The information gathered for a certain period of time can serve as a basis for evaluation. The informal data can be a part of diagnostic assessment done by the teacher.

The diagnostic measurement and assessment also provides information about the style the student studies and the successful or unsuccessful teaching methods used before with the student. Knowing and non-using of unsuccessful methods since the start of the schoolyear serves to the use of school time efficiently. Teachers, also become more sensitive to the students nonverbal reactions through the daily contacts at school. Recording this information by the means of assessment techniques such as portfolio, makes possible the accomplishment of some helpful instruments within the adoptable dimension.

Structuring of assessment techniques in questionaries and interviews, can also serve to gathering formative information about the student's interests and motivation, his/her style of learning as well as the effective strategies of learning.

Structuring assessment techniques into questionnaires and interviews can also be used to obtain formative information on student motivation and interests, student study habits, and effective learning strategies. Adaptation can then be made to curriculum content, instruction, or classroom environment for small groups or individual students.

Many students have test information accompanying them throughout their school careers. It is important that teachers are aware of what assessments have been done and what information is already available. Historical test data that is more than one year old can provide some information about students, but current data are more valuable for planning purposes.

The assessment data accompanying students in terms of:

- whether the information consists of all standardized test scores or whether there is a balance between norm-referenced and criterion referenced testing.
- whether there are representative assessments that are teacher-made and curriculum-based.
- whether the information gives direction to teachers in terms of planning or holds little instructional value.
- whether there are areas that could still be explored.

Maintaining good communication channels **between the home and the school** is important with all students, but with students having difficulties in school, the importance escalates.

For example, knowing how extensively parents have been involved in supporting a student's educational program and how past communications have occurred can be valuable information in providing teachers with access to support mechanisms.

Integrating Assessment Plan With of Your Colleagues

Begin by considering which colleagues constitute a natural or logical group with whom you need to integrate your student evaluation program. In the elementary school, the circle membership will probably comprise other teachers teaching the same grade or teachers teaching adjoining grades. The same sort of aggregation might be appropriate in the middle years, too, although subject matter groupings might be appropriate as well. In those high schools that have a departmental structure, the department is the obvious unit. In other high schools, the subject area may dictate the grouping.

The assessment club meetings will provide some of the following opportunities.

Comparing student evaluation philosophies. If each teacher has written down her or his philosophy of student evaluation, then these can form the basis for drafting an **assessment club** philosophy. In all likelihood this will be a matter of choosing one philosophy that has the broadest appeal and modifying it so that it encompasses the ideas of all members. Treat this as a working document to which you can refer during the subsequent discussions. Ultimately, it should be formalized because it will become an important reference for you, for other circle members, for future members, and in the preparation of a school policy on student evaluation.

Verifying the appropriateness of the chosen student assessment techniques

Each member of the evaluation circle can explain to the others the reasoning behind the selection of the particular techniques in his or her student evaluation plan..

Validating student evaluation plans by considering individual students

At several fixed times during the year, teachers often meet to consider the progress of particular students. Not only are these meetings opportunities for teachers to focus on the 'whole student', but they can also be opportunities to compare student assessment and evaluation practices.

Comparing student evaluation plans

The plan will be unique, owing to the decisions you have made during its construction and the specifics of the courses you are teaching. You will find that most of your colleagues in your assessment club have had to solve similar problems. Their ways of solving them may result

in a somewhat different emphasis or a different selection of techniques, but those differences will probably look more significant than they really are. You and your club colleagues should, in turn, explain your overall student evaluation plan

and verify that it accords with the group's philosophy. If there are points of discrepancy, then either the circle philosophy or your student evaluation plan should be amended. Whatever direction the discussions take, they should be conducted with sensitivity to the collegial nature of the evaluation circle and to the need to respect each member's professional integrity.

Developing common student assessment techniques

The **assessment club** offers an opportunity and a mechanism to explore the potential for standardizing the ways of assessing your students. Some reasons for doing this are:

- *to minimize the investment of student time and effort in introducing a technique.* Some student assessment techniques require quite a bit of 'setting up' with the students. For example, preparing a class to use assessment stations effectively takes a few trial runs.
- assessment club members may decide that agreeing to use assessment stations over several grades or in several subject areas saves in the time required to orient the students to a new assessment technique.
- *to construct long-range profiles on student development.* Some student characteristics such as lifelong learning or communication skills are so incremental that even one school year is not really enough time to assess evidence of student progress through the program of study. You and your colleagues may be able to plan a long-term program of collecting information over a period of years. For example, you may agree on certain items to be included on all your observation checklists.
- *to construct common examinations in order to ensure that teachers who teach the same subject at the same grade level are all teaching much the same things at much the same level.* In the same way, club assessment members may wish to develop a wider repertoire of common instruments so that they can develop an understanding of how their students are performing on a wide range of objectives.

School student evaluation plan

Every school needs to develop a policy on student evaluation along with a system of communications to transmit this information to students and parents/guardians. Each evaluation circle will contribute to this process. You and the other members should prepare a working summary of what you feel is important for the school to include in its overall policy on student evaluation.

- Every school should have a written, formal student evaluation policy in order to facilitate communication among teachers, parents, students, and the school board.
- The principal and the school staff should be crucially involved in developing the school policy.

This does not mean that they are the only people who should be involved. Parents, students, administrators, board members, can all contribute to the process. It does mean, though, that the principal and the teachers, because of their professional preparation and responsibility, must take the leadership in developing the policy.

At a minimum, every school policy on student evaluation should incorporate the following aspects:

- a statement of the school's vision or philosophy on the purposes behind the evaluation of students.
- a general description of the way in which students will be evaluated specific requirements of all teachers in the school, Some examples might be: development and communication in writing of a student evaluation plan, formal procedures for storing information developed during student assessment activities, and formal requirements for communicating with parents in certain crucial situations.
- a grading policy. The final grade is far from being the only purpose of student assessment but it is an important one. The school policy should address such issues as the role of grades in continuous assessment or promotion policies, grading for modified classes, and adaptations of assessment and evaluation procedures for identifiable groups such as exceptional students.
- a general description of how the school's evaluation policy and the student's progress will be communicated to parents. Equally important, it should include a delimitation of what will not be evaluated or reported to parents.
- a step-by-step procedure whereby parents /guardians and students can discuss reported student progress

- a protocol on what records will be kept at the school level and at the division level, including the length of time the raw information on student evaluation (e.g., data sheets, portfolios) should be kept at the teacher level, at the school level, and at the division level.
- a formal description of teachers' authority in evaluating students. Student evaluation places a great degree of responsibility on the individual teacher. It opens the teacher to challenges to his or her professional competence in the area, and it reduces the opportunities for the teacher to shelter behind 'objective' grading practices. Teachers need to know that they have the authority to draw upon their professional expertise in evaluating students. They must also feel secure with the policy if this professional expertise is questioned. As well, it is essential that teachers, parents, and students know the source of teachers' authority.
- an adjudication and review process. For the protection of all parties - teachers, students, parents/guardians, administrators, and boards - some kind of adjudication or review process should be developed and put into place in every school. From the teacher's point of view, school division processes should be established to resolve conflict in the area of student evaluation. This element may well be the most important and most enabling aspect of a school's student evaluation policy.

In Summary

Teachers, never really stop learning how to teach more effectively.

They try new approaches and modify old ones.

They learn how to meet the demands of new curricula.

They adjust to the needs of each particular class and of each particular student.

Student evaluation, as a part of the teaching process.

Student's assessment; a possibility of teachers' professional growth

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