

Learning

Assessing is much more than testing and controlling

Assessment seems like the end of a race. Evaluation seems like the heartbeat of a living body. Their use can make your role as a principal a nightmare or it can offer you a handy tool. As almost everything at school, it is an issue that needs serious attention long before the final exams.

Testing is not assessing

The teacher enters the class. He/she presents an issue, underlines the important parts and factors, explains what he/she thinks that needs to be explained, and gives one or two examples. The learner listens and follows the teacher's pace. He/she goes home, finds the issue in the text book, reads about the issue, underlines the important parts, remembers the explanation, and solves one or two exercises. During next lesson, the teacher asks the learner to repeat part of the given issue. At the end, he/she formulates questions about items of the whole sequence and expects them to be answered in written form. Someone gives me something, I deal with it, I give it back. The giver checks it for accuracy. According to the parts missing, he/she subtracts the equivalent marks.

This is a summative assessment, focusing on learning achievements, which we all know from testing and grading. This type of assessment is demanded in our school systems to award degrees. It is also a means of control, but not of evaluation, as it actually measures the effectiveness of teaching as a way to transform and impart information.

Testing and controlling have serious weaknesses. Assessment criteria are often either too vague, so they cannot deliver just measurements, or too strict, so they cannot account for the diversity of the learners' strengths and weaknesses. If we also consider the subjectivity of the person who judges the students' performance, then the same achievement may receive totally different grades, and their feedback for the learner will be almost useless.

Formative and prognostic assessment.

Not only in EDC/HRE, but in good teaching in general, assessment also looks at the individual learners and their processes of learning (formative assessment) and what outcomes may be expected (prognostic assessment). These forms of assessment reflect the learners' personalities and their specific strengths and learning needs.

Assessment criteria are tools to analyze the individual learners' mistakes, rather than to correct them. The teachers discuss with the students how to overcome their difficulties, and the students take responsibility for their progress in learning. In this way, formative and prognostic assessment connect teaching and learning to democratic values, enabling and encouraging learners to participate in democracy, and to be successful in their more advanced studies.

For a more detailed account on summative, formative and prognostic assessment, see <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-5/chapter-2/lesson-3/>.

Sharing assessment criteria with students

Assessment should therefore be part of the democratic ethos of a school. It follows that in a summative assessment, the criteria need to be fair and clear, and they must be transparent for the learners. This does not only serve education for democratic citizenship and human rights, but it is also a precondition of good teaching – in all subjects. Moreover, you and your staff must discuss, and agree on, the scope of assessment. For example, does it focus solely on knowledge and skills, or does it also include attitudes and values?

Self-assessment of teachers

Teachers cannot escape from their individual perspectives and how these affect the assessment of their students. Thus, they need to be aware that differences in assessment from one teacher to another may be unfair for the individual learner. Teachers should permanently reflect on their assessment procedures, which can be accomplished through peer surveillance and mutual feedback. Another method is listening to feedback by

students. A third approach is self-assessment. The first volume of the EDC/HRE manuals for teachers, *Educating for democracy*, contains a complete chapter on the assessment of students, teachers and schools, <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-5/>, and also includes a checklist for teachers' self assessment: <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-5/chapter-2/lesson-8/>

