

Original Paper

Current Trends in Student Assessment Practices and Their Underlying Philosophy

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Received: February 2, 2019 Accepted: February 25, 2019 Online Published: February 26, 2019

doi:10.22158/wjer.v6n1p85

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v6n1p85>

Abstract

After we explain, initially, the differences between assessing the learning process and assessing a student's performance, we analyse all the parameters on the basis of which a student and his/her performance are assessed. Finally, we present and evaluate all current trends that modernise the assessment methods and techniques related to the learning process and student performance, and also stress the basic logic and philosophy that govern these new approaches and also the points that make them different from what was applied in the field of student assessment until recently.

Keywords

evaluation, assessment, descriptive assessment, student self-assessment

1. Introduction

Methods and ways to assess student performance—in any way we may define the latter, i.e., whichever content we may attribute to it or believe it is attached with—, have evolved and changed in recent years, in the exact same manner that Teaching methods have developed—besides, it is widely known that the Teaching Methodology has not simply been in a *close*, but *core* relationship with the process and practice of the Assessment of students and the learning process. Nowadays, however, we do not only realise a post-development in the methodology of this assessment, but a structural, we could say, change of “example” (based on the meaning that Kuhn (1962) attaches to the entire philosophy and its mentality frame), since an almost totally different perception has been formed. And this new perception does not only cause a radical revision of (i) the way a student is or should be perceived and approached (in terms of pedagogy, education and teaching) as a person, key and active factor of the learning and

teaching process, and (ii) the role that a teacher and assessor has or should have in relation to his/her student, but also changes, to a great extent, even (iii) the purpose, objective and key priority of assessment itself.

2. Main Part

In this paper, we are discussing the modern approaches, proposals and trends in student and student performance assessment. Initially, we should point out the following: Education has become an institution and functions—and so does school itself—for the students' "own good" and in order to improve the way their personality is being shaped (pedagogical approach-perception) or towards their smoothest possible inclusion in the society of adults (sociological and sociocultural approach-perception) and teaching is conducted with the student being its sole objective (that is, its final point of reference). Thus, even the assessment that we call *assessment of the educational work*, just like every assessment of teachers or assessment of teachers (Note 1) as tutors, and also the type of assessment that is today called *assessment of the learning process* (whatever its precise content may be) cannot but derive, to a great extent, from the valuation of student performance (Note 2), since the educational system and school and also teachers work and are taught to "change" their underage students.

Apart from this, for years now we have become familiar with the triangular shape which provides the basis to underscore the pole of the teaching process, where the greatest emphasis is placed. We mean the so-called *teaching triangle* (Matsagouras, 2002, p. 138), every corner of which responds to one of the pillars involved in teaching (Bikos, 2017a, pp. 177-179), the student, the teacher and the syllabus (or *subject area to be taught*). More specifically, when the emphasis is placed mainly on *one* of these pillars, the triangle is positioned in space in the form of a capital Greek delta (Δ), with the pillar dominating the teaching process placed on its top vertex. Thus, in (traditional) teacher-centered teaching models, the teacher is the one placed on the top vertex of the triangle (Bikos, 2017a, p. 177), while in (modern) student-centered models this is where the student is positioned (Bikos, 2017a, pp. 177-178).

Consequently, it is useful for every researcher or scholar, studying either the developments in student *assessment* theory, and education in general, or the trends in student assessment methods and techniques (those measuring progress or performance) applied, to bear this shape in mind in his/her effort to show to which of the teaching pillars is the weight of the assessment placed (or attempted to be placed) each time.

In recent years, trends in the assessment mentioned above are shaped as follows:

First, according to the most recent views of Teaching Methodologies and Pedagogical Sciences, the teacher must study more intensively and carefully, in comparison to what (s)he has been doing so far, each student and their personality (even their biohistory, their particular behaviour as individuals in a group, the special way their perception, perhaps, functions and also their character) before (s)he

proceeds with their assessment and also even before planning his/her teaching intervention (that is before choosing his/her teaching methods and techniques and also the activities through which (s)he will teach and attempt to bring the desired learning results). Therefore (s)he should plan his/her teaching in such a way as to suit the students' particular qualities, which (s)he has identified and chartered through the above-mentioned study of them. Students in a class, however, are always so different as regards their learning and cognitive profiles that the teacher is obliged to find not so much the common component in all these details related to his/her students as, first, *compose* them in a particular manner and, then, adapt his teaching work to his/her students' profile; and wherever it is necessary or feasible, (s)he should adapt, as a tutor, to the needs, capabilities, and, in general, the profile of *certain students* (see, for example, those who are particularly weak, those who are challenged by certain learning difficulties, those who face distraction or hyperactivity and those who exhibit a very high intelligence quotient) adopting a personalised teaching approach for each one of them (if not for *each of his/her students* separately). In other words, (s)he should apply the method of *differentiated instruction* (Tomlinson, 1999; Panteliadou & Filippatou, 2013; Matsagouras, 2000, p. 287; Papanoum-Tzika, 1985, pp. 38-40; Vastaki, 2010, pp. 123-134). And this shift is due to the fact that the teacher and the academic community has now fully perceived the value of students' *individual differences* and their effect on the way each student perceives and assimilates the knowledge taught-syllabus (Note 3).

In consequence, as the teaching methodology is turning towards *differentiated instruction* (Bikos, 2017b, p. 13), student assessment is in turn obliged to turn towards portfolio—see a kind of assessment based on the student's portfolio (Oosterhof, 2003, pp. 181-194, 2010, p. 26; Rekalidou, 2011, p. 89; Taratori-Tsalkatidou, 2015, pp. 89-97; Dimitropoulos, 2007, pp. 126-127; Kassotakis, 2013, pp. 523-525; Pamouktsoglou, 2007, pp. 219-220; Manolakos, 2010, p. 6) (As a matter of fact, in certain subjects, a student and his/her performance are both assessed, as we read in Oosterhof (2003, p. 181), *solely* on the basis of his/her portfolio). Using a student's portfolio, the teacher forms a more complete picture about each student's personality and school achievements, in relation to a broader *set* of subject areas and activities, which achievements are of numerous and various kinds, exactly as is true of the multiple kinds of intelligence, according to Gardner (1991, 1993) (Note 4). E.g., others express a student's *creative thinking* (Note 5), or are of an artistic texture, others reflect his/her dexterity in construction work, etc.); therefore, *first*, the teacher makes a more comprehensive assessment of the student and, *second*, after making a better judgment of a student's particular capabilities and weaknesses (therefore also his/her needs), (s)he can plan more effective and to-the-point interventions in relation to him/her, in order to maximise the relevant learning outcome. (In certain cases when the student exhibits poor performance in a subject taught by a particular teacher, but does exceptionally well in other subjects, sport or artistic fields, there might be the following development: after the teacher has ascertained that with the exception of his/her own subject, the student has good-exceptional performance, (s)he forms a more positive picture of him/her, in the sense that (s)he stops having a

negative picture of him based on bias—which is something that happens quite often with teachers and their students) (Note 5).

Moreover, what is highlighted is the value, usefulness and use of *descriptive assessment* (Konstandinou, 2002, pp. 125-130; Kapsalis & Chaniotakis, 2011, pp. 65-67; Manolakos, 2010, p. 6), which helps to deal with the problem of using numbers to value a student's purely *qualitative* features. And *also* this form of assessment usually reveals—and, often, not to an insignificant degree—the special capabilities (:abilities and skills) of each student (therefore his/her particularity and individuality), since, within its framework the teacher is called upon to write usually more than two sentences about his/her student's performance and their educational and perceptual profile. Thus, this student assessment method also, just like the one mentioned above through the portfolio, bears witness to a turn towards a student's personality and special features.

The use of descriptive assessment, however, also acts as a factor that contributes to setting certain limits to the unbridled numerical logic adopted throughout the years by the applied practice of evaluating-assessing student performance using marks, which, in essence, a) did not constitute a real assessment, since it lacked words/discourse, being solely a *numerical* expression, and b) had introduced a quantitative (and positivistic) logic in the field of education, which, being primarily pedagogical, is by definition related to qualities, characters (that it attempts to formulate) and values—i.e., components that cannot be quantified and/or evaluated numerically.

Resuming our reference to descriptive assessment, we should point out that, even the dissemination of the use of rubrics (Note 6) in the assessment process (Stila & Michalopoulou, 2014; Kassotakis, 2013, pp. 521-522) in recent years can be considered to be indicative of the fact that those involved with education, teaching and student assessment have now realised how barren and often anti-pedagogical—and, possibly, “devastating” for students and their personality—is every assessment method or practice that is solely quantitative-numerical. So, together with qualitative assessment methods (Note 7)—i.e., those which do not use numbers—those involved with education also introduce the use of rubrics in the assessment process, which combine both qualitative and quantitative elements.

Finally, in recent years we have witnessed the use of projects as tools to assess a student's performance (Dimitropoulos, 2007, pp. 118-120; Pamouktsoglou, 2007, pp. 222; Manolakos, 2010, pp. 5-6). And if we consider that almost all school projects involve group work (therefore are implemented using the method of *cooperative learning*), we realise that, by introducing projects in the assessment process, we begin to assess even the ability of students to cooperate with their peers; and this is very important, since it is without a doubt that whoever graduates from school today should have developed this ability and the skills that will allow him/her to cooperate effectively, both in the academic sphere, if (s)he continues his/her studies, and in the labour sphere. Thus, this new trend can *also* be considered as nothing but real progress in the field of applied means/ways/methods to assess a student's performance (whichever content we may attribute to it).

At this point, however, we feel we should comment on what we have previously mentioned about

contemporary trends in assessment from a more philosophical-social point of view. We have seen that in recent years emphasis has been placed, as far teaching methods are concerned, on *differentiated* instruction and, as far as the assessment of the learning process is concerned, on portfolio and *descriptive* assessment. All these three, however, express and constitute an individual-centrism that brings the student's personality to the foreground of attention.

On the other hand, the dominance of the theory of social constructivism (Note 8), which caused, in the 1960s and 1970s, a shift of focus on the *cooperative* teaching method has made us turn towards collectivism and a, let's say, group-centrism and sociocentrism as far as the teaching methodology is concerned and what takes place in the school classroom. But through this group-sociocentrism, something has risen that added yet another priority in the everyday teaching practice of all teachers: the need to "monitor" how students co-operate with one another and train them to co-operate. As a result of this, however, something else emerged: the need and also the obligation of teachers to assess their students' ability to co-operate with their counterparts, inside and outside the school classroom and school in general. Thus, both active teachers and the pedagogical theory now approach the student not in relation to him/herself, but also in relation to the others, mainly his/her peers—that is, also in terms of how (s)he perceives others, what is his/her opinion of them and what is his/her attitude towards them, how (s)he approaches—"reaches out" to them, how (s)he establishes communication with them, how (s)he behaves when (s)he shares the same space with them and how (s)he collaborates with them (Note 10).

In conclusion, as far as assessment in education is concerned, we may have become witnesses of a dominant culture that is inclined towards self-centrism in recent years, but everyday school-teaching practice applied in certain subjects (such as those which relate to organising society and citizens' life), being based on the cooperative teaching method and cooperative teaching techniques (see, for example, the debate technique (Note 11)), obliges a teacher to focus, amongst others, also on the students' potential to participate in actions, research work, assignments and *cooperation* projects. And this is something that seems to be leading both the learning process and student assessment to a "balance", since it does not let it sink into an absolute self-centrism and turn into an assessment of a student's self-reference, self-oriented and individualistic qualities.

3. Conclusions-Epilogue

It appears that current trends in school assessment practices pertaining to the learning process are not one-sided, as they used to be until today, given that they expressed almost exclusively one and only logic, that of quantitative measurements, but tend to be reciprocal; because today, they also express a verbal way to evaluate student assessment—see primarily the use of descriptive assessment and, secondly, the use of rubrics. But they are not one-sided *also* because they attempt to assess a student and his/her performance, not as these were assessed until today, on the basis of only one form of assessment which is based in marking students (i) in oral and written exams, and (ii) assignments and

exercises assigned sometimes by the teacher, but *also* employing alternative methods and other ways that supplement each other: such as projects and portfolio development. And if we consider that the portfolio method expresses a student's purely *personal* achievements, while the project method reflects what (s)he has achieved as *part of a team*, we realise that through these new methods of assessment we form a more complete-comprehensive picture of the student, since (s)he is approached both as an individual *and* as a member of various working groups. Therefore, we can arguably assume that one of the main objectives of the new trends in student performance assessment is to establish a *holistic approach* to a student (Note 12) and a treatment that sees him/her as a *person* (and the concept of a *person* also includes the *particular* features of his/her personality), not simply as an *individual*.

Finally, even the tendency for a more massive application of descriptive assessment bears witness to a shift on the part of the educational world to each student's separate personality and special features; because, in essence, using descriptive assessment, the teacher refers, if (s)he wishes so, to each of his/her students' personal and specific features-qualities and special abilities, capabilities, inclinations, and weaknesses. But teachers' recent keen interest in the special profile of each of their individual students is also reflected on the process of *self-assessment*, which has started to be applied in certain few cases when students themselves are called upon to assess their performance (Rekalidou, 2011, p. 89; Taratori-Tsalkatidou, 2015, p. 35, pp. 102-104; Kapsalis & Chaniotakis, 2011, pp. 67-69; Dimitropoulos, 2007, pp. 120-121) (And we assume that the teacher somehow takes under consideration what students mention in their self-assessment; because if (s)he does *not* do so, then the method of the trainee's self-assessment does not have any contribution).

All the above, however, cannot but be viewed, amongst others, also as proof that what we generally call a Student-trainee's *personality* is taken even more seriously. And when we assume or suppose that one of the two poles of the teaching and learning process—that is, the teacher—starts taking the other pole—which is the student—, into more serious consideration, then we can do nothing but believe that our educational “condition” and reality has a great and serious chance to be improved. Except if it chooses to move, gradually, towards a path of *educational* and *pedagogical populism*, as we would call it, within the framework of which the teacher will not lead his/her students somewhere as his/her pedagogist, but will just be “carried hither and thither”, as we would say, by them, as a “variable” “dependent” on the underage—therefore in that case, in the student's relationship with the teacher, the student will be the “independent variable”. And that would mean the end (in the sense of *pause*, not *purpose*) of education.

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Notes

Note 1. About teachers' general *efficacy*, see, for example, in Pamouktsoglou, 2003, pp. 39-40.

Note 2. We read characteristically: "In the last twenty years, student performance assessment is a vehicle to evaluate the efficacy of the educational system within the framework of the educational policy applied in many European Union member-states. Various countries have introduced measuring and monitoring mechanisms that relate not only to the content or methodology of teaching, but also to what students are capable of achieving on the basis of certain questions" (Mavrommatis et al., 2008, p. 242).

Note 3. In fact, from what Dunne και Wragg (2005, p. 29) write, we can ascertain that the need for an extensive application of *differentiated instruction* has been identified since 1967. We read characteristically: "Anyone who spends time with groups of children cannot help but notice how different they are from each other and how difficult it is to cater for each of them. The physical differences are fairly obvious, but differences in personality, ability, learning styles [...] are also important". "It is not surprising that these individual differences have become a major focus for the professional concern of teachers".

There has been considerable encouragement for this emphasis. The Plowden Report (CAGE, 1967) made this claim that: “We found that the Hadow reports understated rather than overestimated the differences between children. They are too great [...] Children are unequal in their endowment and in their rates of development. [...] Whatever form of organisation is adopted, teachers will have to adapt their methods to individuals within a class or school. Only in this way can the needs of gifted and slow children and all those between the extremes be met (p. 460, para. 1232”) [...] the differences in children are taken to imply unproblematically that the curriculum must be differentiated; and so insistent is this demand that the need for differentiation has become one of the guiding principles in planning classroom work” (Dunne & Wragg, 2005, p. 31).

Note 4. In their personal file (portfolio), which is found in their school [...], students submit their most representative assignments, which they themselves have chosen from all the assignments they have prepared within a certain time period [...] The portfolio may represent a student’s work in one or more subjects [...] [Inside it] there are projects assigned by the teacher [...] and projects that the student prepared on his/her own initiative [...] [Thus, the portfolio also displays] additional talents that the student believes (s)he has. [...] Through the portfolio students themselves participate [in a way] in their assessment, since they are the ones who choose the best [in their opinion] of their projects [...] Using [the portfolio] the teacher can truly acquaint him/herself with each student [...] The portfolio is a very important assessment technique, because it [...] exhibits certain points that highlight a student’s value. (Taratori-Tsalkatidou, 2015, pp. 89-90, p. 91, p. 92).

Note 5. See, about this, for example, in Tsikopoulou, 2017, pp. 35-36.

Note 6. See in Rellos, 2007, 195-197, 200-203, where this bias is associated with the stereotypes against certain students and also the famous and pedagogically very important *self-fulfilling prophecy*. (About this prophecy, see in Merton, 1968, pp. 475-490, which is also the first work that makes reference to this term and psychosocial phenomenon.)

Note 7. Rubrics belong to the so-called *graded assessment criteria*, about which see also in Osterhof, 2010, pp. 65-66, where reference is made to Baker’s contribution to assessment using such criteria.

Note 8. See also the relevant term *qualitative assessment* in Rellos, 2007, p. 56.

Note 9. According to this theory, knowledge is “produced”—created in each student’s reasoning and perception, through collective-social processes which are developing in the field (of all kinds) of interaction of students with their human environment which is primarily made up of his/her classmates, teachers and, secondarily, all those “others” who are in the field of his/her (out of school) life (Foundopoulou, 2010, pp. 41-42; Kiriakis & Bakogiannis, 2003, p. 37, p. 39).

Note 10. At this point, however, we think it is interesting to note the following: When an individual, therefore a student as well, participates in any group as a member, they undertake or are assigned (by the tutor or the group itself—or, in some way, by *both* of them) a *role*. The role, therefore, expresses the contraction of the personal with the collective/group element, since, it may (always) be born by one *individual*, but, *first*, it is played in relation to a (small or large) group of other people, that is, to a

group, *second*, it may be assigned by a/the group, *third*, (s)he “plays” this role on the basis of certain rules some of which—if not all of them—have been set by the group and, *fourth*, (s)he acts, playing this role, having in mind and with the intention to serve a goal that concerns the group as a whole, not him/herself. So here is how the socialisation of the student *as an individual* is accomplished via the cooperative method and here is how (s)he becomes socially extroverted, i.e., a human unit that turns to the others and “transacts” (via some-usually shared-understandings, meanings, communication and acts-actions) with them.

Thus, by assigning the student with “roles”, most of which are related with a group project, the modern teaching practice makes the student social and cooperative; and by doing so, it obliges the teacher, first of all, to teach his/her students (using various ways) skills and different modes of cooperation (and also ways to be (self)committed to his/her group), and at the same time makes him/her do the following: assess the student focusing also on the way (s)he acts together with his/her classmates. In conclusion, because of all that we have just mentioned, modern teaching practice encourages students to make references “outside themselves”, as we could perhaps characterise their attitude within the classroom, and develop a mindset and, mainly, certain skills and abilities of socialisation and cooperation.

Note 11. See about this in Bikos, 2017c.

Note 12. In fact, we consider this to be one of the aims of (the not so new method of) student assessment via *systematically observing* his/her behaviour, about which see in Dimitropoulos, 2007, pp. 115-118. But we consider this to be one of the key objectives of the so-called *authentic assessment*, about which see in Kassotakis, 2013, pp. 520-521, which forms a general perception of the theory, assessment practices and means and objectives involved in student assessment.