

Assessment as a Tool to Aid Learning

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It is commonly understood that assessment does not obstruct the learning process but supports it by keeping a regular and continuous track of the learning progress made by students over time. In the current context, it is important to understand the entire assessment process along with the challenges faced by teachers in classrooms so that the implementation of assessment supports the teaching-learning process and leads to improvement in learning outcomes.

In the context of school education, assessment is an integral part of the curriculum. The objective of assessment is to understand how effectively classroom processes align with the intended learning outcomes and the impact of this. In reality, the purpose of assessment extends far beyond merely passing or failing students. It aims to evaluate whether the curriculum and pedagogical approaches have successfully achieved the intended learning goals or not. It involves identifying how many students reached those goals and how many fell short of reaching them and understanding the reasons behind their inability to achieve the desired outcomes. The goal is to analyse these reasons and modify the pedagogy accordingly. Understanding the creative and positive potential embedded in the assessment process is crucial.

Given that there is talk of retracting the 'no-detention policy' for classes V to VIII, assessment should not be looked at as a liberty to fail students. In fact, the objective of this change is that the students who are a little behind on the expected learning outcomes should get some more time and support to learn better before the beginning of the new session. There can be arguments for and against the no-detention policy; however, we must remember that every child can learn and that every child has the right to learn. Passing or failing, more or fewer marks – are a completely different matter.

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The ground reality of teachers is rife with challenges; without understanding these challenges, it is difficult to truly understand the issue. Teachers are faced with challenges like giving admission to students based on the criterion of age, teaching students from varied

backgrounds and of varied abilities in the same classroom and working on competencies that could not be achieved in the previous classes while also working on competencies to be achieved in the current class. Teachers work with these challenges the whole year. Beyond the marks recorded in the report card after the annual examination, a teacher needs to have a clear understanding of each student's academic progress, which involves an understanding of continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

Somewhere between a teacher's understanding of assessment and their discernment of students' learning, lies the vision for education, which ensures meaningful learning, one that is free from the burden of competition or the fear of failure.

This is not an unexplored idea. Within the school education system, concepts such as *formative assessment* and *summative assessment* are well recognised, and there is an intention to implement them effectively. However,



Figure 1: Students write down what they know and have learned.

the real question is: Where does the true understanding and sensitivity toward assessment get lost? What steps can the school education system take to ensure that assessment, as a vital component of the curriculum, constructively serves the true objectives of education? How can learning be placed at the centre, rather than the fear of examinations or the race for marks? Equally important is understanding what learning gaps still exist and how they can be addressed.

To achieve this, we will have to understand the entire assessment process in the contemporary context and at the level of the classroom.

The objective of *formative assessment* is to comprehensively understand each student's competency in subject-related concepts and track their progress in achieving learning outcomes or the challenges faced in the same. However, this does not seem to be happening with formative assessments on the ground. As of now, one only sees the process of documenting the marks achieved in report cards at the end of the session. There is neither an analysis of the responses by students in the formative assessments, nor are the insights drawn from it incorporated into the teaching-learning process.

Now, let us discuss *summative assessments*. The concepts included in school education are not isolated or

standalone; rather, they have an inherent continuity. On the one hand, these concepts are interlinked with other concepts taught in the same class, and on the other, they progress with increasing complexity across subsequent years in the school curriculum. Similarly, subjects are not confined within boundaries, there is an interrelationship among them. Given this, the assessment conducted at the end of the session in each class can serve as an effective tool for the teacher of the next grade to understand the learning level of the student. Teachers committed to providing quality education for their students must stay attentive to this.

There is a strong need to establish formative assessment in its true form. This can be implemented at two levels in schools – first, during the process of question paper creation, and second, through the analysis of students' responses after the assessment.

While designing a question paper for formative assessment, a teacher should be careful about which questions assess which skills and learning outcomes, and at what cognitive level. Similarly, while evaluating students' responses, it is essential to consciously analyse the progress in their competencies and learning outcomes, as well as identify the challenges they face



Figure 2: Students enjoy reading books of their choice.

in learning. A close analysis of students' responses will clarify the progress made on the different competencies or learning outcomes, along with the challenges faced in achieving them. If this is done, we will be able to provide the desired learning support to each student. Using the insights gained from such analysis in the teaching-learning process will create better learning opportunities for every student, providing quality school education that is inclusive and equitable.

The entire discourse on assessment so far establishes that assessment should be for learning rather than merely serving as a tool to measure what has been learned. The National Education Policy 2020 has recommended a reimagined format for the school-based assessment progress card, which is to be shared with parents. This progress card has been conceptualised as a 360-degree, multidimensional card, offering detailed analysis and insights into the cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor domains of each student's development. The objective of this format of assessment is to view education as holistic development, as stated in the definition of education. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is an effort in this direction. However, in today's context, our school education system appears to lack readiness for such an approach. Nevertheless, we need to take firm

steps in this direction from now on, and this can begin from the current examination season itself.

As a first step, the process of assessment will have to be aligned with the classroom processes. The teacher will need to carry out assessments while understanding the cognitive levels of concepts, competencies, and learning outcomes related to their subjects. While planning for assessment, the teacher has to try and ensure that the student is able to apply, analyse, and think logically with regard to the relevant competency or concept. This will only be possible when teachers have a clear understanding and perspective regarding assessment. At the primary level, it is better if assessment is done both orally and in written form because it accurately assesses the progress in learning a concept or the problems faced in it.

It is crucial to establish a new perspective on assessment in school education. When assessment becomes a tool to aid learning, students will be freed from the fear of examinations, and the foundation for joyful education can be laid. There is a significant expectation from teachers to rethink the assessment practices being followed in their classrooms and strive to use assessment in its true essence. Only through a better assessment process can better learning and teaching be achieved.

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