

Assessment in school education: then and now

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Assessment plays the very vital role in school life of a child. It is the process for determining whether a child has a disability and needs special education and related services. It's the first step in developing an educational program that will help the child learn. A full and individual initial assessment must be done before the initial provision of any special education or related services to a child with a disability, and students must be reevaluated at least once every three years. Actually, assessment involves gathering information from a variety of sources about a child's functioning and development in all areas of suspected disability, including information provided by the parent. The assessment may look at cognitive, behavioral, physical, and developmental factors, as well as other areas. All this information is used to determine the child's educational needs.

A full and individual educational assessment in school serves many important purposes like as:-

1. **Identification:** Assessment in school education can identify children who have delays or learning problems and may need special education and related services as a result. It gives a unique view to teacher as well as student for their improvement and bright future. A learner can identify very easily on the basis of their performance during school
2. **Eligibility:** Assessment determines whether your child is a child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and qualifies for special education and related services.
3. **Planning an Individualized Education Program (IEP):** School assessment provides information that can help to the school to develop an appropriate IEP for child.
4. **Instructional strategies:** Assessment can help determine what strategies may be most effective in helping a child's learning.
5. **Measuring progress:** School assessment establishes a baseline for measuring your child's educational progress.

Now-a-days the system of assessment in school is going to change with the reference of NCF- 2005, Right to Education Act and Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation. The assessment process in school establishes a foundation for developing an appropriate educational program for children. When we visualized the traditional evaluation system we find that this system is not the most effective in terms of resulting in actual learning and has many disadvantages that are actually counterproductive to real learning. The traditional assessment system focuses entirely on intellectual and ignores experiential learning.

Some of the major characteristics of traditional assessment system were:

1. came at the end of session in the form of exam.
2. based on subject & class
3. common question paper for all students of same grade
4. created tension & put pressure upon student
5. promoted "go for tuition" style

Actually, assessment is as old as education itself. It is the very last phase of teaching and learning. Traditionally, the assessment has been the very tough exercise, fearful enough for students. However, with changing times, the procedure of conventional examination has changed. Now, the modern concept of assessment in school is quite progressive and scientific. Educationists have introduced a new term CCE (continuous and comprehensive evaluation) in the light of various educational policy documents because the NCERT discussion paper (2000) on National Curriculum Framework for School Education has outlined the role of evaluation in raising standard of attainment as stated below. The main purpose of evaluation as envisaged by the Education Commission (1964-66) and reiterated in NPE, 1986, is to help determine and gradually raise standards of attainment at state and national levels. Evaluation should therefore be constructed as a powerful instrument for improving the quality of education in general and that of improving teaching learning in particular. One of the main ingredients of quality education is the quality of learners' achievements which should be effectively realized through feedback mechanism to be employed for the benefit of learners, teachers and parents. Now-a-days, evaluation is practiced as a mandatory requirement of the system which is accomplished through end-of-year examinations and some tests, etc. during the year. In order to have proper evaluation of learners' progress, examinations alone should not be relied upon. Other modes of assessment such as observation during individual and group tasks, sociogram and peer ratings etc. may be put to use. The outcomes of this evaluation convey the achievement of student at particular times as revealed through the testing devices put to use. This exercise is done more as a ritual rather than as a device of specific feedback for learners, teachers and parents. Corrective measures particularly in terms of remedial instructions are a rare phenomenon. In order to derive full advantage of examination and evaluation the outcomes need to be interpreted in the following manner:

1. by the learner to know his/her strength and weakness and get inspiration to make up the deficiency at the earliest.
2. by the teacher to have an assessment of students performance on one hand and assessment of the efficacy the teaching learning strategy employed by him/her. This should be analyzed with a view to providing differential treatments to different categories of learners so that students may be engaged as under:-

- a. bright ones may be engaged in goal directed learning through enrichment program.
 - b. average ones may be involved in peer learning by assigning specific tasks in small groups
 - c. the weaker ones may be diagnosed properly and remedial teaching may be organized before embarking upon new teaching units
- The aforesaid practice of evaluation will constitute part of periodic and comprehensive evaluation and may help learners attain mastery of competencies, basic skills, desirable attitude and values which may help them to settle in life and become good and contributing citizens of the country. Necessary steps may be taken to reduce the element of rote memorization of information from books to application of the learned concepts, skills and competencies in particular situation. Besides, textbooks, instructional materials will have to be re-oriented towards this goal; teachers will have to be motivated and empowered to undertake such tasks in right earnest. Need for a serious monitoring mechanism cannot be undermined.

So, we find that the new system of assessment indicates towards "Assessment for Learning" whereas the traditional system of assessment indicates towards "Assessment of Learning" because Assessment for learning happens while learning is still underway.

These are the assessments that we conduct throughout teaching and learning to diagnose student needs, plan our next step in instruction, provide students with feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work, and help students see and feel in control of their journey to Success. Each one reveals to students increments of achievement and how to do better the next time. On these occasions, the grading system is laid aside.

Assessment of learning are those assessments that happen after learning is supposed to have occurred to determine if it did. They are

used to make statements of student learning status at a point in time to those outside the classroom, as when making student referrals or making decisions about programs. State assessment, local standardized tests, and college admission tests represent external examinations that do this. But we also conduct assessment of learning within classroom when we gather evidence to determine a student's report card grade. Unit final exams and important projects often serve this purpose.

Apart from above given information some major variation between traditional assessment and current assessment for assessment users are-

| Assessment User | Assessment Now | Assessment Then |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Students | Am I improving over time? Do I know what it means to succeed? What should I do next? What help do I need? | Am I succeeding at the level that I should be? Am I capable of success? How am I doing in relationship to my classmates? Is the learning worth the effort? |
| Teachers | What does this student need? What do these students need? What are student strengths to build on? How should I group my students? Am I going too fast? Too slow? Too far? Not far enough? | What grade do I put on the report card? What students need to be referred for special service? What will teachers tell parents? |
| Parents | What can we do at home to support learning? Is my child learning new things? | Is my child keeping up? Is this teacher doing a good job? Is this a good school? |
| Principal | | Is instruction producing results? Are our students ready for the workplace or the next step in learning? How shall we allocate building resources to achieve success? |
| Superintendent | | Are our programs of Instruction producing desired results? Is each building producing results? Which schools need additional resources? How shall we allocate district resources to achieve success? |

| Assessment User | Assessment Now | Assessment Then |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--|
| State Department of Education | | Are programs across the state producing results? Are individual districts producing results? Who is working adequate yearly progress and is not? How shall we allocate district resources to achieve success? |
| Citizens | | Are our students achieving in ways that prepare them to become productive workers and citizens? |

Finally, we can say that previous assessment methods in schools were a traditional way to think of formative uses of assessment while current assessment in schools goes beyond that.

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