

Assessment - a team game!

By [Learning Curve](#) | Aug 26, 2013

There might have been instances in your life where you were asked to reflect and evaluate your own capabilities and you would have either taken a while before responding or penned down unsure words about your own self! It is rather surprising that for most of us, this capacity of self – reflection or evaluation doesn't come so naturally. Looking back at the ground where we are supposed to develop all our skills and abilities – our schools hardly give any attention to this ability that is not only critical for our professional lives but also impacts our personal life to a great extent. The entire paradigm of evaluation is based on the belief that the knowledgeable adults in a child's life – the educators impart knowledge to the students and they alone need to evaluate and conclude about how well the student has been able to learn. There is definitely a very crucial role that the educators have to play in evaluating the learning of their students. But it is even more important to see this process of assessing student's learning as a **collaborative process** rather than something that an educator concludes for the student.

Why choose Collaboration?

One of the principles of true teaching - "The mind must be consulted in its own growth" stated by Sri Aurobindo- indicates how essential it is for a learner to participate in the decisions and processes of his/ her own learning and growth. This holds true not only for learning but also for assessment of learning. Research in Australia (Midgley and Petty 1983) showed that recent graduates rated the ability to assess their own performance among the most important skills used in their jobs, but one that their schools or degree courses had almost totally ignored. In such a scenario, it seems almost imperative to inculcate this skill of self – evaluation in our educational spaces. One of the most effective and common ways of working towards this skill is for educators to collaborate with the students for their assessments. There are three critical reasons why a collaborative approach can prove to be effective:

• A pursuit of excellence

In this approach, when teachers work with students on evaluating or judging how well they have learnt the required skills, concepts, etc. the underlying intent is to constantly raise their benchmark of quality and achievement. This does not in any way include a competitive element as a means to progress but on the other hand, enables students to understand their own individual learning styles and abilities and direct their learning towards excelling in the areas they decide for themselves. Another reason why excellence would manifest as a quality within children in this process is that they develop the habit constantly looking at their own work objectively and critically; are able to invite feedback from teachers and peers and work on it and persevere till the time they reach the desired benchmark. These are in fact the very foundational abilities required for anyone to excel in an area.

• Building ownership of learning

It would be a disempowering process if we view children as a group of individuals who are receivers of knowledge from adults in their life and have no say in their own learning journey. Talking from a constructivist point of view, learning is much more meaningful and rich when students construct knowledge for themselves and have a sense of responsibility for their own learning. By going through the process of evaluating collaboratively, we enable students to share the ownership of the entire learning process with their educators. This has implications at all levels – the curriculum and planning, the classroom pedagogy and how the teachers are being prepared to hold a collaborative space.

• Developing high order thinking skills

With most schools these days promising to develop life – long learners, higher order thinking skills (HOTS) is a term most of us would have encountered. The reason these skills are getting more and more attention these days is the fact that these skills have the potential to enrich students' learning to a great extent and empowers them to develop a sense of discernment which holds importance in all spheres of their lives – academic, personal, social and so on. As students collaborate with their educators to reflect, judge, evaluate and critique their own learning, they are actually developing these fundamental skills that will aid their learning as well as make them better thinkers and decision makers in all aspects of their lives. In fact, if we consider the perspective that the above three reasons indicate, there is a major paradigm shift required. When students' evaluations are done with the intent to use them as inputs towards their further learning, it becomes assessment 'for' learning in contrast to assessment 'of' learning'. The latter being the usual approach in most of our schools. However, it is essential to gauge how much and how well the students have learnt, but that should not be the point where the learning cycle ends. It is what we do with the information that we have about student's evaluation that matters more and serves as a critical ingredient in designing further learning for students. Author and consultant Rick Stiggins in his article 'Assessment Through The Student's Eyes' explains assessment for learning really well:

"Assessment for learning provides both students and teachers with understandable information in a form they can use immediately to improve performance. In this context, students become both self – assessors and consumers of assessment information. As they experience and understand their own improvement over time, learners begin to sense that success is within reach if they keep trying. This process can put them on a winning streak and keep them there. When we use assessment for learning, assessment becomes far more than merely a one – time event stuck onto the end of an instructional unit. It becomes a series of interlaced experiences that enhance the learning process by keeping students confident and focused on their progress, even in the face of occasional setbacks."

Having said this, the big question is always 'How to bring this vision into action?' as what brings success to any approach is its ability to manifest into concrete implementable practices. Some strategies that can bring this vision into action are given below.

Strategies for Collaboration

In the daily routine of school, one might think that it would be a tall order to establish collaboration between students and teachers for assessments. But the fact is that there are a range of simple and effective strategies that can be adopted for assessing student's learning

collaboratively.

Some of these strategies are shared below:

- **Planning structured assessments**

The success of the assessment practices depend greatly on how educators plan for them. In one sense as educators, we should literally do backward planning by keeping the end in mind while planning. As we decide the learning goals for our students we simultaneously need to think of how we will know if what we intend to teach has been learnt by the students. Structured tools and templates of assessment therefore have a great role to play here and need to be done at the time of putting down the learning goals and not be kept as an end task. It is necessary to carefully choose the tools of assessments according to what needs to be evaluated. From a range of structured tools such as rubrics, assignments, tests, work samples and so on, we need to pick up the one that best suits what we want to assess. For instance, language skills can be effectively assessed through rubrics, whereas social and emotional development will need a different kind of tool e.g., teacher's narrative observations. However, talking about collaboration, we can't miss the role of students in this stage of planning. Wherever possible, we can devise the learning targets along with the students. Simultaneously, the students and educators collectively come up with assessment criteria and tools to evaluate learning. Students should know beforehand and participate in deciding the criteria on the basis of which they will be evaluated.

- **A 360 degree view**

Collaboration can mean more than the partnership between students and educators. It can be extended to other stakeholders who form a part of the child's immediate community and can evaluate the child on at least some dimensions. Having peers and parents of the child as a part of the assessment process will provide a wider understanding of the progress of the child while also making the process of evaluation fairer, as involving several perspectives will reduce subjectivity and indicate clear patterns at the time of concluding. While peer evaluation can be done through classroom practices integrated in the teaching method, parents' evaluation can be done at specifically designated intervals where parents are given criteria and formats to assess their child.

- **Student led conferences (SLC's)**

SLCs are forums where students share their work and their learning journey with others. These could be teachers, peers, parents or any other audience. The conferences are in a sense individual presentations where children share their work and explain what they have learnt and how and the audience can question them on anything about their work. These forums help children reflect about their learning and understand their strengths and work on areas and get feedback from others that they can use to further improve their learning. Though the presentation is an individual exercise by the student, the preparation towards these is a collective effort of the students and teachers.

- **Student Portfolios**

A portfolio is an effective way to see the learning curve of a student. It is a collection of a student's work in a chronological order either in the form of a physical file or folder or as a soft copy document or presentation, depending on what the school chooses. Evidences showing a student's learning of skills and understanding in each domain is organized in categories in this folder. There is no one single format in which a portfolio is to be made but essentially portfolios should cover all areas of learning, contain work samples and should be able to show the student's progress. Portfolios can be managed by students themselves where they choose what samples they want to put and what they want to share with the audience. Teachers work with the students on their portfolios by sharing the purpose and the guidelines and thereafter giving them feedback on their work and helping them decide work samples and giving suggestions by organizing it.

Collaboration in Practice

Fortunately, (maybe as a consequence of the guidelines by the NCF 2005 and CCE requirements) there are now many schools in the country that have adopted a collaborative approach towards assessments and have been working towards evolving their assessment practices. Having worked in one such school, **The Heritage School** (an experiential learning school in Gurgaon), I got the opportunity to bring alive some of the above mentioned strategies for the students as a part of the assessment process of the school. The educators in the school have been able to plan structured formative and summative assessments in most of the curricular areas along with strategies to involve the students, peers and parents in their evaluation. I could actually see students developing as more reflective beings, who can easily talk about their strengths and weaknesses, critique their own work and share how can they work on bettering themselves! In spite of the fact that the reality of Indian education system provides little space to bring such innovations, small steps taken by different groups of people across the country will go a long way in eventually impacting the whole system. Hopefully, the power of collaboration for assessment and learning on the whole will be more widely recognized and used.

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