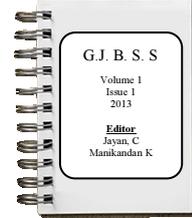




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Beyond Examination Reforms: Assessment *For*, *As* and *In* Learning

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Abstract

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This paper is to provide a framework for generating and extending thinking, to back up and to guide minuscule of thoughts towards learning oriented evaluation in the ocean of administrative and executive reforms in examination systems of higher education. In addition, it is to further and orient professional thoughts towards learning culture. Thinking reflecting, analyzing, deliberating on evaluation, concept and practices, can be fresh learning for educators and researchers. The background of this paper is prevailing system in which examination drives it from backseat. In this system assessment and learning are divorced, students display apathy towards learning, students perceive assessment as 'policing' and it exhibits serious neglect towards evaluation of student learning. This paper builds up on changes in social expectations about the education institutions, changes in the conception of learning and changes in the understanding of purpose and outcome of evaluation to propose changes in the assessment practices in higher education.

Keywords:

Examination Reforms,
Assessment, Learning.

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Context: Lack of culture of evaluation in higher education

How many of the adult learners know what their strengths (in academics) are? How many of our students can explicitly say what they have learnt, developed, in the last one-year, three year, or five year? Did not we assess them? Didn't we test them? How did our internal assessment and the external tests advance learners' cause? For that matter, did it advance teachers' cause? Did the 'liberal' nature of assessment and 'liberal' classroom practices, in which neither teacher nor student were made accountable for learning, create the liberated society the system aspired for? Did it contribute to a younger generation, who found themselves misfit for the society for which they were preparing by spending valuable years, in their life? To put it succinctly, are our current approaches to assessment improving student learning. Might other approaches to assessment have a greater impact? How can we use assessment to help all our students *want* to learn? How can we help them feel *able* to learn?

We are used to an examination driven education system, where learning is geared towards an examination that comes after the stage of learning in an academic session students are taught to be examined. Examinations are prescribed on syllabi. Hence, teaching learning becomes textbook, guidebook based; learning becomes storage and retrieval of information than developing thinking, originality and creativity. Examinations will come only at the end, and hence teachers and students can relax until then.

As examination comes after a period of 'leisure', and as they do not enhance the student cause, people have come to understand evaluation in a negative way as a process of inspection. Evaluation that is seen as 'policing' does not lead to appropriate learning. The outcome is deep student resentment to any kind of evaluation and reluctance to take part in the information gathering process. This explains the students' negative attitude towards internal (formative?) assessments. Evaluation is seen as something done to them, often in a negative, destructive and unreliable way that appears to be of no direct relevance to them.



Thus, thrust is on assessment for 'measuring' rather than assessment for 'enhancing' learning. When assessment is divorced from the process of construction of knowledge, it ceases to be an effective learning-enhancing procedure. Most of the students, attend the classes in order to pass. The most often raised question is "will this be for exam?", implying 'how little I can learn to get the certificate?' Moreover, almost all of the teachers, some often and others rarely, encourage this tendency in their students, through hasty completion of the syllabi, examination preparation, "consolidation", question paper revision, model exam and the like. If we want to do away with this culture of shallow learning, and bring in a system of deep learning, the evaluation system has to be overhauled.

In India, most of us were lecturers, and now we are professors. If this nomenclature does not take away our teaching function, we have to agree that teaching is ultimately the same as assessing. True measure of teaching is how deeply the students learn. Teaching is to be measured by learning, not by the number of lessons covered.

Higher education in India and elsewhere too, suffers from serious neglect it exhibits towards evaluation of student learning. This is to the extent that, theory of evaluation in education is wholly based on school learning, and hence this paper too relies most on such sources than on references specifically fit for tertiary education. Evaluation in education has not escaped its role of what Mehrens (1968) has described as, *scapegoat, stoolpigeon, and housemaid* instead of being the soul mate of learning. Especially in higher education, evaluation has failed to perform its fuller functions in terms of diagnosis, guidance, and formation of learning.

Assumptions that gains ground

At the outset, the author accepts that there is no consensus about what learning is nor about, how evaluation can contribute to the learning. Nevertheless, given this, there are emerging conceptions of learning which gains ground throughout the world. It is based on these conceptions of learning, which are discussed below, that it advocates the changes in the evaluation practices.

Ambiguity of learning

Learning is a good but complex idea, a buzzword without a specific meaning. Everyone agrees that learning is the object of education; however many differ in conceptions of learning and in particular what is effective learning. And, hence its meaning is still in evolution. The human conception of learning has evolved from learning as memory and repetition, learning as understanding, and learning as performance, learning as insight, to learning as inquiry, evaluation and problem solving. Learning is now viewed as a process of constructing understanding, during which individuals attempt to connect new information to what they already know, so that ideas have some personal coherence. Learning is a transformative process. One thing curious about human understanding of learning is that as the knowledge of the construct become more evident and our ability to regulate it in practice has increased, the learning goal of individual emancipation and the means of social regulations of learning has become remoter.

Educational institutions stands for nation building, person building, learning; but learning cannot be confined to such institutions. Learning goes out of boundaries of institutions; the society itself either become a *learning society* (it can be an educated society), or a learning market where the social relations are fragmented as in a market with power on the consumer (learner), or a learning network of relations. *Learning is an interactive process by which learners try to make sense of the world.* Students are always thinking and they are either challenging or reinforcing their thinking on a moment-by-moment basis. Before teachers can plan for targeted teaching and classroom activities, they need to have a sense of what it is that students are thinking. What is it that they believe to be true? This is more important for teachers than the knowledge about learners' possession of right or wrong answer.



Learning as discovery, deep Learning as Understanding

Dewey describes learning as a habit formation that arises from the continual reconstruction of existing dualisms into entirely new unitary functions and understandings. According to Feynman, this approach to learning is manifest when someone is genuinely curious enough to ask questions and then finds an answer they can defend in a manner that is convincing to themselves and others. Hence, effective learning is not just accepting wisdom but trying to come to an understanding why this wisdom is accepted. How people make sense or understand the world and themselves is a broader view of learning than simply the traditional cognitive perspective of long-term memory retention. Fosnot and Kuhn argues that if learning is about sense making then the goal of instruction is not just about shaping behaviours or skills but rather to influence conceptual development and deep understanding. Learning also includes learners monitoring and reviewing their approaches and strategies for learning and assessing whether they are proving effective for the particular goals and context. Deep Learning is Problem Based Learning, inquiry learning, meta-cognitive and self-regulatory learning.

21st century skill - Preparation for future learning (PFL) requires engineering of effective learning environments

A model of learning that says

Learn ... while you are young, the skills that you will apply during your lifetime is no longer tenable. The skills that you can learn ... will be obsolete by the time you get into the workplace and need them, except for one skill. The one competitive skill is the skill of being able to learn. It is not the skill of being able to give the right answer to questions ..., but to make the right response to situations that are outside the scope of what you were taught ... We need to produce people who know how to act when they are faced with situations for which they were not specifically prepared (Papert, 1998).

Preparation for future learning (PFL) cannot be taught in isolation from other types of learning. For this, we have to develop the way teachers teach, *not what they teach*; where teachers do not create learning, instead learners create learning. Teaching hence becomes the *engineering of effective learning environments*. Key features of such effective learning environments are student engagement and well-regulated nature of feedback.

Evaluation: a discipline neglected in higher education

Evaluation like learning is an umbrella term. It goes beyond the confines of applied discipline of education. Educators have traditionally relied on assessment that compares students with more successful peers as a means to motivate students to learn. Evaluation is a component of curriculum for effective delivery and further improvement in the teaching learning process. Evaluation is not something administered by the teachers and taken by the learners on the conclusion learning. Learning is to be the most important purpose (end in sight of learning process) of evaluation.

Educational assessments are conducted in a variety of ways and their outcomes can be used for a range of purposes. There are differences in who decide what is to be assessed, who carries out the assessment, where the assessment takes place, how the resulting responses made by students are scored and interpreted, and what happens as a result. Each of these can be the responsibility of the learners themselves, those who teach the students, or, at the other extreme, all the processes can be carried out by an external agency. Assessments can be used to support judgments about the quality of educational programs or institutions (what might be termed the evaluative function). They can be used to describe the achievements of individuals, either for certifying that they have reached a particular level of performance or competence, or for making predictions about their future capabilities (what might be termed the summative function). And assessment can be used to support learning (what might be termed the formative function) (Dylan Wiliam, University of London, United Kingdom)



All evaluations are about thinking first and doing second. Evaluation researchers (Lee Cronbach, Gretchen Rossi, John Owen, Hallie Preskill, and Rosalie Torres) see it as a process that deepens understanding, obtains new insights, takes visible actions, and improves the quality of an evaluand – product, programme or process being evaluated.

Four Paradigms of Evaluation

Evaluation paradigms are a framework for thinking about how to select or develop assessment tasks, how to use them, and how to communicate about them with students, parents, and others. One assessment approach is not good and another is not bad. Every paradigm is fit for its purpose. They are complementary. Identifying the purpose of classroom assessment is critical for it to be productive and efficient. There are three distinct but inter-related purposes for classroom assessment: assessment *for* learning, assessment *as* learning, and assessment *of* learning. If we want to enhance learning for all students, the role of assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning takes on a much higher profile than assessment *of* learning. These can be seen as parallel existing paradigms in evaluation. A fourth paradigm, assessment in learning, important in the context of higher education, is emerging.

Assessment of Learning is a process whereby someone (teacher who designs, collects and judges) attempts to describe and quantify another (student) who has little involvement in the design or implementation of the assessment process. Here, assessment is summative. Evaluation is seen as a product, a measurement, an assessment of students. Assessment *of* learning is used to confirm what students know and can do, to demonstrate whether they have achieved the curriculum outcomes, and, occasionally, to show how they are placed in relation to others. Teachers concentrate on ensuring that they have used assessment to provide accurate and sound statements of students' proficiency, so that the recipients of the information can use the information to make reasonable and defensible decisions. Traditionally, the focus of classroom assessment has been on assessment *of* learning – measuring learning after the fact, using the information to make judgements about students' performances, and reporting these judgements to others.

Assessment for Learning involves increased levels of student autonomy with teacher guidance and collaboration that emphasizes giving useful advice to the student by designing learning and feedback helping students develop insight into what has not been learnt. Assessment *for* learning is designed to give teachers information to modify and differentiate teaching and learning activities. It acknowledges that individual students learn in idiosyncratic ways, but it also recognizes that there are predictable patterns and pathways that many students follow. Assessment is formative. Evaluation is seen as a process, an activity with more qualitative data collection methods. Primary concern is with reporting information, albeit information gathered by new methods, to external stakeholders, not with directing classroom instruction (Czech, 1998). Teachers simply collect student work, use the rubric to determine a score and submit the score to the state department because an authority outside the classroom directed them to do so. Assessment *for* learning shifts the emphasis to a better balance between summative and formative assessment - from making judgements to engaging in ongoing activities that can be used to support the next stages of learning. Resulting information is used to determine not only what students know, but also to gain insights into how, when, and whether students apply what they know. Teachers can also use this information to streamline and target instruction and resources, and to provide feedback to students to help them advance their learning.

Teachers traditionally have also been using assessment *for* learning when they built in diagnostic processes, formative assessment, and feedback at various stages in the teaching and learning process, though it was often informal and implicit. Assessment *for* learning is premised on a belief that all students are capable of learning the intended curriculum, and that teachers have the requisite content knowledge and the pedagogical skills to find ways to facilitate students' learning.



The current worldwide interest in assessment for learning is, to a large extent, due to a review of research carried out by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam at Kings College in London and published in 1998. Their publication, 'Inside the Black Box', was a review that drew upon 250 research journals and publications between 1988 and 1997.

Assessment as Learning is more connected with diagnostic assessment and emphasis on informing learning via self-assessment and peer assessment. Students take on increased responsibility to generate quality information about their learning by co-constructing learning, assessment and progress map with teacher allowing students to adjust, rethink and re-learn via iterative feedback. Evaluation is seen as a process, an activity. *Assessment as learning* highlights the importance of the self-monitoring processes students use during learning. *Assessment as learning* is a process of developing and supporting metacognition for students. *Assessment as learning* focusses on the role of the student as the critical connector between assessment and learning. When students are active, engaged, and critical assessors, they make sense of information, relate it to prior knowledge, and use it for new learning. This is the regulatory process in metacognition. It occurs when students monitor their own learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in what they understand. It requires that teachers help students develop, practice, and become comfortable with reflection, and with a critical analysis of their own learning.

Systematic *assessment as learning*—where students become critical analysts of their own learning—is rare. Although some teachers have incorporated self-assessment into their programs, few have systematically or explicitly used assessment to develop students' capacity to evaluate and adapt their own learning.

Assessment as learning requires reconceptualizing not just assessment, but teaching and learning as well. *Assessment as learning* means giving up the more traditional constructs of transmitting knowledge, "managing" classrooms, and maintaining control, and instead redistributing responsibilities in classrooms. This major shift in approach (and consequently in the student-teacher power arrangements) can produce a sense of disequilibrium and dissonance.

When students engage in ongoing metacognitive experience, they are able to monitor their learning along the way, make corrections, and develop a habit of mind for continually reviewing and challenging what they know. Metacognitive thinking as an internal conversation—monitoring their own understanding, predicting their performance, deciding what else they need to know, organizing and reorganizing ideas, checking for consistency between different pieces of information, and drawing analogies that help them advance their understanding.

Assessment in Learning places the students' question at the centre of teaching and learning whereby students engage in monitoring, assessing and reflecting (learning) processes that generate feedback (about their deep learning and understanding) from multiple sources, and activities and thereby demonstration of learning to self and others; where teacher is coach and mentor. Evaluation is seen as inquiry, a social, contextually specific, interpretive activity; as a human interaction, involving the human as the primary assessment instrument. Portfolios are seen as a vehicle for promoting student and teacher reflection, self-evaluation and goal setting through learner-referenced assessment, an assessment with student. Classroom instruction does not stop in order to assess learning. It is still an emerging paradigm. Learning is most effective when new information or ideas are brought into the deep structures of understanding of an individual so that both take on a new meaning and allow for the growth of yet further understanding and new kinds of behaviour. At its best, new learning is experienced as a discovery in which an individual's experience of themselves and their world is altered.

Evaluation should be integrated into daily work practice and thus it ought to be an ongoing inquiry for learning. *Evaluative inquiry* encourages all members to have chances of exploring, reflecting, questioning and discussing critical organization issues based on the



evaluation logic and process bringing out enhanced organization capacity for continuous learning as well as personal and professional development of organization members (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Purpose dictates how assessment is constructed and used. If the purpose is enhancing learning, the assessment needs to give students an opportunity to make their learning apparent without anxiety or censure. If the purpose is checking learning for reporting, teachers need to be especially concerned about the quality of assessment; and especially about how others might use it. It is very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to serve three different assessment purposes at the same time. It is important for educators to understand the three assessment purposes, recognize the need to balance among them, know which one they are using and why, and use them all wisely.

Implications for innovations

Key strategies, which serve to connect assessment to other important educational processes (Dylan Wiliam, 1998, 2006, 2009):

Clarifying, understanding, and sharing learning intentions by developing and communicating a curriculum philosophy. Learners must understand the criteria and standards for assessment. The teacher needs to explain this to learners as the language of the official documents may not be clear to all learners. To help promote effective self-assessment, teachers need to go beyond simply telling pupils what to do and how to do it (the task or activity) and making clear what is to be learned (the learning intention or objective) and how to recognize success (the success criteria). This requires that course objectives, unit objectives and specific objective of every learning activity be clearly spelled out while designing the curricula.

Engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning such as classroom discourse, interactive whole-class teaching. Getting inside a learner's head to clarify what learning has taken place, to identify what learning difficulties are being experienced and to introduce future tasks, is one of the biggest challenges for classroom teachers. It involves encouraging and enabling pupils to share their ideas and emerging understandings with their teacher and also their peers. three key processes in learning and teaching viz., Establishing where the learners are in their learning, Establishing where they are going, and Establishing what needs to be done to get them there (Ramaprasad, 1983) has to be part of every classroom.

Teachers often find that quite small changes can make a significant difference. For instance, they might leave more 'wait time' after asking a question; and defer pupil answers until much later, sometimes until another teaching session.

A design which is now sufficiently widespread to qualify as a "signature pedagogy" (Shulman, 2005) in which lesson begins with a "big question" or goal on a given lesson or unit, is an example. The question can be carefully designed to lead students towards the intended outcomes (however broadly they may be defined). Students are asked to work on this question in pairs or small groups. Then the teacher conducts a whole class session in which different groups present their works. Teacher then conducts a whole-class discussion, "kneading". This happens after students have shared various solution strategies. During this phase, students, carefully guided by the teacher, critically analyze, compare and contrast the shared ideas. They will consider issues like efficiency, generalizability, and similarity to previously learned ideas. (Takahashi, 2008 p. 8)

Providing feedback that moves learners forward and giving Access to assessed examples. Feedback can be at different levels. Task-level feedback focuses on faults in the interpretation of the task or in the outcome produced. At higher level, feedback is about the main process needed to understand/perform a task: such feedback should be related to the student's own error-detection strategies, and has to serve as an 'advance-organizer', giving cues to lead to better strategies. Yet higher feedback focuses on the self-regulation level—the self-monitoring, directing, and regulating of actions (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Criteria and standards



are often phrased in generalized ways, so it is important that learners have access to examples of marked work, so that they can see what the standards look like in practice. In this context, Comment-only marking at least for internal assessment is to be seriously considered.

Activating students as learning resources for one another using collaborative learning, reciprocal teaching, peer-assessment and the like.

Activating students as owners of their own learning through metacognition, motivation, interest, attribution, self-regulated learning, and self-assessment. Learners need to evaluate and assess their actual performance against the standards required. They need to see the gaps and work out strategies to close the gaps. Peer discussions can be helpful. To learn effectively, pupils require good quality, continuous feedback, tailored to the pupils' individual needs. If the source of all the feedback in a classroom is the teacher, there will inevitably be bottlenecks in this provision. Providing learners with the framework and skills for peer and self-assessment reduces the burden on the teacher. Peer and self-assessment promotes metacognition in learners. It helps them to develop a deeper awareness of how they learn and this promotes better learning. Pupils often listen more actively to the observations of learning partners and accord higher status to their evaluations.

In external examination system, use of clear explanations of what each task is meant to assess (in terms of content, skills, thought processes, and situation). Large parts of these clear indications are already available, but distributed over several sources. Would it be possible to use (a modern version of) a test grid/description/matrix?

On-line assessment systems can be effectively used to conduct bi-weekly continuous tests, which impart descriptive feedback, the same time could be used for summative certification purpose.

However, are teachers ready? Few teachers are prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment because they have not been given the opportunity to learn to do so. Resources must be set apart to train teachers to create and conduct appropriate classroom assessments. *Instruction in how students learn and how learning can be assessed should be a major component of professional development programs.*

Conclusion

Process of evaluation is essentially a learning process and that it works best when it is explicitly so. Whichever model of evaluation is being used, new learning is involved which enables people to make informed decisions about many aspects of the task. Evaluation in learning is evaluation in problem solving, insight learning, metacognitive learning, self-regulatory learning, learning from self-assessment (learning in projects, dissertation works, learning in self-active situations). As Black and Wiliam (2006, p. 100) has put it succinctly, whilst we cannot argue that development of formative assessment is the only way, or even the best way to open up a broader range of desirable changes in classroom learning; it may be peculiarly effective in part because the quality of interactive feedback is a critical feature in determining the quality of learning activity; and, is therefore a central feature of pedagogy. *Both assessment of learning and assessment for learning are essential. However, one is currently in place, and the other is not. Additionally, the changes require open flow of information and communication, Language that allows problems and solutions to be described and absence of hierarchical structure that prevents problems from being reported*

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