

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION

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Since education has been commoditized, there are two different worlds of the haves and have-nots in education. The quality of education in government schools is still very poor and new assessment-based books have been introduced which are not compatible with the delivery system. The 'haves' in the existing system of education live in an age of information overload. As there is so much to learn, many parents and educators try to give children a head start by introducing them to advanced concepts early on. To put children on fast-forward is to risk turning them off to their natural desire to learn and, instead, increases the risk of their becoming anxious, depressed and unhappy. The schools meant for the 'haves' exert pressure through high-powered curricula and parents feel the need to keep children running, lest they fall off the treadmill.

A system to measure the learning achievement of children aims at motivating and inspiring teachers and schools to develop processes in a sustained manner. It is to capture the holistic objective of a school environment and in-school processes that enable all the children to acquire the relevant expected competencies in a manner relevant to their day-to-day applications.

In the Indian education system 'evaluation' is associated with examination, tension and anxiety. New approaches to curricula fail, if they do not combat the deep-rooted system of examination. This deep-rooted system hinders the natural flow of knowledge in a joyful learning environment. To overcome these barriers of education, reliable and ongoing information must be available to:

- Identify academic and behavioral needs of

individual students

- Inform the problem-solving process
- Design and modify instruction to meet student needs
- Evaluate the effectiveness of instruction at different levels, of the system (e.g., classroom, school, district)

An efficient system that streamlines increasingly limited resources, however, is still paramount. Therefore, school assessment uses a tiered system of assessments that increase in frequency and intensity as greater needs are revealed. Timely, reliable assessments indicate which students are falling behind in critical skills or which students need their learning accelerated, as well as allow teachers to design instruction that responds to the learning needs. By regularly assessing students' progress in learning and behaviour, teachers can identify which students need more help, which are likely to make good progress without extra help, and which students need their learning accelerated.

An effective assessment plan has four main objectives:

1. To identify students at the beginning of the year who are at-risk or who are experiencing difficulties and who may need extra instruction or intensive interventions if they are to progress toward grade-level standards by the end of the year, as well as students who have reached benchmarks and who need to be challenged.
2. To monitor students' progress during the year to determine whether at-risk students are making adequate progress in critical skills and to identify

any students who may be falling behind or need to be challenged.

3. To inform instructional planning in order to meet the most critical needs of individual students.

4. To evaluate whether the instruction or intervention provided is powerful enough to help all students achieve grade-level standards by the end of each year.

The four objectives outlined above can be achieved through four types of assessments during the school year: 1) screening, 2) progress monitoring, 3) diagnostic, and 4) outcome. They correspond roughly to the four objectives above, but all can contribute in helping plan effective instruction and interventions.

Screening Assessments: Screening assessments are quick and efficient measures of overall ability and critical skills known to be strong indicators that predict student performance. Administered to all students as an initial baseline, these assessments help to identify students who do not meet or who exceed grade level expectations. Results can be used as a starting point for instruction or to indicate a need for further evaluation.

Progress Monitoring Assessments: Progress monitoring assessments are also brief, but are given periodically to determine whether students are making adequate progress. Progress monitoring assessment data should be collected, evaluated, and used on an ongoing basis for the following purposes:

- Determine rate of a student's progress
- Provide information on the effectiveness of instruction and to modify the intervention if necessary
- Identify the need for additional information
- Analyze and interpret gaps between benchmarks and achievement.

Diagnostic Assessments: While relatively lengthy, diagnostic assessments provide an in-

depth, reliable assessment of targeted skills. Their major purpose is to provide information for planning more effective instruction and interventions. Diagnostic assessments should be given when there is a clear expectation that they will offer new or more reliable information about a child's academic or behavioural needs that can be used to help plan more powerful instruction or interventions.

If schools are implementing screening, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments in a reliable and valid way, the need for additional testing, using formal diagnostic instruments, should be reduced. Because they are time-consuming and expensive, complete diagnostic tests should be administered far less frequently than the other assessments. However, specific subtests from diagnostic instruments might be used to provide information in areas not assessed by screening, progress monitoring, or outcome assessments. School leaders should continually ask if the value of the information to teachers from formal diagnostic tests in planning instruction merits the time spent administering such tests.

Outcome Assessments: Given at the end of the school year, outcome tests are frequently group-administered tests of important outcomes (e.g., CSAP). Outcome assessments are often used for school, district and or state reporting purposes. These tests are important because they give school leaders and teachers feedback about the overall effectiveness of their instructional program. As part of an effective assessment plan, outcome assessments should be administered at the end of every year.

The Present Scenario of Assessment

The present system of assessment and evaluation for school education in India is exam based. Therefore, it focuses only on cognitive learning outcomes and in the process co-curricular domains are neglected, even though

co-curricular areas are an equally important and significant part of child development. Even in curricular areas the focus is on rote learning and memorization, characterized by a neglect of higher mental abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving and creative ability.

In India, The National Curriculum Framework – 2005, developed on the basis of 21 position papers has looked into every aspect of school education. The document states that examinations require systemic reforms in the context of evaluation and assessment. The high failure rates, increasing number of school drop outs, unhealthy competition, stress, nervous breakdowns and suicides among learners make it imperative for Indian educationists to look into the evaluation system of the country which is at present examination oriented.

The need of the hour is to prepare our young learners as innovative problem-solvers and not as rote-learners. However, the present system of examination is inflexible. It is based on a 'one-size-fits-all' principle, wherein the individuality and creativity of the learner are not taken into account. There is a failure to measure the real potential of the learners, and the marks awarded to the students are raw marks which do not give a real picture of the learners. The pattern followed in the school leaving exams known as board exams, is adhered to even in schools and the emphasis is on scores thereby defeating the whole purpose of education. This backlash effect of examination has taken its toll on the pedagogical principles of teaching and learning.

To correct this distortion, National Curriculum Framework 2005 has proposed some guiding principles for school education, which are

- connecting knowledge to life outside the school,
- ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote methods,
- enriching the curriculum to provide for overall

development of children rather than remain textbook centric,

- making examinations more flexible and integrated into classroom life and,
- nurturing an over-riding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

These guiding principles show a major shift in the approach towards teaching and learning, as compared to the traditional methods i.e. a shift from behaviorism to constructivism. The new approach to teaching is learner-centered and the process of assessment also aims at enhancing the learning capabilities of the learner by taking cognizance of their overall progress. This shift in approach in itself requires a major change in assessment tools and techniques as well.

National Curriculum Framework, 2005 has proposed a shift in the approach towards teaching and learning, from the earlier behaviorist approach to the constructivist approach. Under the behaviorist approach the student's achievement was determined on the basis of memory, as a result of which, the meta-cognitive skills such as critical thinking; reasoning ability and problem solving were totally neglected.

Constructivism, on the other hand, believes that learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience, and that learning should be situated in realistic situations, should promote social interactions and use authentic learning materials/tasks. In a constructivist class students are encouraged to take the initiative in the process of learning. Students are encouraged to ask questions, interact freely and develop independent thinking. This in turn helps them develop critical thinking and problem solving attitudes. As a part of this approach, students are asked open-ended and extrapolatory questions and their ideas are given due recognition.

Group work and pair work are encouraged because sharing of ideas helps in conceptual clarity and language learning. The constructivist approach is based on the premise that all human beings construct their own knowledge and that

given the right opportunity and environment, learners will be able to construct their own knowledge. This new approach to teaching demands corresponding changes in assessment in school as well.

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