TESTING TIMES

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"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution" - Albert Einstein.

The story of the three blind men attempting to understand the entirety of an elephant by piecing together the experience of each one is illustrative of the attempts made by educators to understand the intelligence from the knowledge base of the students. Assessment at best reveals only a miniscule part of the total personality of the student.

Assessment literally means evaluation or judging the outcome. It refers to a form of testing the various aspects of growth in education. Assessment reveals the physical, emotional and intellectual development of the student.

Today, assessment has become a bad word. It conjures up pictures of stressed-out children, parents and teachers, all trying to desperately meet the expected goals of testing. Testing is the tool that judges and labels children. It can even scar them for life. As a result, assessment has become the bane of the education system, instead of being an instrument to spur better learning, a tool to better understanding of the students' needs and to tailor individual support.

A change in this direction will definitely make for a difference in perspective of the learning process; which in turn will address appropriately, the needs of the individual learner. This attitudinal change propels the next step required to move towards the expected goals.

An assessment activity is helpful if the information it provides is used as feedback to teachers and students in assessing themselves and each other, and to modify teaching and learning activities to better effect. Such assessments become formative assessments, where the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet learning needs.

Why should we assess learning and performance? Who benefits from these assessments?

The learner, no doubt, is at the core of this evaluation strategy. Teachers and experts in the subjects, schools and organizations also benefit from this assessment.

What are the benefits of assessing learning and performance?
1. Identifies gaps in learning and performance.
2. Measures learning and suggests ways to improve.
3. Equips students for the journey ahead
4. Encourages and supports further learning.
5. Feedback helps to redesign teaching methods
6. Evaluates the appropriateness of the concept topic

Assessment is a collaborative process between the teacher and the designer of the learning process and the student or the participant in the process of learning. The assessment through the feedback process makes the students onus to their learning. The teachers in turn become more responsible in developing appropriate learning interventions.

As a teacher, the goal is to use assessment, to encourage learning, promote introspection and educate so that every student automatically becomes a better learner.

What is the role of Rubric when we are talking about assessment of learning and assessment for

learning?

Rubric is a scoring tool that lists criteria for a piece of work; it also articulates gradations of quality for each criterion from excellent to poor.

Rubrics are powerful tools for teaching and assessment. They can improve the students' performance and monitor it by making the teacher's expectations clear and showing students how to meet those expectations. The result is a marked improvement in the students' work and in learning. Thus the use of rubrics defines quality.

Secondly rubrics make students judge their work with honesty and in detail so they are more aware of quality. When used for self and peer assessment, students are able to spot their errors and solve problems in their own work as well as others. This increases the sense of responsibility and allows them to take ownership for their work.

Thirdly, rubrics reduce the time spent by teachers in assessing and evaluating the students' work. Teachers tend to find that when a piece is self and peer assessed, they have very little left to say.

Rubrics provide informative feed backs about the student's strengths and the areas that need improvement.

Fourth, teachers like rubrics because by its very nature it accommodates heterogeneous classes.

Students feel that rubrics help make more precise evaluations of their work. Parents felt that they knew exactly what their child should do to be successful.

It is good to develop rubrics that are suitable to the curriculum and the teaching style. The creation should be a participatory process that involves the students.

How to go about it:
1. Present both a piece of good work and not-so good one to help the students identify the features of the former
2. List the criteria or features that mark the good work.
3. Describe the best and the worst levels of quality and fill in the middle levels taking common problems that occur.
4. Practice: evaluate the modals presented at the beginning by using the rubrics.
5. Use self and peer assessment.
6. Revise assessment based on feedback from peers.
7. Teach assessment with the same rubrics.

Creating a rubric is the difficult part, using them is easy. When the rubrics have been created the students have a copy to assess their own progress on a particular project. The students' assessment should not count towards a grade. The purpose is for the students to learn more and produce better work. Grading self-assessment compromises students' honesty.

When peers assess the work, they have to sign it so that the teacher is able to see how fair and accurate they have been. Teachers can ask for explanations and evidence to support their feedback.

Ultimately the rubric must bring out the best in every effort and to maintain quality. Rubric should also support and help to retain the levels of quality. The most important rubric will be those that are tailor made to fit the needs of individual students.

The demands of the 21st century are changing rapidly and our education must develop the survival skills; to know how to think, to reason, to analyse, to solve problems, to weigh evidence and to communicate effectively. These are essential skills for all. Testing tool should also be designed to encompass these skills to make testing comprehensive.

Current metaphors point to similarities of the lifeless computer to the live brain. Expressions such as being "hard wired" or "programmed" meaning to behave in a particular fashion have become common. Yet our living mind is not a metal component, "it is made of living people who are driven by feeling motives and relationships."

Here are some samples of a rubric created by the teachers at Vidya Vanam for class 1.
Class Level-1
Age: 5+
Group Action:
Situation: Class room needs to be organised and cleaned. Children asked to plan the action in groups
Reaction: Some children took decision on how to proceed with the work, some children reluctant to come forward.

Criteria	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Responsibility	Followed teachers' instructions and took up responsibilities	Followed peers and willing to follow their lead	Did not participate showed no interest
Planning	The group decided course of action, prioritized the action and executed it to perfection	Group did not have a plan of their own but followed the plan of their peers	This group observed the working and the plan of the others but paid very little attention to what was happening
Order	Placed desks, bags in its place, picked up paper and put it in the basket swept the classroom clean and put the broom and dust pan in its place	They helped the group which initiated the work, did not do anything on their own but followed the others meticulously	Some children showed interest in a particular work like arranging the desks
Personal Cleanliness	Group washed hands and feet after completion work and persuaded others to do the same	Followed group one in washing hands and feet	The group was eager to wash up and participated in this activity.
Leadership	They were leaders in every activity	Though they did not lead they followed the way set by others	Some were drawn to be leaders but others did not make an attempt

Rubrics for Group activity, debate and group discussion by students of Class 5, age 10+ to 12.
Role Play Describing the Evils of De-Forestation
The role play consists of characters:
Tree, cow, crow, wood cutter, priest and a hat seller.

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Accuracy and believability of the role	Realistic and consistent with the Character	Usually realistic but not consistent to character.	Often realistic partially consistent	Rarely believable and no accuracy to the character
Clarity of speech	Speech clear and easy to understand	Speech clear most of the time but not understood at times because of low volume	Speech muffled at times therefore not easy to understand	No clarity of speech
Expression and body language	Facial expressions and gestures appropriate to the role	Facial expressions dominate expression through voice	Voice and facial expression gestures are exaggerated	Gestures and voice are appropriate at times
Knowledge gained	Can clearly explain the purpose of the role play and how different characters view the aim of the role play	Can appreciate several ways in which the characters look at the theme but unable to justify	Can explain only one of the characters and only one way to solving the problem	Cannot explain the role in relation to the role play

Group Activity

Subject: Study of the five different land forms as described in Tamil Literature

Age group: 10 to 12

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Decision making	One person dominates decision making	Some students contribute to decision making	Most students contribute to decision making	All students to decision making
Social Interaction	Students frequently interrupt and put down view of others, students do not ask questions or clarification	Students pay attention to the group discussion, some students ask questions and build arguments based on others comments	Body and verbal responses indicate active listening, students ask questions and build on others comments	Students respect and encourage the views of others, they ask questions and clarifications and build their arguments also based on views of others
Contributing	Students do not contribute any positive way	Some students contribute positively	Most students contribute positively	Students consistently contribute
On task behavior	Students reflect inconsistently they do not follow through the completion of the task	Students work only for some time and expect support from teachers	Most students are able to assess their strength and work towards the completion of the task	Students exhibit consistency on task behavior allocate work among themselves and completed the task on time
Group Structure & Functioning	Task is not completed on time even with the assistance students find it difficult sequencing the steps	Division of tasks and responsibilities inefficient, students waste time, unable to plan the sequence of steps therefore rush to complete the task	The leader of the group assigns responsibilities and tasks, students complete the tasks in a sequence of steps.	Members of the group take responsibilities and roles; they complete the task in clear and logical steps
Demonstration	Unable to explain details of the task completed	Able to explain some portions of the task completed - those areas where the students have understood	Able to give a cogent step by step development of the idea and illustrate the purpose of the group work	A confident explanation of how the group work was thought through and each step was explained by different participants in the group showing the combined effort

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