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Educational assessment and migrant students

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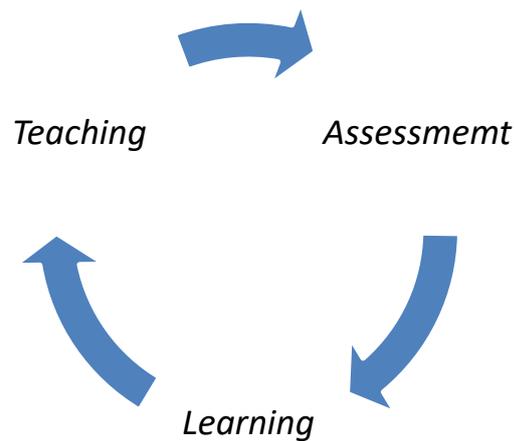
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Educational assessment (EA) can be understood as the act of eliciting information about student learning or competence. EA comprises both teacher assessment and external assessment of students and might affect migrant students differently than majority students, thus representing an equity issue. For instance, an assessment gap is observed between majority and migrant students in international and national large-scale studies. We argue that this might be in part an artefact of the applied tests, as many assessments are not designed to acknowledge students' diverse and cultural ways of expressing their competencies. However, the gap might also be an outcome of differing access to teaching and learning opportunities and, as such, might be linked to classroom assessment. In classroom assessment, teachers need to apply a wide range of assessment formats, be sensitive to student diversity and implement a large range of assessment tools in order to elicit evidence about students' learning that can be utilized to support teaching. . In addition, formative and summative assessment should build on the same underlying model of developing competence in order for these assessment practices to be coherent and mutually supportive.

Educational assessment

Educational assessment can be understood as assessment with the purpose of facilitating learning (Cook, 1951), whereby evidence is elicited about student knowledge or competence and the progress of student learning can be used to inform teaching (see figure 1) (Black & Wiliam, 2012; Shepard, 2006; Wiliam, 2007). 'Educational assessment seeks to determine how well students are learning and is an integral part of the quest for improved education. It provides feedback to students, educators, parents, policymakers and the public about the effectiveness of educational services' (National Research Foundation, 2001).

Figure 1. The relationship between teaching, learning and assessment.



Evidence about student learning or competence might be elicited at an individual level, a class or school level, or at a national level. EA can be divided into groups according to assessment format, purpose or level. When dividing by level, EA can broadly be divided into three groups: teacher or classroom assessment, external standardized testing at a local or national level and international, comparative assessment, where classroom assessment is performed by the teacher and external and international level assessments are often performed to inform policy. Shepard (2006), focusing on the relationship between teaching and learning, divides educational assessment into formative assessment, summative assessment and external, large-scale assessment, where formative and summative assessment are formats that inform the teacher about the students' learning and competence level. This paper will focus on both classroom-level assessment performed by the teacher him-/herself and classroom-level assessment where the teacher can utilize the assessment outcome as evidence on student learning at an individual or group level (e.g., external assessments where the teacher receives information at the student level).

Classroom assessment is used by teachers to determine whether students have mastered a body of knowledge or acquired skills or strategies targeted in the teaching. 'Good classroom assessment is based on a clear understanding of what is to be learned and what constitutes good work and success in that regard. Good classroom assessment includes feedback and opportunities for using the feedback for practice and growth' (Brookhart, 2009, p. 734-735).

Formative and summative assessment

Sadler (1989), who provided one of the first definitions of formative assessment, points out that it is insufficient for teachers to provide feedback on the correctness of student answers in order to facilitate learning. Instead, feedback needs to be linked to performance standards. In addition, students need to be provided with strategies by which to reach the given standards. Thus, teachers need to be able to analyse student work and identify patterns of error and gaps in student competence (Shepard, 2006). Part of this analysis consists of identifying students' prior knowledge and linking this to the content and tasks students are currently working on.

Previous research has identified teacher feedback as one of the most efficient tools to boost learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shepard, 2006). Feedback should be

connected to the tasks students are performing during instruction rather than after. To connect feedback to the teaching and learning processes, explicit criteria or rubrics might be used (Shepard, 2006). Feedback to students should be positively phrased; however, false praise should be avoided.

Assessment for learning (AfL) was introduced as a particular form of formative assessment by the British Assessment Reform Group (Shepard, 2006). In AfL, as in other forms of formative assessment, assessment is focused on the quality of student work in relation to established criteria, and students receive guidance about what to improve to reach identified learning goals. Peer- or self-assessment should be part of formative assessment, particularly in AfL (Hayward, 2012). Although a major part of AfL, self-assessment was originally introduced by Sadler (1989), whose assessment model stressed that students need to apply metacognitive skills to monitor their own performance and build ownership and motivation toward learning the content of school subjects. Self-assessment also necessitates a trusting classroom climate where students are allowed to be the authority of their own learning.

Much attention is paid to the validity of AfL. For AfL to be valid, the feedback needs to move learning forward (Stobart, 2012). In order to judge if teacher feedback in AfL is valid and will impact learning, it is necessary to scrutinise whether the feedback contributes to a significant learning outcome (Daugherty, Black, Ecclestone, James, & Newton, 2012). For instance, external assessments and teaching for the test has been observed to disrupt learning and assessment practices (Harlen, 2012; Stobart, 2008; 2012). In addition, school policies, as well as national assessment policies, might influence teacher practice (Harlen, 2012).

Summative assessment can be understood as assessment that seeks to identify whether students have reached a particular content or competence at a given point in time and to verify attainment of important milestones. Summative assessment can be used after the conclusion of a teaching unit or school term or at a transition level in education (Shepard, 2006). Often, some sort of test or exam is applied to elicit evidence of student mastery of the identified content. Previously, tests have been regarded as 'objective' and believed to assess all students in the same manner. It was believed that tests developed by external experts would save teachers time and allow them to focus on teaching and learning (Shepard, 2006). The acronym WYTIWYG (what you test is what you get) has been used in discussing the policy influence of national tests and exams, where test content has identified what is important. According to Shepard (2006), alignment between curriculum and test content is crucial.

The term 'summative assessment' is often used when the performed assessment is made with the intention of grading student work or students (Brookhart, 2009; Shepard, 2006). Little research on teacher grading exists, but, according to Shepard, it is likely that many teachers find grading challenging. Although teachers try to be fair to students, grading has the power to undermine student motivation, self-efficacy and self-belief. Students who repeatedly receive low test scores can become demotivated and less willing to make an effort during teaching and learning.

Policy influence on classroom assessment

Educational assessment is profoundly influenced by the national policies and legal requirements that regulate the purpose of assessment, the assessment process itself and the use of assessment outcomes (O'Reilly et al., 2007). In Norway, for instance, the Education Act (Lovdata, 1998) states that assessment should steer learning and that all students should understand how and why they are

assessed, the assessment outcomes and how these outcomes should be used to enhance learning. Furthermore, students should be involved in determining assessment criteria (Lovdata, 1998).

The opportunity to set the agenda for classroom assessment varies between countries for both students and teachers. In a top-down model, national assessment criteria are determined at the national level. However, this could mean that criteria for summative assessment (e.g., distinct criteria and a national curriculum) guide summative assessment while formative assessment is left to the teachers and students.

National educational policies might also affect classroom assessment with regard to national external assessments being developed and used in classrooms, national assessment criteria/standards, national curricula, AfL as national assessment strategy and teacher moderation.

Assessment formats

Based on studies by Brookhart (2009) and Shepard (2006), a list of possible classroom assessment formats, including various formats for teacher assessment and external, national assessment, is provided below:

- National tests and exams
- Paper and pencil tests and quizzes
- Observation and informal assessment
- Performance assessment
- Essays
- Oral assessment
- Portfolios
- Assessment of prior knowledge

In an article on EA of students with intellectual disabilities, O'Reilly et al. (2007) include interviewing parents and ecological assessment as main assessment procedures. We believe these processes that secure evidence on student knowledge and learning are valid for all students, including migrant students, and are in line with what Civil (2007) proposes. However, the parent interview and the ecological assessment of student preferences and 'can do's', have a different focus.

Following the publication of Brookhart (2009) and Shepard (2006), a wide range of digital tools that combine teaching-learning-assessment modules have been made available for teachers. Automatic scoring and instant feedback open up new possibilities for assessment for learning procedures (Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015; Vermeulen & van der Kleij, 2012).

Often, teachers are not knowledgeable about what specialists in measurement consider to be the principles of validity and reliability or how to obtain valid and reliable evidence to use in their teaching (Brookhart, 2009). For instance, teachers need to implement tasks that elicit evidence of student thinking. In addition, tasks need to be targeted toward higher-order cognitive tasks and authentic performance (Shepard, 2006). Shepard (2006) also stresses that applying the same underlying model for competence/knowledge, such as in the form of a national curriculum with clear competence goals, enables formative and summative assessments to become supplementary.

Classroom assessment and migrant students

Migrant students are those students born abroad or whose parents are born abroad. Often, migrant students speak a home language different from that of the teaching language and, as such, are termed second language learners (L2-learners). Previous research has found that educational assessment might influence migrant students negatively. First, an assessment gap has been observed from high-stakes external assessments, such as national tests (xxxx), exams (xxxx) and large-scale comparative assessments (OECD, 2015). Prior research identifies assessment gaps between majority and migrant students with larger differences being observed between first-generation migrant students and majority students than between second-generation immigrant students and majority students (OECD, 2015). The assessment gaps might also differ between subjects. In Norway, for instance, PISA 2015 revealed larger differences in science and mathematics than in reading literacy where second-generation migrant students are approaching majority students (OECD, 2016).

Achievement differences might be an outcome if tests are not piloted on migrant students and are not being developed to take into account students' cultural ways of responding to test content. Differences in opportunities to learn (OTL) within schools or school systems might also be an outcome; migrant students from the same origins and with similar social economic status (SES) perform very differently in different educational systems (OECD, 2015), indicating that some educational systems succeed to a much higher degree in providing good teaching and learning opportunities to migrant children.

Bishop (2003) found that teachers hold strong beliefs about migrant students and often resist evidence about their students that does not conform to their beliefs. Fernandes, Kahn and Civil (2017) challenge the possible deficit perspective of bilingual students by proposing not only the application of assessment tasks that afford multiple modes of engaging with the content of the task but also the acceptance of multimodal explanations. This would allow for assessment practices that better identify what bilingual students know and can do in mathematics. In our view, an implication of the proposal made by Fernandes et al. (2017) would be to move from summative approaches to more formative approaches in the assessment of migrant students.

In addition, migrant students have less accurate self-estimates and self-understanding than majority students. Students tend to underestimate achievement over time, lose confidence in their ability to learn school content and, as a consequence, are less willing to take on challenging tasks (Hattie, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Such learned helplessness is difficult to 'unlearn' and might prove a challenge both to students and teachers, as it demands a shift in students' and teachers' beliefs about migrant students and learning. Migrant students' tendencies to down-play their academic success might be one of the underlying factors when they opt out of academic education at the secondary and tertiary levels.

To practice AfL in multicultural classrooms, teachers need insights into students' cultural ways of expressing themselves (Civil & Hunter, 2015; Fernandes et al., 2017). Hunter et al. (2016), for instance, claim that language is a key aspect of cultural identity and link Pasifika students' failures in the educational system to structural inequalities caused by the disconnect and dismissal of the students' cultural values, understanding and experiences. Pasifika students who are fluent in their own language and who have a rich background of knowledge and experiences will fail unless they are met by teachers who establish respectful and reciprocal relations not only with the students but also with their parents. Furthermore, Civil and Hunter (2015) found that students from non-dominant groups (e.g. migrants) who might withdraw from the classroom discourse or who might struggle to express their knowledge in the dominant culture are able to build relationships when they encounter teachers who are supportive and encouraging of them entering into the classroom discourse, provided the teachers are aware of the students' cultural ways of being.

In a classroom where the day-to-day assessment practice has an AfL focus, the community of learning (i.e., the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students) needs to be renegotiated, teachers need to listen to student voices and students should be encouraged to move from peripheral to central community members (Hayward, 2012). AfL necessitates trust between teachers and students (Stobart, 2008). Both teacher and student assessment output should be treated as valid. This might be challenging for students coming from a culture where student voices are not traditionally heard, where teaching is teacher-centred or where students are expected to show

respect for and listen to their elders. Prior research shows that this is especially challenging for students from some cultures, such as Pasifika students in New Zealand classrooms or Mexican students in American classrooms (Civil & Hunter, 2015). Some might claim that for students to understand the feedback from the teacher, the feedback should be in line with the students' beliefs about teaching and learning and their understanding of the relationship and responsibilities of students and teachers. An alternative view might be that teaching should help students and teachers develop a didactical contract, where students take the roles and responsibilities identified as AfL best practices to support learning (Hodge & Cobb, 2016; Hunter et al., 2016).

Peddar and James (2012) argue that professional learning is a condition of teachers adopting AfL. This might be even truer if teachers adopt AfL in diverse classrooms, as a change in the focus of assessment might yield students' understanding of assessment and will add to the complexity of the classrooms. Western European and American values have long dominated educational practices and educational assessment, which might contribute negatively to teachers' understanding of how to assess migrant students (Moschkovich & Nelson-Barber, 2009). To counteract this influence, teachers need to take a cultural affirmation approach to differences to understand how cognitive approaches and social-cultural origins of the classroom affords or constrains student participation in assessment.

Concluding remarks

For migrant students to succeed in education, it is important the curriculum and assessment are well-aligned and the students are offered good opportunities to learn the content embedded in the curriculum. Teaching, learning and assessment are strongly connected and teacher assessment needs to be designed to take into account diverse students' cultural ways of knowing and doing. Formative and summative assessment practices should be tied to the same competence model, where formative assessment should inform and support the learning process while summative assessment should be used to verify that important milestones have been reached (Shepard, 2006).

What is valid as content might be cultural. Solano-Flores and Nelson-Barber (2001) argue for developing a concept of cultural validity, as socio-cultural context influences values, beliefs, expectations, communication patterns, teaching and learning styles and epistemologies inherent in students' cultural backgrounds. Solano-Flores and Nelson-Barber (2001) further question whether current approaches to handle student diversity in educational assessment are limited.

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