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Introduction

Student assessment in early childhood education has remained a subject of discussion, tension and controversy for years. The public/ colloquial discourse on the subject involves not only teachers, but also parents and politicians, is sometimes emotionally heated, and focuses on the surface of the issue: To assess or not to assess? What tools and forms of assessment to use? Meanwhile, as research shows, the key issue is not what tools and forms of assessment a teacher uses, but rather for what purpose he or she uses them. The question embedded in prescriptive didactics: What should a teacher do to ensure that assessment fulfils its functions? should be replaced with another, much more flexible one: For what purpose to assess? To whom and for what purpose should the assessment serve? (Szyling, 2020, p. 144). The answer to the question posed in this way can be found first of all in the Education System Act of 7 September 1991 (Article 44b), according to which the purpose of school assessment is not only to inform the student about his/her learning progress, but also:

> [...] giving the pupil help with their learning by giving the pupil information about what they have done well and how they should continue to learn;
> [...] providing guidance for self-development planning;
> [...] motivating the student to make further progress in learning and behaviour (Article 44b).

Good assessment should therefore not only provide clear feedback to the child on how they are doing, what they have achieved and what they still need to work on. It should also trigger the child's metacognitive reflection, foster the child's sense of agency, shape the child's ability to cope with failure, encourage the child to take personal responsibility for their own learning, gradually building the child's capacity

for self-regulation. In practice, however, teachers face a variety of challenges both in terms of the process of observing the child's learning efforts, monitoring progress or sensitively individualising assessment, as well as responding to the expectations of parents and head teachers. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be aware of what formative, developmental assessment is, which supports the child's motivation and efforts. This is because it is not the technical solutions that determine the effectiveness of assessment, but the deeper, philosophical assumptions underlying them, namely the theory of learning and epistemology of knowledge adopted by teachers (Klus-Stańska, 2024). Graded assessment is embedded in the behaviourist model of influencing the child through a system of positive and negative reinforcement. Formative assessment, on the other hand, derives from the constructivist approach, based on the belief that the feedback given to the child is intended to help him/her understand what he/she is learning, engage him/her in the process of actively making meaning of knowledge and prepare him/her for independent learning in the future. In this way, not only is the object of assessment broadened, but the child is also involved in the process, creating the opportunity for him or her to experience and discover knowledge 'in search of a trace' rather than 'following a trail' indicated by the teacher (Klus-Stańska, 2000, p. 136).

Developmental assessment, understood in this way, requires a change in the mindset of teachers and the construction of an appropriate learning culture in the classroom in the sense that J.S. Bruner (2006) has given to the term.

> A school culture functions/should function based on the reciprocity of a community of learners. The members of the community engage in problem-solving, constitute a learning space, and awaken metacognitive thinking in children: an awareness of WHAT they do, HOW they do it and WHY they do it.
> By participating in the cultural praxis of the school classroom, the child experiences how to use the mind, how to relate to authority figures, how to treat others. A good school, a good classroom provides ideas of how society should function – an equalised playground (Filipiak, 2011, p. 103).

By experiencing participation in a community of learning minds, the child acquires cultural tools of learning – culturally embedded ways of thinking, planning, seeking and critically evaluating information.

As Earl and Katz (2006) point out, building a culture of reciprocal learning requires the teacher to be aware of the purpose for which he or she is making the effort to assess learning and to build an appropriate balance (or rather, reverse the traditional imbalances) between:

● the logic *of* 'assessment of learning', a practice embedded in the behaviourist tradition of measuring learning outcomes post factum, by relating them to the

requirements of the teacher and the educational programme. Assessment therefore has a purely summative function and mainly serves reporting purposes;

● the 'assessment *for* learning' logic, whereby the teacher builds a diagnostic process using constructive, but also direct and immediate feedback at different stages of learning, thus strengthening the student's motivation to make an effort. Here, the teacher is the source of the goals and criteria for evaluating 'success' in learning;

● and the logic of 'assessment *as* learning', in which assessment is embedded in the learning process as a form of metacognitive reflection on one's own knowledge and thinking, and students are involved in the process of monitoring their own progress and regulating/modifying their learning.

In the latter approach, it is the learner who manages his/her own learning, sets goals, defines success criteria. Whereas the teacher, as G. Szyling observes, "only provides the tools for learning, creates a sense of security for students in the situation of taking cognitive risks and allows them to get used to the uncertainty that arises when learning something new" (2020, p. 145). Just or as much?

We cordially invite You to read the latest issue of the journal on formative assessment.

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