

CHAPTER 5A: JOURNEYING INTO POSSIBLY INFORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

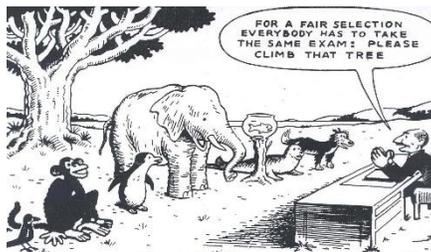
In this chapter, I discuss the practices of assessment driven by an informative curriculum that was passed on to teacher educators (see Chapter 3A) to deliver through teacher centered approach to teaching (see Chapter 4A) in order to accomplish desired learning outcomes using metaphor of assessment as ‘of’ learning approaches. My own experience shows that such approaches seem to focus on knowledge acquisition and reproduction level questions in centralized exams both in midterm and end semester. This reflects that it is the assessments that define pedagogies and curriculum, giving rise to the *metaphor of written exams as curriculum*. In this chapter, I am discussing the question of the kind, ‘*How have I lived with key features of assessment as an add-on activity that force learners to acquire lower order thinking skills?*’

Assessing, Assessor and Assessed as Educative Endeavours

It may be any Friday back in 2008. I was sitting on my computer looking at the course outline of ICT in Education, and thinking about to prepare a question paper for an upcoming fall semester exams. I was reminding myself about the topics which I had taught in a class of 30 student teachers (pre-service teachers) towards a degree in B. Ed (Hon). And soon after a while, I came to realize that I had already covered the whole course from a given curriculum of ICT in Education. In so doing, my approach was conventional teaching as filling/transmitting the information to my students, where I had to cover the course within short period of time because we (the teacher educators) were bound to be within the fixed curriculum and cover whole content.

Reflecting on my practices, I came to realize that unwillingly my approach remained very much conformist by promoting *assessment as 'of' learning*⁶⁵. Perhaps, this approach to assessment, a kind of traditional assessment had to look at learning for the purpose of promoting to next grade level and/or labeling as passed/failed (Meyer, Land & Baillie, 2010, p.18).

Perhaps, it was the assessment that derived my approaches to teaching. For



example, in my context, I focused on the nature and structure of questions patterns (e.g., what is second generating computer? Write answer of the following terms? Define hardware and software? Write in detail

about the historical developments in the field of computer hardware etc.) in exams to choose my pedagogies in order to complete the course.

Reflecting on my practices, I came to realize that my focus of questions in the exams was on some lower order thinking skills and reproduction of information (i.e., of memorizing and reproduction of specific text taught in class) (Frade, Acioly-Regnier & Jun, 2013). Perhaps, it was desirable to be very much responsive to curriculum as content (single color yellow text book), *teaching as loading* (telling and transferring to students through one way flow of information) and assessment as 'of' learning in order to avoid students' possible complains about '*out of course questions*'. This very structured and narrow view of educative process of teaching, learning and assessment seems to prepare

⁶⁵ The metaphor of assessment as 'of' learning means an assessment that is of summative in nature and focuses on memorizing level learning of the Blooms taxonomy (i.e., lower order thinking skills). This metaphor defines the concept of assessment as an add-on activity. It means that assessment starts when teaching finishes (i.e., if teachers finishes his/her teacher assessment begins- end of lecture test, end of unit test, end of semester or end of year test etc.). This assessment neither informs learner to improve learning nor teacher to improve teaching. It is a kind of add-on, something that is added at the end of something ends.

learners as parrots who can just reproduce what was given to them, and cannot make a meaning of the text with that of their real life situations.

I used a simple approach in my assessment of learning based on the course that I taught them exactly. And I used a simple and linear way of asking questions. If questions (written in lecture notes and/or course texts books) were rephrased in exams, student could not get those questions. For example, if I taught benefits of computer hardware and ask a question in exam like how a printer can help us in our everyday life, the student might not understand such kind of questions.

Arriving at this point of inquiry, I begin to feel that I was limited by operating within very conformist environment of TLPs (Meyer et al., 2010). Metaphorically speaking, I had to deal with *exams as curriculum* (meaning exams control curriculum), teaching as filling/transferring and/or teaching as loading on learners (passing on information to learners through monological flow of telling/informing) and learning as parroting and/or reproducing information. Perhaps, this was because of the socio-pedagogical settings that shaped such kind of practices by creating a closed culture.

I still remember the words of a colleague (Mr Bulo⁶⁶) on my orientation day (i.e. year 2008) about the curriculum book (a yellow single colored book), probably, which they seemed believing in the book that it was the only source of all remedies of their teaching/learning and assessment practices. Believe me or not, from very beginning I developed my first assumption (and perceptions) about the curriculum/document- a yellow color book as a driving force and/or a source of guideline to operate within that context.

⁶⁶ Mr Bulo is a composite character who used to think at lower order questioning approach to assessment, and does not think beyond normal way of knowing things.

Look, what Mr Bulo says about the curriculum document, 'this book contains all courses whatever we offer in this school, and it has everything in it. So, don't worry about what to teach because you have to follow whatever the content is given in the course.' Mr Bulo here is a representative figure who cautions novice teachers that they have to follow the rules of teaching and assessment strictly to avoid confusions for self and others.

'Why this university is so rigidly following such a confined content from such a curriculum book', I would ask the colleague. He would explain, 'I think in most of the public universities, including this one, the practices are almost the same. However, this is a new university so the Dean of this school does not want to take any risk of innovation.'

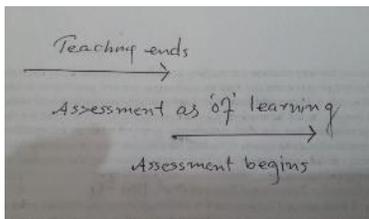
'What do you mean any risk of innovation', I would inquire. 'I mean if you will follow a particular content that is based on exam you can simply prepare student for the exam through your teaching', he would explain. 'You mean I cannot change anything from the given format,' I would show my interest for something new. 'That is very right', he would caution me, 'Be careful! If you use your own selected content under the topics and/or method of teaching how student will answer the questions you will ask in papers. They are habituated to reproduce whatever is there in the books and/or the notes'. Such conversations with my friends would really bother me a lot those days.

Arriving at this point of my self-inquiry, I begin to think about an image of the curriculum as a single *colored curriculum*, the student teachers as *machines to reproduce the same stuff* as they are stuffed with notes, and also will be stuffed by me as an educator as *filler/transferor* to do the job (see Chapter 4A). In this connection, I remember, I was also informed about the distribution of marks for term exam papers and assignments

using paper pencil tests focusing on defining, describing and explaining type of questions from within that given curriculum. With this in mind, I came to realize that I had to assess accordingly within a given fixed structure. Perhaps, after knowing these strict rules, there was no way for me to make something different that may create problems (or some challenging opportunities) for students and myself as well, so I followed the same format.

Teachers as Add-on Assessors

Reflecting on the nature of assessment as an add-on activity in teacher education and research practices at TU reminds me about my own teaching at school, and my



learning as a student during my school, college and university time. Perhaps, this is the teacher education that prepares teachers (future teachers) as I (and other teacher educators in the context of TU) do with my limited view of assessment as an add-on activity to know student teachers' (future teachers) learning (Luitel, 2009). Probably, this would be the learning experience (the experiences of student teachers with assessment as 'of' learning – and add on activity) that ultimately lead them to use the concept in their own teaching and assessment in schools and colleges where they go for teaching with university degrees.

Then, I came to realize that the whole problem is at preparing teachers at teacher education level. It reminds me Zeichner and Liston' (1996) view that 'no matter how good a teacher education program is, at best, it can only prepare teachers to begin teaching' (p. 5). Here, the teacher education program having practices of assessment and teaching with a very limited, detached, and unhelpful for both teachers (as it do not

inform to improve practices of teaching) and student teachers (as it do not help them to reflect and learn more- because the results come after completing the course), do not seem productive (Frade et al., 2013). Arriving at this point of inquiry, I begin to think that to improve such practices we need to bring reforms at teacher education level.

Questioning as Knowing Teaching Outcome

Probably it was any Tuesday back in 2008. The day after my orientation, I started my teaching, and at the end of each lecture, I vividly remembered that I had taken verbal



tests. Of course, the questioning activity was no more than five to ten minutes of duration but the purpose was to test how my teaching enabled students to memorize my professorial way of teaching. The way of checking my own teaching

through questioning, for me, was a kind of self-assessment of my teaching outcomes.

Perhaps, it is hard to claim that the testing was an effective way in terms of its results (student teachers responses of my questioning) to inform my practices to improve. I did not reflect on those responses of learners to reshape my pedagogies. This reflects that until we do not reflect on our own teaching how we can improve it to facilitate learning of learners.

I remember, I did not use that outcome of questioning to improve my teaching. And I did not see any person in the system to talk about how to teach, but it was obvious what to teach and when to finish. So, every one of the team members at the School of Education was using mostly lecture method (with one way flow of informing) to do more to cover the content within short time. And following the rules of academia, I used the

same method of teaching which was common and, perhaps, students seemed more familiar to that type of teaching/learning and assessment practices.

Arriving at that point, I began to think that I was doing well as my students were getting good marks in the *mid-term exams* (a written exam in between every semester with maximum marks 30). Probably, I thought that these mid-term exams (learning) could help them in their assignments to do well. Perhaps, it was my perception about my own teaching method that would help to reproduce in exam to get good marks.

Thinking about and recalling those moments helped me to make my mind to prepare a question paper for end semester exam. I guess, that kind of thinking about the whole scenario somewhat served the purpose of planning for the question paper to draft. However, at that time I couldn't help myself with a critical reflection on the practices, and assumptions. I would ask if my method of teaching helped learners, or their own method of rote memorization from their notes. I observed, such traditional practiced enabled them to get good marks (Frade et al., 2013).

But later on, after reflecting on that situation, I came to realize that students with such kind of teaching and assessment practices were habituated to rote memorization only to get promotions into next level of their studies. Reflecting on my own situation while being engaged with teaching/learning and assessment practices which seem highly mechanical guided by a written document with an image of '*single colored curriculum*' (containing everything) passed on to teach within a fixed structured came to know about myself as a successful educator in that context. I guess it was because of my perception of doing a right job as demanded by the university to cover all the contents from the course outline.

Though tests like classroom assessment approaches, which I used in my classes ,to see students' progress, were not mandatory because they had to do nothing with marks allocated in a defined structured (mid-term= 30; assignment=20; and final semester=50). I used it to test my own teaching approach in terms of responses to the questions asked, rather focusing students' learning.

Reflecting on that situation, there I was still in doubt with use of classroom assessment approaches involving only a few students, and interpreting that students were doing well with my pedagogy. At least for me, it didn't seem to reflect a clear picture of understanding of all 30 students in those classes.

Question Paper Format as Informing

Developing a mental map of the paper was a kind of planning that gave me an idea on how to shape my paper format in two Section: 'Section-I' for short response questions carrying 30 marks and 'Section II' for long essay type questions carrying 20 marks. In this way I made my mind to draft a paper of 50 marks, and that gave me a clear picture about the type of questions I had to put in the paper. 'I can understand this paper is very important for students as it carries the highest weightage of marks. Because midterm paper has 30 marks and assignments carry 20 marks. So, it is equal to both of the tests', I talked with self.

Looking at every lecture after midterm exam paper, and searching for short response questions which mostly fall under the category of definitional knowing in addition to a few conceptual understanding questions in 'Section -I' I did that part. Fairly speaking, 'Section II' consist of three long essay type questions was looking easy for me. So, without any difficulty, I developed that by simply choosing three long essay

type questions from the topics covered during the lectures excluding the topics given for two assignments.

Arriving at this point of inquiry, I begin to reflect that pattern of paper with the type of questions appear to focus on learning of students at reproduction of information (Fradeet at., 2013). Perhaps, such kind of learning may not help them in their real life situations, and yet as students were habituated to such assessment changing questions beyond that level might create confusions for students. So, that may be the reason I made the paper accordingly.

'Hmmm, the paper is now ready', I said to self, 'and I should write instructions



for students to avoid any kind of confusion while selecting questions and marks allocated to each.' The instruction looks like

*this - Note: Attempt 1) any TEN ($10 * 3 = 30$) questions from*

*'Section -I'; and 2) any TWO ($02 * 10 = 20$) questions from 'Section II'.*

University Rules as Dictating

Soon after developing the question paper something strikes in my mind about exam rules of the university. I immediately start searching rules which we had to follow to ensure everything operates well in order. In the meantime, I got the exam rules.

Exam Rules

*Ask questions from and within course
A course has its outline for the teachers*

*A guide for all and a master piece to follow
Let them write what you teach them*

*Don't be deviant for something out of it
Otherwise you will be called in the office*

You will be labeled 'creative' teacher

Who teaches apple and asks orange

*Ensnare keeping apple away from orange
And no mixing to avoid confusion*

Looking at the rules and reflecting on what it means to be within rules, I must have reminded myself that I was not a deviant who may be called in the office for being a teacher who asks questions out of syllabus. With those assumptions, I thought I was on the right track. Thus, avoiding any kind of possible risks related to out of syllabus questions, I thought I should proceed with whatever I developed.

Perhaps, following exam rules and providing instructions to solve paper show that I, as a teacher educator have been enculturated and/or immersed myself in the system. These rules seem to portray the assessment culture of university where teachers appear to be strictly following what exactly to teach and what to ask in the paper in order to avoid *confusions for learners in the name of creativity*.

It reflects that teachers are fully confined to reproduce the content they teach rather linking the content with socio-cultural context of learners to enable them using learning in their real life situations based on the needs and demands of the society in which they live. Perhaps, it seems to be a kind of *non-developmental approach to teaching, learning and assessment*. For example, if teaching/learning and assessment activities cannot help learners to gain knowledge and develop skills required for their real life situations to face while their association with courses in teacher education that seems to be non-developmental or impractical.

Structure of Assessment Tools as Informing

When I looked at the previous mid-term exam question paper that did not show any big difference in terms of its structure except multiple choice questions in 'Section -I'

carrying 20 marks whereas short response questions in 'Section -I' of end semester exam paper carrying 30 marks. Similarly, 'One' (01) essay type question in 'Section II' carried 10 marks in midterm paper whereas 'Two (02) essay type questions in 'Section II' carried 20 marks in end semester exam paper. In the same way there was no such difference in assignments that could enable learners to be creative and innovative towards doing their individual assignments as a reflection of their learning rather mere reproduction of information they receive in a rigid environment of TLPs.

Assessing Students' Learning as an Add-on Activity

Perhaps, I (and other teacher educators) was depending on mid-term exams, end semester exams and assignments (at least three to five graded tasks) as means to

...we assess what we teach: This is a basic principle in any kind of *informed assessment* scheme, whether formative or summative, school-based, university-based, or practice-based ...develop appreciation (Orland-Barak, 2010, p. 168)

assessment. These approaches used to check students' ability of reproduction of knowledge in order to promote into next level. Probably, it was a kind of deficit approach to assessment as an add-on activity (Luitel, 2009), an

activity that is detached from the process of teaching rather a tool that is used at the end of teaching. My experience shows that the most commonly used methods of assessment in the university was the assessment as 'of' learning with paper pencil testing rather than assessment as 'for' learning (Elliott, 1995).

This situation reflects that the purpose of this sort of assessment as 'of' learning seems to know to what extent the students has remembered the content taught in their classes in order to accomplish some *narrowed view* of single colored image of curriculum using teacher centered approach to teaching. Perhaps, such kind of summative exams reflects a traditional way of assessment was to measure reproduction level knowledge

(Frade et al., 2013). However, in so doing, these skills (if any usable) and knowledge through rote memorization seemed unhelpful for learners in their lives.

Perhaps, this kind of reflection can help us (self/others) to revisit *single colored image* of curriculum, very structured way of content to teach within a *50 minutes classes* (1 credit hour), and *assessment as 'of' learning* to check learners' ability to pass exam. However, in that context, it seemed no man's land to search for and/or think about improvements in such kind of practices.

Arriving at this point of inquiry, I begin to reflect that such kind of educational practices in which we were habituated, and which we were passing on to student teachers seem to be part of the 'big game' that the elites (policy makers) with their hegemonic intentions attempt to engage the new generation of marginalized areas with such kind of planned and structured TLPs. In doing so, they deliberately legitimize low level of informative knowledge acquisition and poor technical skills (might be a few).

It appears that engaging in such kind of teacher education cannot enable student teachers to develop critical questioning skills, rather it discourages to raise voice against such practices. Perhaps, without critically reflecting on '*means and ends*' dilemmas, it seems difficult to know what problems students actually are facing with such kind of teaching/learning with lower order thinking as a result of *assessment as 'of' learning* approaches used at teacher education (Elliott, 1995).

Unlike this distribution of marks for mid-term, assignment and final semester exam in the context of university, schools and colleges mostly use one-in-all means of assessment⁶⁷ as an add-on activity. I remember, when I was in my primary school we had

⁶⁷ It means an assessment that begins and ends once for all. It shows that only one exam at the end of each academic year student have to appear to reproduce whatever s/he has learnt during the whole year.

to appear in verbal exams⁶⁸, but in secondary school and college we had written exams at the end of each academic year.

This reflects that such type of summative assessment that was used to measure learning outcomes appears to be a dominant way to assessment (Meyer et al., 2010). Unfortunately, this whole concept of assessment as an add-on activity with one-in-all means of assessment at school and college level did not help me as a learner.

Closure and my Way Forward

My practices of *assessment as 'of' learning* reflect a traditional tool to check students' achievement in their classes for the purpose of promotions by using teacher centered pedagogies under curriculum as textbooks. This reflects that such a view of assessment as 'of' would not enable learners to engage with meaning-centered education (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013). This deficit approach, which focuses on mere what student cannot do sounds both partial and emotionally pathological as well (Wagle, 2016). It is partial and emotionally pathological in a sense that until student begins to exhibit failure, our linear pedagogical practices do not bother to take timely corrective actions and remedial attention towards change. It is what Tayler (2007) calls "... a myth that intervention is only needed for the struggling student". Thus, the nature of assessment as add-on activity neither helps teachers to improve their practices nor students to get timely feedback for learning. Based on this meaning making, in the next chapter, I am discussing assessment activities with reforms in teacher education.

⁶⁸ Teachers used to ask questions verbally and we were giving answers memorized from the text books which we were taught in class.