

Approaching Student Assessment

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In the article, “The Role of Assessment in Learning Culture,” Lorrie Shepard (2000) speaks about the roots of educational assessment and how they are linked to the approach of assessments of students held in the early 1900’s. In that time, they believed that science would be able to solve the issues of both of industrialization and urbanization. The social efficiency theory holds that it was during this time that people were looking to maximize efficiency in factories and people felt that if this approach could work there, these aspects could be used to maximize the efficiency in schools as well. The educational system in the early 1900’s was geared more towards vocational studies but there was an understanding of the impossibility of teaching every student every vocational study. Therefore, the educational system believed it was best to measure the scientific abilities of their students in order to predict what type of employment they would most likely possess in the future. This is when the birth of student assessment started to take place.

Initially, assessment of students was based a great deal on testing in the form of rote recall. Many felt that matching, essay questions, and multiple choice questions were a good way to gauge what the students were learning. While testing was still a major part of his understanding of learning, in the mid 1900’s, the approach to learning had been altered a bit by the likes of B.F. Skinner (1954). Skinner (1954) held the ideal that learning is the process of becoming competent in any respective field but that to gain this competence, one must learn the field in a way that is broken down into smaller steps. The assessment of whether or not a student was learning would be contingent on whether or not they held the ability to accomplish these steps. If the student was able to complete these steps, they should receive positive reinforcement for their success. The model that Skinner (1954) proposed was one that focused on the cognitive

behavior of students. Skinner (1954) felt that students should be tested as often as possible to ensure that they understood the material before moving onto the next part of the learning process.

Due to conflict in how these types of standardized testing should be executed, Shepard (2000) states that there have been some changes when it comes to the assessment of students, one of these changes being objective testing. Objective testing has been found to level out the playing field for students and make assessments a bit more fair than standardized testing. Before the idea of objective assessment ever came into play, it was believed that the only way assess students in a fair way was to do so in a uniform fashion. Shepard (2000) took great notice of how important the cognitive aspect of learning had become. It had allowed the mind to be at the forefront of learning, displayed the fact that learning is a process and the introduction of new knowledge has the ability to build upon the existence of previous knowledge. Black and Williams (1998) speak about a great way to expand upon the knowledge of students and believes that it can all start with conversations amongst student and teacher. They feel that by having conversations with their students, teachers will be able to observe the level of understanding that the student holds about the material. Black and Williams (1998) also feel that these types of conversations should be incorporated into the teaching and learning process as much as possible due to the fact that it will give the students a chance to voice their understanding of the information provided to them in the classroom as well as improve upon this understanding and help them to gain more knowledge.

Black and Williams (1998) really held the belief that the best way to improve the assessment of students was to bring about changes in the classroom. While they encourage discussions among teacher and student, Black and Williams (1998) do discourage the asking of

questions from the teacher to the student because they view it as as being unproductive. Black and Williams (1998) state that many teachers will ask the question, yet not allow the student enough time to adequately think about their answer. In a classroom full of students, there are usually only a few who will go about answering these questions that are asked and the rest of the class just stays quiet for fear of giving a wrong answer or because they know they are not able to answer as quickly as these other students. To break this cycle and allow all students to participate in the class, Black and Williams (1998) suggest that teachers ask their students to discuss their thinking or even have them work in groups together, so that they can discuss the material with one another. Another way to bring about change in the classroom was voiced by Tunstall and Gipps (1996). They have studied various classrooms in Britain and found that many teachers have developed a way for all students to interact with them that will allow a redistribution of power to occur and allow the students to have more of a collaborative impact on their learning experience.

Black and Williams (1998) felt yet another way to bring about changes in the classroom is by bringing about change to formative assessment. By doing this, it would take the business aspect out of learning and become an assessment that is more focused on the interaction between student and teacher. This will allow instructors and students to figure out what has been learned and what still needs to be learned. Black and Williams (1998) feel that the assessment of students is beneficial for both the student and the teacher. They understood that by assessing students, instructors will be able to gauge their students learning progress, as well as any difficulties the may be experiencing in their classroom, much like the teachers observed by Tunstall and Gipps (1996). Black and Williams (1998) view assessments as a way for instructors

to decipher whether or not their teaching methods are effective or if they need to improve upon them to help their students better retain the material.

Shepard (2000) also feels that assessments need to focus more upon the what the students are learning and that it would be extremely to students if assessments were created to include a vast array of their learning methods and assignments, such as reflective journals, projects, and projects, to create a more accurate data when it comes to assessments. While Shepard (2000) understands that there are still many hurdles the educational system must overcome to properly assess students and their learning capabilities, she also is aware that there are many promising models of assessment that are currently in development. Shepard (2000) does worry that that these models will have difficulties being implemented due to the fact that many standard-based assessment are imposing themselves on new reforms.

According to Black and Williams (1998), the U.S. political movement has developed a, “distrust of teachers and a belief that external testing will, on its own, improve learning” (Black and Williams, 1998). The reasoning behind this imposition is that the educational system has incorporated their own system of rewards and punishments to schools, classrooms, teachers, and students. The educational system has not taken into context the idea of learning and have seemed to become more concerned with administering tests and receiving the highest test scores among their students. Black and Williams (1998), have also taken notice of how this extrinsic reward system is impacting students. If the assessments being given are focusing too much on the rewards they can receive, then students are more likely to try and figure out the best way to receive the highest scores and they worry less about the aspect of learning. This form of assessment has not only led to the abolishment of creative and effective classroom instruction but

has also led to the de-skilling and de-professionalization amongst instructors (Shepard, 2000), instructors either conform to these standards or they have to go. This form of high-stakes accountability has students forming the belief that their learning efforts should have a direct correlation with extrinsic rewards rather than teach them the importance of forming new ideas and creativity. Black and Williams (1998) feel that to improve upon teaching methods, there must be thorough scrutiny of all components of teaching plans being administered to students.

Citations

Black, P. & Williams, D. (1998). *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. Phi Delta Kappan, 80(2), 139-144.

Shepard, L. (2000). *The role of assessment in a learning culture*. Educational Researcher, 29(7), 4-14.

Skinner, B. F. (1954). *The science of learning and the art of teaching*. Harvard Educational Review, 24, 86-97.

Tunstall, P. & Gipps, C. (1996). *Teacher feedback to young children in formative assessment: A typology*. British Educational Research Journal, 22, 389-404.

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In the article, “The Role of Assessment in Learning Culture,” Lorrie Shepard (2000) addresses the conflict standardized testing is causing in the assessment of students. Shepard (2000) noticed there have been changes in assessments being administered to students and feels there are many changes needed, one of these changes objective testing. Objective testing has created a more level playing field for students while making assessments a bit fairer than their standardized counterparts (Shepard, 2000). Black and William (1998) believe that one of the best ways to improve the assessment of students is to bring about changes in the classroom. They feel one way this can be achieved is by the introduction of conversations amongst students and their teachers (Black and William, 1998). Black and William (1998) do discourage instructors initiating the questioning during these conversations. Black and William (1998) feel that many teachers will ask questions, but not provide their students with enough time to adequately think about their answer before they give one. Classrooms full of students tend to have a few who will answer questions that are asked and the rest of the students will remain quiet, out of fear they may give the incorrect answer (Black and William, 1998). To allow all students to participate in the class, Black and William (1998) suggest that teachers have students discuss their views of the material with them or in groups with other students. Black and William (1998) also feel that these conversations should be incorporated into the teaching and learning process as much as possible. They feel this would give all students a chance to voice their views of material, as well as improve upon their understanding of it.

Black and William (1998) feel another way to bring about changes in the classroom is by changing formative assessments and to do so, in a way that would enhance the feedback given between teachers and their students, allow instructors to have the information needed to improve

upon their teaching methods, and also find ways to improve upon their students' learning methods (Black and William, 1998). Black and William (1998) believe that the assessment of students is something that can be beneficial for both the student and the teacher. They understand that by assessing students, instructors will be able to gauge their students learning progress, as well as any difficulties they may be experiencing in their classroom. Shepard (2000) also feels that assessments need to focus more upon what the students are learning and that it would be more constructive if assessments were created to include a vast array of students' learning methods. These methods could include students' assignments, such as reflective journal and projects (Shepard, 2000). Shepard (2000) believes that this type of change could create more accurate data in assessments. While Shepard (2000) understands that there are still many hurdles the educational system must overcome to properly assess students and their learning capabilities, she also is aware that there are many promising models of assessment that are currently in development. Shepard (2000) does worry that these models will face difficulties being implemented due to the fact that many standard-based assessments are imposing themselves on new reforms.

According to Black and William (1998), the U.S. political movement has developed a, "distrust of teachers and a belief that external testing will, on its own, improve learning" (p. 142). The reasoning behind this imposition is that the educational system has incorporated their own system of rewards and punishments to schools, classrooms, teachers, and students (Black and William, 1998). The educational system has yet to take into context the idea of learning and has become more concerned with administering tests and receiving the highest test scores amongst students in their district (Black and William, 1998). Black and William (1998), have noticed how

this extrinsic reward system is impacting students. If assessments are focusing more on the rewards received than the knowledge received, students will be more likely to find the best way to obtain the highest scores and care less about learning (Black and William, 1998). This type of assessment has not only led to the abolishment of creative and effective classroom instruction but has also led to the de-skilling and de-professionalization amongst instructors (Shepard, 2000). High-stakes accountability is leading students to believe that educational efforts have a direct correlation with extrinsic rewards (Shepard, 2000). Black and William (1998) feel that to improve upon teaching methods all components of teaching plans need to be thoroughly scrutinized before being administered to students.

Citations

Black, P. & William, D. (1998). *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. Phi Delta Kappan, 80(2), 139-144.

Shepard, L. (2000). *The role of assessment in a learning culture*. Educational Researcher, 29(7), 4-14.

Revisions Made

As you may have noticed, I write... a lot! Some professors I have had in the past do not seem to mind when I write over the amount of words given, actually, I've only had one other professor that did. I should have clarified this with you before I submitted my Precis, I apologize for not doing so. For the revisions I have made:

- Changed word count.
- Changed "Williams" to "William"
- Changed grammatical errors (I apologize for this as well, I always read over my work but I had been so busy, I'm guessing I didn't read over this one. It will never happen again).
- Added page number in APA format after a quote.
- Made sure to cite the source even when it was not a quote. (This is not an excuse but I have little to no knowledge of APA format, I'm still trying to learn this and feel I should set up an appt. with the writing lab. I did purchase the book on APA style of writing and have gone to OWL as well. I find it sad that I do not have a better knowledge of this style of writing but it honestly was never asked of me. I really am shocked by that.)
- Removed information that wasn't necessary.
- Switched some information around in the hopes it would flow better.

I hope that this has improved upon my paper a great deal. I want to do very well in this class, so I promise I will do all I can to make it happen.