

Dialogue Paper

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For this dialogue paper, I had the pleasure of conversing with two teachers. These teachers were uniquely different from each other, mainly because they reside in opposite parts of the world. My objective is to learn what teachers think of assessment depending on the country they live in. Moreover, I would also like to know what each teacher thinks of grades, which may or may not correspond with assessments. In this paper, there will be specific sections about each teacher's background and their answers, my reflection on the dialogue, and how the discussions may or may not have influenced my thinking and practices regarding assessment in the future.

Questions that will drive the dialogue.

The questions I asked are as follows:

1. What are your thoughts about assessment? What does it mean to assess students?
2. Could you tell me some assessment strategies you did in the classroom? Could you tell me how do you know that it is the appropriate assessment to use?
3. (Connected to question 2): If you were to do this lesson again, what would you do differently?
4. Do you sometimes find it difficult to assess or come up with an assessment? Think about classroom dynamics, class sizes, time, and so on.
5. Do you feel restricted when trying a new assessment strategy? If so, why? How did you overcome this restriction?
6. What is one thing you wished you knew about assessments before you became a teacher?

7. What are your thoughts about grades? It seems like grades shaped our whole schooling. We always try our hardest to get As, but what do grades are for exactly? Does it showcase our learning or student's learning?

These questions will shape the conversations I had with the two teachers. Note that some questions were not asked or were not answered by these teachers. However, the conversations that flourished were valuable for me as a pre-service teacher.

Teacher 1

The first teacher I talked to is a Filipino teacher who resides in the Philippines. I will be using a pseudonym for this teacher. We will call her "Mika." Mika is a relatively new teacher. Mika spent her time teaching 1st and 2nd graders. She has been a great friend of mine for years. The colonizers influenced the Philippines greatly, especially the country's education system. My wish to get out of this conversation with Mika is to learn if the Philippines has reformed its education when it comes to assessments.

Mika stated that assessment is an important tool for teachers to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and understanding of students. By assessing, according to Mika, teachers could identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers use assessment to cater to or personalize their teaching strategies to meet their needs. I personally disliked the use of "strengths" and "weaknesses" because it often comes off as negative. However, I could understand the language barrier, so I am sure there is not a hint of ill-intention in Mika's words.

Regarding assessment strategies, Mika had the first graders recite a short poem in front of the class to assess whether they were learning or not. Mika stated that the first graders are struggling in reading. I continued the conversation by asking if making them recite a poem is her strategy for determining whether they are learning how to read or not. Mike elaborated that

reading is a skill, therefore, students need to perform it in the real world. Moreover, she stated that the poem consisted of short phrases where students could practice or demonstrate if students could read simple words from the lessons. Furthermore, Mika stated that if she were to do this lesson again, she would go for a gamified type of assessment where students would enjoy peer-to-peer collaboration. I adored Mika's thinking about the real world. She is thinking of her students' future. Reading is a fundamental tool that everyone uses daily. Making students read in front of the class also helps them with their confidence and may help them build public speaking skills. I think having a gamified type of assessment is a modern way of assessing students. Since Mika was thinking of peer-to-peer assessment, I shared with her some strategies that I learned in my classes. One of them is students reading phrases from books to each other and critiquing via peer assessment. For reciting a poem, I pitched the idea of "two stars and one wish," which Mika was extremely glad to know about.

For difficulties in assessing, Mika stated that she rarely finds it difficult to assess or come up with assessment strategies. In her experience, Mika's advisors have utilized many assessment strategies for them. She believes that it is crucial for teachers to give choices to students on how they would like to demonstrate their learning. Moreover, Mika stated that teachers should not rely solely on summative assessments because this only leads to memorization. Students are not grasping the key ideas of the lesson. Mika's advisors always encouraged her to do project-based outputs or product-oriented outputs. Mika and her advisors believe that this type of output demonstrates creativity and freedom for learners. Mika also thinks that having exams and quizzes are not bad assessments if the teacher prepared solely as a basis for students' learning and not as an evaluation.

Lastly, Mika thinks that grades are not just numbers, but they show students' effort to obtain that numerical value. Mika explained that grades are the numerical value of teachers' judgement on how a student performed during the semester. However, grades do not define success in life. She believes that having high grades/marks may help students enter their dream school, or aim for something big such as scholarships, however, it is not enough. Grades are not important in real life. Grades are not direct evidence to prove our capabilities. It is our knowledge that we can align to our skills, and that is something grade can testify to.

Teacher 2

The second teacher I talked to is a Canadian teacher who lives in Melville. We will call her under the pseudonym "C." Ms. C is a grade 9 science and math teacher in a school under the Catholic School Division. In my experience, I find that Catholic Schools tend to be more structured when it comes to assessments and evaluation. I am honored to be learning about assessments from Ms. C as my target is to teach in a Catholic school.

Assessments help Ms. C guide their teaching and help her identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, Ms. C uses assessments to figure out common misconceptions or get to know about what the students got from what she taught. By assessing, Ms. C can adjust her teaching to have a better understanding of her students' thinking process. Ms. C makes sure to assess frequently because she believes that assessments should guide learning. She wants her students to get feedback quickly and often so they can see their misunderstandings and build off them before it matters (I am guessing she is referring to evaluation). Ms. C wants her students to have opportunities to check their understanding and learn to build on that regularly.

Regarding assessment strategies, Ms. C is always looking, watching, and gathering information. When students are working, Ms. C makes sure that she is paying attention to what

they are doing. Ms. C reminisced about the times when she had markers who would mark for her. Although helpful and efficient, Ms. C confessed that this method does not give her the information she needs for how the students are doing. So, she is always checking in often with her students. Another method that Ms. C likes to do is to do the assignments that she assigns to students. This way, she is putting herself in her students' shoes and getting her brain to think about how her students think. In terms of actual types of assessment, Ms. C has done exit slips, homework, quizzes, tests, and digital tools like Plicker, Kahoots, and so on. Ms. C also likes projects as a form of assessment or anything where students can show what they know. As an example, Ms. C had students create a game board to show their understanding of solar systems. When students create rules of the game, this is an indicator that they know what is going on and that they acquired the knowledge to create a game. However, Ms. C explained that there are issues with project-based assessment. One of them is when a student is absent, it will be difficult for them to catch up. Another issue is time. How to use time efficiently while still allowing students to show their understanding? Ms. C always reflects on the assessment strategies she uses in class to see what works and what does not work.

Ms. C finds it extremely difficult to assess and come up with assessment strategies. There is a difference between expectation and reality. For example, what she expects the students to be able to do versus what they will do. Moreover, Ms. C also reflected on how other teachers assess. If other teachers assess it more easily and therefore students get better marks in class, how does this reflect Ms. C's class? Some students compete for achievement awards, so they will take teachers who mark easily to achieve that goal. Ms. C wonders about being in line with other teachers about assessment to keep it "fair" with students. Another difficulty she faces is adjusting assessments on where the students at versus preparing them for where they need to be.

Ms. C feels restricted when attempting a new assessment strategy in high school. She stated that students have expectations and have a lot more attitude. Students will tell teachers what is right or wrong, so there is that pressure again to be on par with everybody to make it fair. On top of all this, Ms. C wishes she knew what assessment meant before she became a teacher. Now, she knows that assessment is not about behavior. Teachers do not assess behavior. Teachers assess progression towards a learning outcome. For example, when students are punished for handing in assignments late, we assess their behavior. Ms. C states this is wrong. Teachers should be fine with assessing differently to adapt to different students who are just starting to show their understanding of the learning outcome.

With grades, Ms. C does not think grades reflect students' learning. In her experience, students would bring home graded assignments and get help to get the highest grade possible. For Ms. C, students are not reaching the learning outcome this way, but the grades say otherwise. Ms. C highlighted the importance of assessments because they accurately depict students' learning versus grades. Judging students based on their marks is tricky because she wants to ensure it is fair. However, some students are competing for awards.

Self-Reflection

It is really interesting how two perspectives could be different but have the same purpose, to provide quality education to students. Mika's views of assessment are what I imagined it to be in the Philippine's schooling. I spend 13 years in the Philippines before moving to Canada. During those 13 years, I experienced the structured process of assessment which are quizzes and exams. Mika experienced this all her life, and I am sure her advisors have experienced this type of schooling as well. It is evident that even though we are all against student mimicking, we teachers and pre-service teachers have been mimicking all our lives. I do not have a problem

with testing. My only problem is why testing is weighted too hugely compared to other things like projects or activities in class where students can show their understanding uniquely. Not all students are capable of memorizing formulas or able to write a timed essay. Some students like to take their time and produce their best quality work while showing understanding. I cannot comprehend why an exam is the basis of students' understanding when they could show it sooner rather than later.

I liked how Ms. C is going for more modern approaches to assessment like digital tools to document student learning and share it with students and their peers in real-time. I also admire how Ms. C strives to reform her assessments based on students' responses. I admire her willingness to improve to have a fair education for all of her students. It is just sad on her part that students are often competing for marks and achievements. I remember being this competitive. I would always compare myself to other students. Where did I get this behavior? From my peers. I believe Mika also thinks this way that high grades could get students to their dream universities and get scholarships. Sadly, students have this pressure of going to school to get high marks and fulfill their peer's expectations. As a result, I believe Mika and Ms. C's assessment strategies are greatly influenced by this.

I resonated with Ms. C's way of assessing, where she separates behavior from student learning. When we assess, we are assessing the student's ability to meet the learning outcome, not their behavior. Many things happen outside of school. Students have their own lives and sometimes things happen. Students may get sick and miss the deadline of the assignment. Often students hand in late, however, their work is complete, and they clearly show their understanding. So, why should we punish students for showing their understanding? However, there are also issues surrounding missing the deadline. For example, when we get a job and

partake in work projects, these projects need a set date to be finished. While we do not mark the behavior, we should teach students responsibility and accountability. Real-life jobs will mark people's behavior, and I believe if we do not teach students how to be responsible, we are failing them in real life.

I completely understand why Ms. C feels restricted when trying new assessments. Both students and teachers are accustomed to the norm. Trying new assessments is going out of your and your student's comfort zone to assess a learning outcome. I feel like as a teacher, we have to get the students to understand that whatever we are doing is for their betterment. I believe that teaching is a group project. Everyone must cooperate in this matter for learning to flourish.

Lastly, I am intrigued by the two educators' perspectives on grades. Mika sees grades as an achievement students earn, while Ms. C thinks that grades do not reflect students' learning. I did not mind grades. I think if the students are included in the conversation about their grades, it is much more accurate. This makes students more responsible and accountable for their performance throughout the term. We can change the classroom notions about grades; however, it is difficult to change parents and peers about grades. I believe we have to make students understand why grades may not reflect their performance fully and have them be responsible for explaining this to their peers. Once I get to my classroom, I will spend the first day of class explaining grades to my students. I will also make sure to communicate with students often about assessments and how they would like to be assessed.

Conclusion

It is my pleasure to be able to have a conversation with these two educators. I learned a lot about assessments, and I wish to make three commitments and goals as I progress toward becoming a teacher:

1. I will make sure that I am not marking students' behavior but their ability to reach a learning outcome: as I stated, students have lives outside of school. Life happens to them, and I should understand to be flexible around students when they are trying to achieve a learning outcome. However, I will emphasize that due dates are still due dates, and they are responsible for meeting that due date. As a teacher, I want to make sure that students are experiencing real-life expectations when it comes to submitting assignments and projects on time.
2. Communicate with students about their grades: one component in today's schooling that is difficult to progress towards not grading. Teachers will have to find a way around grading which is to have students communicate the grades they deserve. I believe by doing this, we are making students responsible for their learning and performance throughout the term. Also, this is a way to prepare students for real-life situations. For example, some job interviews require individuals to reflect on their best and worst performance and try to think about how they could improve. Students will be well aware of their learning and be able to reflect on it. I will make sure to always implement self-assessment and self-grading in my classroom.
3. Co-create criteria with students: The crucial part of grading is to have students be responsible for where they will grade themselves. When we co-construct criteria and expectations with students, we are passing the responsibility to them. As a teacher, I exist to assess their learning. If I cannot assess their behavior, then I will leave that job to the students. When students are accountable for their actions, they will be more urged to show their learning in the best way possible. Even if grades do not reflect students' learning, we all see them as a form of achievement. If students can get high

marks because they showed that they could complete the criteria they constructed, then they deserve the mark they assigned themselves.

I am sure I will have more goals in the future, but these three goals will be my basis for now. I believe it is always great to set building blocks for learning and work my way through it, eventually reaching success as a student and as a future teacher.