

# Educational assessment

## What is educational assessment?

**Assessment or educational assessment** is a process used to determine what a student knows or what he is able to do. It is the process

- *"... of documenting knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs, often in measurable terms."*<sup>1)</sup>

Assessment was first introduced through the frames of **psychometrics** and intelligence testing. Since intelligence was at the time considered to be a predetermined characteristic, it could be measured and compared to a specific norm (*norm-referenced*).

This paradigm was later in the 1960s shifted towards **educational measurement**<sup>2)</sup> which, unlike norm-referenced psychometrics classified test-takers according to some criterion (*criterion-referenced*). The educational measurement approach also:<sup>3)</sup>

- attempts to approach an individual as an individual and not in relation to others,
- tests for competence (outcome of learning or experience) and not intelligence (inborn characteristic),
- attempts to help an individual in learning,
- looks for the best and not typical performance.

Finally, another change was introduced into the perspective on assessment suggesting it should be used not only to evaluate past or current achievements, but to

- *"... indicate the assistance, experiences and forms of practice required by learners as they move towards more competent performance."*<sup>4)</sup>

This change is an ongoing process as today assessment is still

- *"... undergoing a **paradigm shift, from psychometrics to a broader model of educational assessment**, from a testing and examination culture to an assessment culture"*<sup>5)</sup>,

in which assessment has more forms and roles than before.

## Purposes of assessment in education

Some of the reasons assessment is used in the educational process are to:<sup>6)7)</sup>

- grade and **rank** students individually and within a cohort,
- **determine fitness** for attending a program, course or module,
- **set standards** to a course or module,
- provide data that assist students in decision making,
- get feedback about the **quality of teaching** or a particular instructional strategy,
- **assist student** learning and help students identify their strengths and weaknesses.

# Shouldn't we just focus on improving teaching practice?

Two quotes should answer this question directly:

- *"Students **can escape bad teaching**, but they **can't escape bad assessment**."*<sup>8)</sup>
- *"... nothing that we do to, or for, our students is more important than our assessment of their work and the feedback we give them on it. The results of our assessment influence our students for the rest of their lives and careers – fine if we get it right, but unthinkable if we get it wrong."*<sup>9)</sup>

## Good practices in educational assessment

Assessment in general should be:<sup>10)</sup>

- **authentic and reliable** (measure what we would like to know),
- **transparent** (explained to the students),
- **promote deep learning** and demonstration of excellence, not rote memorization,
- **fair and equitable**,
- **timely and incremental**.

## Types of educational assessment

[Click here to learn more about the types of educational assessment.](#)

1)

Dolan, Erin L. Education Outreach and Public Engagement. Springer, 2008.

2)

Glaser, Robert. Instructional technology and the measurement of learning outcomes: Some questions. American Psychologist 18, no. 8: 519-521, 1963.

3) 5)

Gipps, C. V. Beyond testing: towards a theory of educational assessment. Routledge, 1994.

4)

Glaser, 1990. Cited by Gipps, C. V. Beyond testing: towards a theory of educational assessment. Routledge, 1994.

6)

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7) 9) 10)

Race, Philip, Sally Brown, and Brenda Smith. 500 tips on assessment. Routledge, 2005.

8)

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