

Title: Instruction and assessment in multicultural contexts – A Case Study of 14 years as a Teacher and Examiner in a multicultural International School.

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Abstract: Instructing students and assessing their work involves teacher assessment, in so far as student-centeredness is concerned. What are instructions, their purposes and objectives in a multicultural context? How do these affect assessment and how can these be quantified in qualitative ways, without compromising effective standards of education? Can these affect testing and examination results etc.? This Paper revisits and examines the case of instruction and assessment, as a teacher of IGCSE and Advanced Levels in a reputed International School of over 1500 students from over 55 nationalities. The purpose of this analysis is to encourage us, as educators, to be effective, meaningful, and careful in our choices and higher achievers with little hassle. We can plan thoroughly, economise time and yet be most productive to the envy of the rest of the world, by wisely instructing and assessing our students in an ever-accelerating technological era. This leads to the production of thinking, reasoning and logical workforce and a healthy society.

KEY WORDS:

Think

Plan

Affect

Resolve

Achieve

Teaching in the classroom can be rather a daunting task for many educators, despite all the fine training and experience over the years. For any assessor to reach his students it takes testing oneself. It also requires constant education and re-education of the various assessment methods and principles behind the assessment concerned. In the globalised world we live in, the challenge is even greater than ever. Our major goal, as assessors, is to ensure that there is communication and that, candidates show understanding of any material with which, they have to work.

Both the processes of teaching and learning involve the constant use of instruction and assessment. There is always a need for clear goals, and objectives, as well as understanding. This means that explanations in any instructions must not be obscure, whatsoever, and the actions to be done during the learning, by candidates, must be distinct, since they are the centre or focus of any teaching. Whether students perform their set tasks accurately or not is a clear indication of us, as assessors.

There is a variety of methods in giving instructions and assessing them, such as multiple choice, direct or indirect questions, discussion, essays, analysis, explanations, drawing diagrams, plotting graphs, designing , defining, supporting arguments with clear examples, balancing sheets etc, depending on the subjects involved. Like it or not, setting examinations and marking them are part of our duties, as assessors. Examinations are valuable aids to both the teacher and learner.

As assessors, we are often saddled with teaching syllabuses, curricular, examinations or testing, which often overwhelm us, especially, when we are ineffective in handling the materials, resources at our disposal and our own mastery of the needed skills as assessors. Our tasks become even more daunting, when we have to deal with large class sizes that involve so much planning, especially, when we have limited resources and equipments, in our present global economic crises, shortages and draconian cuts by Governments, politicians and managers of resources etc.

Nonetheless, it is our responsibility, as educators to ensure that in spite of all the massive challenges that we face, our instructions and assessments produce a work force that is able to meet the growing demands of our generation and, especially, the future. We must instruct and assess correctly, fairly and monitor the processes we use in these, in order to be effective. Anything short of these leads to utter failure on the parts of both teacher and learner.

We need to constantly, measure the extent to which we cover our teaching objectives, how effectively our students retain the knowledge taught them, whether, our tests are too easy or difficult or even, whether, some candidates score higher or lower than expected etc. Where a majority of students perform badly, then we need to give more attention to those aspects or areas concerned. We must always give our students the chance to demonstrate their ability to apply knowledge intelligibly.

What are instructions, their purposes and objectives in a multicultural context? How do these affect assessment and how can these be quantified in qualitative ways, without compromising effective standards of education? Can these affect testing and examination results etc.? This Paper revisits and examines the case of instruction and assessment, as a teacher of IGCSE and Advanced Levels in a reputed International School of over 1500 students from over 55 nationalities. The purpose of this analysis is to encourage us, as educators, to be effective, meaningful, and careful in our choices and higher achievers with little hassle. We can plan thoroughly, economise time and yet be most productive to the envy of the rest of the world, by wisely instructing and assessing our students in an ever-accelerating, technological era. This leads to the production of thinking, reasoning and logical workforce and a healthy society.

For the purposes of this paper, I define instructions as the act or practice of teaching, imparted knowledge, an authoritative direction to be obeyed, detailed directions on procedure, orders or recommended rules for guidance, calling for compliance, a dictate, direction or directive.

How do we, as educators, use instructions to assess in a multicultural context? We live in a very complex, modern and diversified global environment that entails a wider understanding of the kind of multiculturalism that cannot be ignored. It takes wisdom and knowledge to be a part of a harmonious assessment system that would always be scrutinised intelligently by the outside world.

Our appraisal or evaluation of students in our care and their achievement on a course, based on a careful, analytical assessment, will determine whether we are progressive or ignorant. The final output will prove our value when we use all the tools at our disposal as assessors, most effectively. Nothing less will exonerate us before posterity, for our assessments today will determine the assessments of the future. Our correct assessment will have a great impact on the future work force of society, as any healthy work force demands doing the right things in the interest of the larger majority.

As educators, using both Formative Assessment (carried throughout a course or project) and Summative Assessment (carried out at the end of a course), based on the established criterion, against the performance of other students or the performance of previous ones, would ensure the quality of our instructions, assessment and products. On such bases the reliability and validity of our testing or evaluation standards will be universally acclaimed as a success.

In this regard, the interaction and communication between different cultures will complement the multiculturalism and diversity of our generation. As assessors, we need to embrace the set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours shared by all and which, will be communicated from one generation to the next via language, without compromising the high standards required. Quality and quantity must be respected, at all times. Class sizes need to be examined carefully, as the imbalance in these distributions deal with souls, who are often limited by issues such as fatigue

and can be susceptible to being demoralised. We need to be observant, in order to learn from our experiences and improve on our approach always. It is imperative that we pay utmost attention to our choice of items, present them methodically and systematically, while taking into account the weighting accorded each item. Objectivity must be chosen and subjectivity reduced to a minimum, else we lose our focus and fail ourselves and the learners.

The International School experience poses even more challenges than ever. Such schools are often private and expensive and so can afford an enormous amount of resources, at the expense of state schools. Consequently, in a fast changing technological world, teaching and testing materials continue to saturate the field of education. We, as assessors, are then tempted to use all these materials, at the expense of quality teaching and learning, by not exhausting materials adequately. Our students also become frustrated, confused, dejected and tend to perform below expectation, leaving us, educators even more perplexed. Consequently, one might ask why such institutions with all the rich resources at their disposal are still unable to maximise their output, as assessors and the assessed at all times. Could this be a result of thoughtless and improper planning? We need to be circumspect in our instructions and assessments. There are 5 key words to bear in mind in order to have satisfying results.

We must:

1. Think
2. Plan
3. Affect
4. Resolve and
5. Achieve.

The Ghana International School, established in 1955, originally to serve the needs of the Diplomatic and Expatriate Communities, who for reasons of migration, needed to keep their offspring abreast with their counterparts in their home countries, today, is faced with offering the highest quality of education, matched by none, to both the Diplomatic and indigenous Ghanaian communities. As the pioneer and leading, elite institution in Ghana, it competes very favourably with other excellent International institutions all over the world and is affiliated to a variety of international Associations in Africa, Europe and the United States of America etc.

Its staff, highly educated, competent and a marketable workforce are selected from both international and indigenous educators. The students also come from a rainbow coalition of over 55 nationalities and represent all the continents in the world and all live and work under the Motto 'Understanding of each other'. This makes it a unique institution in so far as multicultural education is concerned. All the various races embrace its instructions and assessments with laudable results, whether, Formative or Summative.

The lessons from its multicultural dimension is what, I am very privileged to share with you today.

In September, 1995, when I first started teaching there, French was the only foreign language taught. However, today, students offer other various languages and continue to sit examinations in Spanish, German, Dutch, Italian, Korean etc., this highlights the fact that effective instruction and assessment can positively impact learning, in a modern world, where fewer students feel motivated to seek higher education.

The curricular, then, included only basic and traditional subjects such as Mathematics, English Language, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, History, Economics and Art. Physical Education was merely for physical fitness. Then, the Secondary School offered the G.C.E O' Levels and A' Levels in these subjects, with the University of London Board.

Gradually, we expanded our curriculum and continued with our Formative assessments that culminated in the Summative with the London Edexcel Board. In all our teaching, learning and testing, great care was taken in ensuring that the multicultural context received our fullest attention to detail. All instruction during the teaching process in the classroom and assessment were constantly monitored by us teachers and feedback received from the students on a regular basis, in class and after assessments. Our internal and external examinations were always assessed carefully, in order to improve on our performances in all subjects, as assessors. This led to a uniformity in teaching, although the teaching methods varied. Great emphasis was laid on clarity of questions and instructions to our students and we equally demanded clearness in the answers from our candidates.

In the late 1990s, we realised, upon analysis of teacher and student performances, that parents, students and staff were clamouring for a broader curriculum, which would further enhance

learning and assessment. We monitored our Continuous Assessments and their results carefully and sought to rectify student under performance. It then became obvious that we as assessors needed to correct our own weaknesses in teaching and testing, our biggest challenge. It became clear that upon identifying our own lapses, we could then aid our students to perform better, obtain better results and become satisfied with the learning process. This then became our motivation for effective teaching, learning and assessment.

It then became necessary that teachers sought regular training to be abreast with current trends and methods in teaching and assessment in their own subject areas and peer coaching was encouraged, where teachers could voluntarily visit each other's classes and share ideas on improving our teaching, instructing and assessment. Although, peer coaching was a big challenge in its teething years, it finally became a joy for us as teachers and students were also encouraged to do peer coaching, which gave us much improved results both in teaching and assessment. Student performance also improved tremendously and positively. Our assessment results improved dramatically both internally and externally.

Consequently, the school decided, together, with the Board, Management, Staff, parents and Students to introduce more subjects into our curriculum and in our quest for more academic challenge, we opted for various broad subjects and changed from the G.C.E. O Levels to the IGCSE and A Levels with the University of Cambridge International Examinations, with whom our students take their Summative assessments. There is now a wide variety of subjects, the challenges are more but with determination and hard work the quality of the results get better and better. The results are better not because of mediocrity but rather due to the ever-increasing and constant evaluation of our instructions and assessments. Those of our students who opt to attend Universities in the United States, also perform creditably in their SAT, TOEFL, GMAT etc. Those who also return to Asia, countries like Korea, China, Japan etc. or other African nations have amazing results that attest to the production of a healthy work force that will make the world a better place, if, this trend is sustained. The school has the enviable reputation of producing Head Boys and Head Girls and other Prefects who come from various nationalities, purely on merit and this challenges the indigenous folk not to take others for granted.

In the 1990s we also discovered the significant impact that class sizes had on teaching, learning and assessment. We realised that the large class sizes (30 – 34 students per set) that we had did not augur well for good results and effective assessment, because human errors such as fatigue led to rather poor instructions in teaching and assessment, the results of inadequate thought put into teaching and learning, leading to improper planning, making it difficult to positively affect our learners. It was virtually impossible for us, as assessors, to resolve to change the ineffective or achieve any meaningful results.

Upon the introduction of smaller class sizes, from (34 to 25), and subsequently, 25 to (15- 20), improved teacher performance was noticed and students received more individual attention. This

was because teachers could now, carefully, think their lessons, instructions and assessment through, plan their work effectively, affect individual students, resolve to attain excellence and achieve the desired results.

Lessons became more meaningful and learning improved tremendously. Careful choices in the use of resources and materials led to both teacher and learner improvement, without compromising effective standards. Thorough planning of lessons, instruction and assessment led to economising time on the part of educator and the assessed leading to higher productivity, achievement and recognition.

With the advent of the latest and ever-accelerating technological advancement in a complex and sophisticated world, assessors can now wisely use a variety of instruction and diction that require precise and close to accurate results from candidates, clearing all doubt and any obscurity in all contexts. In these situations, clear thinking, reasoning and logic take over from guessing or erratic performance. Candidates are then able read, analyse and decipher instructions, perform any required tasks accurately and complete the set tasks in the stipulated time allotted.

The assessor and assessed both take these healthy attitudes into their work places and so improve and sustain a healthy work force that is productive in society.

In conclusion, as assessors, we must constantly, carefully and thoroughly:

1. Think our lessons through
2. Plan our lessons, instructions and assessments well ahead
3. Affect the output of our students positively
4. Resolve to constantly improve on our teaching, instructions and assessment and
5. Achieve excellent results at all times (assessor and assessed).

These will then ensure that teacher and student fatigue that often lead to human error in clarity of instructions and assessment, testing and performance are reduced to a minimum, at all times. This will ensure that high standards are maintained consistently and fairness in Mark Schemes given an enviable boost by all. Thus, multiculturalism measures a global standard for educators, which will be embraced by all and any discrepancies and differences eliminated perpetually.

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