

Paper Presentation Title: The Negative Impact of Teachers' Labeling of Adolescents At-Risk in Assessment and Big Data

Extended Topic: The Negative Impact, Labeling, and Harm to the Motivation and Empowerment of Adolescents At-Risk in the 21st Century in Transitions from the Middle School to the High School by Their Teachers because of the Pressure to Demonstrate Improvement in the Achievements, in the Processes of Assessment and Learning in the Basic Database

Abstract

Adolescents at-risk may be found in situations of physical, mental, or emotional risk. Most of them come from dysfunctional families, from great poverty, and/or from a delinquent social environment. These children's problems are expressed primarily in the emotional, academic, social, and behavioral areas and lead to many absences from the school, low academic achievements, behavioral problems, and social difficulties. Adolescents at-risk, in contrast to normative adolescents, experience double risk in the transition from the middle school to the high school. They experience rejection from their peer group. These factors influence their system of self and self-confidence. These adolescents belong in the class to a subgroup of adolescents in a situation similar to theirs. The processes of assessment for the purpose of learning and teaching are social processes and obligate a dialogue between those involved – teachers and students. Meaningful teaching will not exist without a beneficial relationship between the teacher and the student, a relationship that enables to know the student's unique needs so as to promote motivation and to tailor for the student the best teaching methods. A negative influence and the labeling of adolescents at-risk by their teachers because of the pressure to demonstrate improvement in the achievements in the basic database that constitutes the

students' profile cause harm to the students' involvement as learners and to their motivation and empowerment in all areas – emotional, behavioral, academic, functional, and social.

Keywords: Adolescents at-risk, teachers, transition, assessment for learning, empowerment

Processes of Learning and Assessment among Teachers

In the year 2010, the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) program of the Ministry of Education commenced in Israel, with the goal of adjusting the education system to the 21st century. The primary objective is to implement advanced digital teaching-learning through the inculcation of the skills of the 21st century.

Many research studies on the process of assessments of teachers have reported that most teachers use technology as an addition to teaching and do not implement an in-depth change that leads beyond traditional teaching to digital teaching-learning that enables the implementation of meaningful learning.

Stellman¹ maintained that the teacher's professionalization depends on the long-term vision that supports the process of continuous training. Changes in the teacher's role also entail aspects of the development of personality for the empowerment of students and the development of social sensitivity and solidarity with others in the classroom.

The old model of learning does not meet the changing demands of the market in education in the 21st century. The role of technology in education will steadily increase. The industrial model based on uniformity has changed, and today it is acknowledged that every brain learns differently and it is necessary to have personal adjustment.

The lack of appropriate teacher training regarding the development of digital abilities is a challenge documented by many researches. In the teacher's initial stages of preparation, there is no training for 21st century skills.

¹ M. Stellman, M. (2014). *Thoughts on Teacher Training. New Trends in the 21st Century*, 2014, Van Lear Institute and Mofet Institute, pp. 11-12

Assessment is an integral part of the process of teaching, and its role is to provide the teaching workers with data for the purpose of planning, supervision, and feedback on the processes that occur in the classroom and promotion of the students' achievements. The test is one of the instruments for the evaluation of different teaching goals. One of the problems with information literacy is the measurement of the students' learning and the assessment of the students' products. Almor² addressed the teacher's perspective, in which the students' abilities are lacking. Almor differentiated that teachers submit assignments and evaluation tasks that are not commensurate with the students' abilities.

Birenboim³ performed a mapping of the two approaches accepted for evaluation. According to the quantitative approach, the goal of the assessment of learning is perceived as to report the level of achievements of the studies in the form of a score for the purpose of classification and agreement. According to the qualitative approach, the assessment of learning is formative, with the goal to provide feedback that promotes the learning and teaching.

Stiggins⁴ maintained that the formative role of assessment has recently become secondary in light of the strengthening of the requirement for accountability, when the role is to transform summative information on learning achievements into the need for local, national, and international comparisons.

The increasing interest in the use of information sources for personal goals and learning, for assessment of formative learning, and for the measurement of performances leads to the creation of a new field: data-based learning and assessment. In data-based learning and assessment, the network is analyzed so as to build better pedagogies, empower students, identify populations at-risk, and evaluate the factors that influence the students' success.

² Almor in: K. Costante, Leading the instructional core: An interview with Richard Elmore. *Conversation*, 2(3), 2-12, 2012.

³ M. Birenboim, Assessment for Learning is a Complicated Action. *Echo of Education*, 81 (7), 40-47, 2007.

⁴ R. J. Stiggins, From formative assessment to assessment for learning: A Path to Success in standards-based schools. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170508700414>, 2005.

Children and Adolescents At-Risk

Many researchers have studied the topic of children at-risk. Dryfoos⁵ maintains that about one half of all children and youths, aged ten to seventeen, are at-risk, when about one-quarter of them are found at a high risk. In contrast, Glenn and Nelson⁶ maintain that all children are potentially in some situation of risk.

Nowadays, the specific definition of a child as one who is at-risk and the evaluation of the level of this risk are performed today by experts from the different treatment professions. Children at-risk are defined by the welfare authorities as living in situations that endanger them in their family and in their environment, and as a result of these situations their ability to realize their rights is harmed in the areas of physical existence, health and development, belonging to the family, learning and acquisition of skills, welfare and emotional health, belonging and social participation, protection from others and from their own endangering behaviors⁷.

The treatment approach accepted in Israel divides the population of children at-risk into three primary groups:

1. Children and youths found in direct and immediate danger - these are children who are victims of abuse and neglect, children and youths with behavior problems, delinquent youths, youths who use drugs, and victims of abuse in the family.
2. Children and youths who live in an endangering environment and are found in indirect risk - these are children who witness violence between their parents, addiction, delinquency, children who live in poverty, and children who live in communities that endanger them.
3. Children and youths who live under circumstances that may create risk - these are children from families that are suffering a crisis because of divorce, single-parent families, families that suffer from unemployment, and immigrant families.

⁵ J. G. Dryfoos, *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention*, 1990, Oxford University Press, N.Y.

⁶ H. S. Glenn, J. Nelson, *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World: Seven Building Blocks for Developing Capable Young People*, 1988, Rocklin California.

⁷ H. Shmidt, *The Prime Minister's Committee for Children and Youths At-Risk*. Report of the Public Committee for the Examination of the Situation of Children At-Risk and in Distress, 2006.

The educational influences also are apparent. It was found that the educational achievements of these children are significantly lower than those of their classmates, and this situation frequently causes them to drop out of the studies.

Adolescents At-Risk and Assessment in Learning

The problem of equality in the education system prevents opportunities for success for adolescents at-risk who come from disadvantaged populations and thus have far lower chances of success. The education system can just be good; it needs to be a good education system for each and every child equally.

Sahlberg⁸, a researcher in education and one of the leading consultants in this field around the world who has worked for different organizations, such as the OECD, criticizes the method based on the pursuit of grades and achievements in comparative tests. He emphasizes the importance of the health and happiness of children in the school and the aspiration for equality in education. He believes from his experience in the field that the system needs to be adjusted to every child, to serve everyone equally, and to help children as much as possible, like in the education reforms in Finland in the 1990s that include integration of mental health services in education. The integration of all the functions, including health and wellbeing, enable support for the child and his happiness and not only in the structure of the learning. The responsibility of the education system on the overall level and on the level of every teacher on the individual level is to see that every child will be happy and healthy and curious and desiring to learn. In a situation of adolescents at-risk with characteristics as mentioned above, whose parents cannot provide assistance and even harm him and endanger him, the education system must provide him with help and invest resources for affirmative action.

Human ecological systems must understand that the development of children is influenced in the long-term from schools that constitute a meaningful space for their cognitive and social development. The ignoring of the children's psychological needs harms the school's ability to educate, and therefore it is necessary to determine a new order of priorities.

⁸ P. Sahlberg, *Learning from Finland: Insights from a Successful Education System*, 2015, Mofet Institute.

Most of the research studies speak about the decisive role of the teacher as a “significant adult” for the child. This role is very critical for adolescents at-risk who experience a double risk in the transition from the middle school to the high school. This risk is also expressed in social rejection from the peer group and in low academic achievements.

The Negative Impact of Teachers

This type of external assessment also has negative impacts, such as the reduction of the scope of curricula because of the focus on the test material, labeling of students, harm to the students’ motivation and the teachers’ motivation in learning and teaching that derives from the pressure to show improvement in achievements, and a feeling of frustration among the teachers because of the difficulty to deploy the technology and the additional work.

This harm is significantly greater among adolescents at-risk, when one of the characteristics of adolescents at-risk is low self-esteem. Therefore, the assessment of formative learning is critical for them, especially during transitions, so that they can attain high achievements.

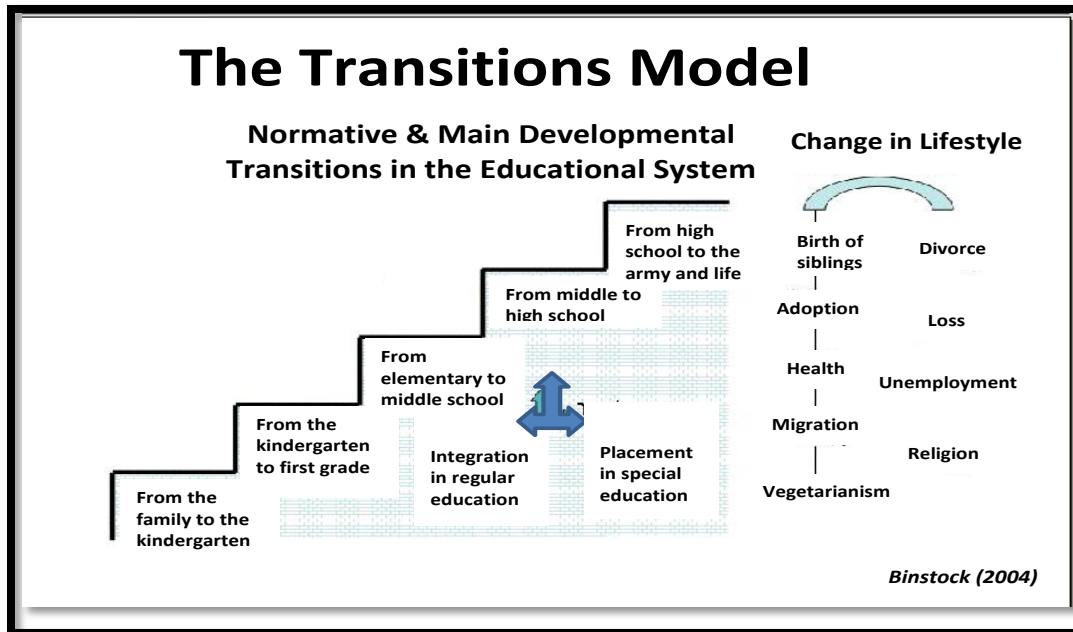
The MOFET Institute reviewed future trends and different challenges in education through STEEP⁹ analysis and found that the teacher’s role in the era of the learning in digital spaces is most critical to the management of the learning process, because of the students’ access to the knowledge. Another change is the need to adjust the evaluation estimates and convert them from grades, tests, homework, and performances to continuous feedback, for the improvement of the student’s involvement and achievements in individualized learning. Adolescents at-risk who face the evaluation of grades feel labeled. For them, this change is very necessary for empowerment and development of their involvement and feeling that they belong and are accepted.

⁹ STEEP: Social, Technological, Economical, Environmental, Political

Coping with Changes in the Transition from Middle School to High School

In Israel the education system has a tripartite structure: elementary school, for six years, from age six to age twelve; middle school, for three years, from age twelve to age fifteen; and high school, three years, from age fifteen to age eighteen.

Figure Number 1: The Israeli Transitions Model



The transition from the middle school to the high school is frequently a dramatic transition. This is a transition from a familiar place to a strange place, with the separation from the familiar significant adults, separation from friends, transition from an intimate framework to a large and seemingly anonymous framework, and change of role - from being the oldest to being the youngest. This transition frequently entails distance from the home, the need for travel, and so on. In essence, the transition necessitates the ability to adjust to many structural and human needs. The acquisition of tools that enable better coping with the transitions in the stage of adolescence is essential to the development of the ability to cope with future situations of change and to the development of personal and cognitive flexibility and facilitates the future integration. The ability to think positively also in difficult or pressuring situations, the ability to cope with difficulty, and even with failures in different situations, and the ability to see localized difficulty as an

opportunity for future change are all a part of the basic toolkit necessary for the construction of the resilience and the personal coping.

Adolescence constitutes a critical stage in the formation of the adolescent's self-identity, in which the question of "who am I?" becomes central and essential in his life and is often accompanied by crisis, confusion, or examination of the identity. Simultaneously with the development of the physical and intellectual abilities and in parallel to the formation of the personal identity, the adolescent acquires independence: he now needs his parents' assistance less and can get along by himself and make decisions himself, when the company of his peers helps him reduce his dependence on his parents.

The acquisition of independence is frequently accompanied by fears, since independence has a cost and not only a profit: a person who decides by himself and does things by himself is also responsible for the results of his decisions and actions. The assumption of responsibility demands mental resilience and the ability to pay the price of independence. Adolescents want, on the one hand, to be independent, to go to a place they want, to do as they want, and to return when they want. However, on the other hand, it is hard for them still to decide by themselves and it is hard for them still to bear the responsibility for the results of their actions. Therefore, they sometimes display independence and sometimes dependence.

The adolescent's ability to cope with the need for the formation and development of independence reflects an essential and critical process. The adolescent's ability to assume responsibility for different processes and for main junctures in his life and his ability to represent himself and to manage himself in a responsible manner, with an opinion and outlook when dealing with different factors, are vital to the continuation of his adult life.

Adolescents at-Risk and Transition

The process of the transition from the middle school to the high school increases the difficulty in the coping of adolescents at-risk with the new requirements. These

problems increase dramatically in the phase of transition and do not address the issue of adolescents at-risk, for whom coping with changes has a double risk, since they are defined as at-risk in emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social terms. The characteristics of adolescents at-risk include:

- (a) Change from a familiar, intimate place to a large, strange, and anonymous place.
- (b) Change of role - from being the oldest pupil to being the youngest one.
- (c) Separation from significant adults and friends.

Adolescents At-Risk and Big Data

Data are the means to change the way in which people think. The actions in the network constitute a source of documentation in the huge databases. In the world of big data, we must remember that the person is what is truly “big”.

Data are the means and not the end. The term big data, defined in the McKinsey Report¹⁰ in 2011 as “the next front of innovation, competition, and output”, has become a key component in the formation and making of decisions in the world of education in the 21st century following the change of the paradigm of data-based perception and behavior. The abundance of data in the education system enables education and learning to be data-driven.

In the context of adolescents at-risk, data allow the adjustment of the learning to their needs and the identification of trends of risk and decline in the learning and achievements in the stages of covert dropping-out.

Conclusion

Children at-risk are defined as children who may be found in physical, mental, or emotional situations of risk. The article addresses the population of children at-risk in Israel and the labeling in the processes of assessment and learning.

The problem of equality in the education system prevents opportunities for success for adolescents at-risk who come from disadvantaged populations and thus have

¹⁰ In: E. Avnei & A. Rotem. *Big Data, Smile, and Ethics – From Data and Insights*, 2015.

far lower chances of success. Most of the research studies speak about the decisive role of the teacher as a “significant adult” for the child. This role is very critical for adolescents at-risk who experience double risk in the transition from the middle school to the high school. This risk is also expressed in social rejection from the peer group and in low academic achievements that cause low self-esteem and low self-image.

^“Labeling is a disaster in education!” The teacher’s judgment of the student at-risk fixates his mental and academic state and closes the door to change and hope. This harm is significantly greater among adolescents at-risk, when one of the characteristics of adolescents at-risk is low self-esteem. Therefore, the assessment of formative learning is critical for them, especially during transitions, so that they can attain high achievements.

I have worked for many years with youth at-risk, lectured in academia in the fields of education and society, and led seminar groups in educational aspects of work with youths at-risk. Thus, I believe that the abundance of data in the education system enables education and learning to be data-driven. In the context of adolescents at-risk, data allow the adjustment of the learning to their needs and the identification of trends of risk and decline in the learning and achievements in the stages of covert dropping-out.

References

Avnei, E., & Rotem, A. *Big Data, Smile, and Ethics – From Data and Insights*, 2015.

Binstock A. *Kit On Normative Transitions in the Education System*, 2004, From: The Psychological Counseling Service Website in the Ministry of Education Website, www.cms.education.gov.il.

Birenboim, M. Assessment for Learning is a Complicated Action. *Echo of Education*, 81 (7), 40-47, 2007.

Costante, K. Leading the instructional core: An interview with Richard Elmore. *Conversation*, 2(3), 2-12, 2012.

Dovrat S. *The National Plan for Education: Report of the National Task Force for the Promotion of Education in Israel*, 2005, The Ministry Of Education, Culture, and Sport, Jerusalem.

Dryfoos J. G. *Adolescents At-Risk: Prevalence and Prevention*, 1990, Oxford University Press, N.Y.

Glenn H. S., Nelson, J. *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World: Seven Building Blocks for Developing Capable Young People*, 1988, Rocklin California.

Ministry of Education of Israel. "Rationale of the Educational Continuum", From the Ministry of Education Website, www.cms.education.gov.il

Ministry of Education of Israel. National Information and Communications Technology Program: Adjustment of the Education System to the Skills of the 21st Century, April 2010.

Mofet Institute. Trends and Future Challenges in Tests, 2016.

Sahlberg, P. *Learning from Finland: Insights from a Successful Education System*, 2015, Mofet Institute.

Shmidt, H. *The Prime Minister's Committee for Children and Youths At-Risk*. Report of the Public Committee for the Examination of the Situation of Children At-Risk and in Distress, 2006.

Stellman, M. *Thoughts on Teacher Training. New Trends in the 21st Century*, 2014, Van Lear Institute and Mofet Institute, pp. 11-12.

Stiggins, R. J. From formative assessment to assessment for learning: A Path to Success in standards-based schools. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170508700414>, 2005.