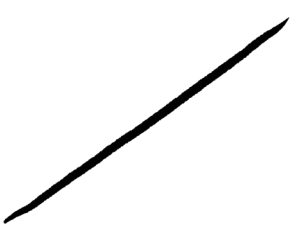


ONLINE LEARNING & ASSESSMENT EXAMPLES FOR IMPROVING TEACHING PRACTICE

MARA DORIANA
OPREA



University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences
oprea.mara-doriana.119@fpve.unibuc.ro

Abstract: In addition to its drawbacks, the e-school experience has prompted an important restructuring of how the entire teaching and assessment system should be reorganised to support learning. We focused our research on the formative – educational value of using complementary assessment methods in online schools as successful practices, both for improving the general assessment process and for achieving the central goal of education – learning.

The advantages of using these methods, proven through the implementation of the online questionnaire as a research method, have led us to expand our findings on how assessment can support learning, with the conviction that technology has entered our lives and brought alternatives in finding the most effective ways to keep education and learning at high levels in online schools as well. By interviewing 97 teachers who have carried out online teaching activities, we can conclude that it is beneficial to use complementary assessment methods in virtual classrooms as well, through a harmonious combination with traditional ones.

Keywords: online teaching, assessment – the fuel of learning, online assessment, use of complementary assessment methods, research methods, autonomy, self-empowerment of the learner in the cognitive process, traits of the postmodernist teacher.

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Contemporary society is undergoing a continuous transformation, and schools must meet the new challenges, proposing viable alternatives for continuing education while digitizing education and adapting to the needs/requirements of new generations in order to facilitate good social integration.

With this article we aim to answer questions related to the experiences of the online school in the last year (2020-2021), regarding the methods used in the evaluation of teaching and mediated learning, the difficulties encountered and the proposed solutions. The experience gained in the online school is a lesson learned, with advantages and disadvantages worth considering for improving future teaching practice.

Through our research we have investigated how learning in the online environment can be stimulated through the use of complementary assessment methods.

The starting *hypotheses* were as follows:

- 1) Students using the portfolio as a complementary assessment method are more engaged in the learning process compared to students who do not use this assessment method.
- 2) The use of concept maps as a complementary assessment method has beneficial effects on students’ deeper engagement in the learning process.

We specifically sought to find out whether online schooling has changed anything in the way students are assessed, whether teachers have relied more on complementary methods of assessment to stimulate learning as opposed to how they were used in direct activities, and what benefits of online learning we can perpetuate in the future, whether we return to the classroom or continue in a hybrid system.

The rationale behind the research on the benefits of using complementary evaluation methods in the online environment started, on the one hand, from I.T. Radu who stated that, “unlike traditional methods that assess school results obtained over a limited period of time and usually with a wider or narrower range of content, complementary assessment methods have at least two characteristics: on the one hand, they assess results in close connection with training/ learning, often at the same time; on the other hand, they concern school results obtained over

a longer period of time, aimed at the formation of skills, the acquisition of competences and especially changes in interests, attitudes, related to learning activity.” (2000, pp. 223-224). In other words, assessment is the fuel of learning. Learning is the core of educational action and benefits from the services of assessment. Both are two self-sustaining processes. Both learners and teachers align their approaches to organising learning with the requirements of assessment. When these change, so does the learning.

Other reasons/arguments for focusing our research on assessment methods were their formative value, which recommends the use of complementary methods as successful practices, both for assessment and for the achievement of the central objective of education – learning, i.e. that they:

- ensure an interactive approach to the instructional-educational activity, by involving the student in the personal assessment process, increasing his responsibility for how he chooses to present himself, based on his own learning;
- facilitate better application of knowledge, skills and abilities in various contexts and situations;
- provide an overview of the student’s work over a longer period of time (e.g. *the portfolio*), overcoming the inadequacies of other traditional assessment methods with a survey character in the subject and between students;
- ensure a better conceptual clarification and an easy integration of assimilated knowledge into the notional system, thus becoming operational (e.g.: *concept map*);
- discourage the practice of speculation or learning only for the grade;
- reduce the stress factor to the extent that the teacher is a counsellor/facilitator, the assessment having as its primary purpose the improvement of the activity and the stimulation of the student to become aware of possible errors and not sanctioning him at any cost;
- allow assessment activities to include material developed over a longer period of time, which gives each student the opportunity to work at his/her own pace and to achieve performance according to his/her own abilities;
- stimulate multiple intelligences, leaving room for original and creative manifestations.

The methodological premise used in this research was that learning is not simply a process of storing knowledge, but rather an activity that involves cognitive, voluntary and emotional effort and that is carried out more efficiently and easily when the individual is motivated to participate and to get out of the comfort zone. Assessment, like teaching, can provide the learner with external resources for engagement. In

learning processes, in order to develop autonomy, *the child must be helped to help himself* – said Maria Montessori.

Supporting these ideas is the fact that at the core of *online instructional design* is the *constructivism* of learning, which is based on the following central idea: human knowledge is constructed through a *creative* and *active* process, with the learner being the main agent of his or her own knowledge construction process, experimenting and reflecting on pedagogically organised experiences. *The pedagogical message* of constructivism is that “people are capable and willing to learn, but often not *as* or *when* others want them to, but as they see fit”. (Siebert, 2001, pp. 212-213)

Because we value assessment as a process that should stimulate learning and not as external control, being part of the act of learning itself, we started our research from assessing to learning, interviewing 97 teachers who have taught in the online school, 30% of whom have been teaching for 0-5 years, 28% of whom have been teaching for more than 20 years, followed by 22% of those who have been teaching for 6-10 years, and 12% of those with 11-15 years’ seniority. The smallest percentage (8%) consisted of teachers with 16-20 years of seniority. 88% of teachers originated from urban areas. The data obtained from completing the questionnaire was confidential.

The template of the online *questionnaire* is available at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/>. The questionnaire items were closed (1, 3, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15), open (4, 6) and semi-open (2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11), the last two questions being identification questions. The questions captured the frequency and efficiency with which teachers use complementary assessment methods in online school, what they are, their advantages and disadvantages, whether or not they have attended various refresher courses in order to better conduct/organise online teaching/assessment activities, what directions for modernising and adapting complementary assessment methods to online learning they propose on the basis of their experiences and the applications used, what difficulties they have encountered in online schooling and to what extent the resources/experiences of online teaching-learning-assessment activities can be used when pupils return to school.

The answers provided were analyzed and statistically organized, therefore we can declare that the hypotheses from which we started in this investigative approach have been validated, *the portfolio*, used as a complementary assessment method, being considered the most frequently used method for stimulating student learning in *online school*, *along with concept maps*, followed by *the report*, *the 3-2-1 technique* and *the R.T.A. method* (Reply-Throw-Ask) adapted to the online environment. Respondents had the opportunity to add other methods they used in the online assessment, namely: *google forms*, *kahoot*, *wordwall*, *project*, *analysis of student work*. Although not as frequently used, *the method of systematic observation* of student activity and behaviour is one of the methods considered important by teachers. The *project*, *self-assessment*, *investigation* and *report* were also considered to be important, although they are not used very often for online assessment. Continuing the investigative approach on the importance of using complementary assessment methods in online school, we analysed the answers of teachers who consider these methods interesting and useful because they are more flexible, based on the pleasure of working online, offering personalised tasks, and being accessible.

This is precisely why the frequency with which complementary assessment methods are used is very high, with 94% of teachers confirming that they use them “often” and “very often”. The fact that methods using media platforms have also been specified indicates that online assessment practice is enhanced by the educational offer of the Internet, which is encouraging given that preparation for online teaching/learning/assessment has been somewhat of a pandemic necessity. Although 74% of the teachers indicated that they had attended training courses in the last year to improve their online activities, the responses to the various items show that they continue to have difficulties in using the technology. Thus, beyond the advantages of using different platforms for online learning and assessment, there are also obstacles linked mainly to the fact that students are unable to access the internet due to lack of resources (32%). Although they are digital natives, primary school pupils in particular have a low capacity to use technology and still dependent on adults to connect to online school (25%). Difficulty in using technology by some teachers is an additional impediment to optimal online learning (20%), followed by the burden of organising time so that all pupils can complete learning/assessment tasks correctly (13%). There were also a few respondents who said there were no difficulties in using complementary assessment methods for online learning activities (10%).

Through open-ended questions, teachers were requested to mention ***the advantages of using complementary assessment methods in online school***. Analysing and summarising the more than 150 advantages listed, we can say that the following advantages were most often mentioned: complementary assessment methods have the merit of reducing students’ *stress* in assessment, focusing on what the student *knows*, leaving room for *autonomy* and *self-responsibility* in the cognitive process of learning and assessment, aspects less captured by traditional assessment methods. Pupils are more relaxed, their creative potential is stimulated, and complementary assessment methods are more attractive, stimulating the development of their self-assessment skills. Thus, they are given greater freedom of expression, support the pupil towards learning, offer a broader perspective on individual progress, while avoiding hierarchisation, are more flexible, adaptable, based on learner involvement in the assessment process, develop *critical thinking*, *reflexivity*, *metacognition* and *meta-evaluation*, stimulating interest in the activity. Complementary methods of assessment provide sufficient and varied opportunities for pupils to demonstrate what they know, but more importantly, *what they can do*, and allow both teacher and pupil to understand the level of knowledge acquisition and skills development, to identify deficiencies and their causes, and to make the necessary adjustments to regulate (adjust) the teaching-learning process. They are particularly useful in formative, continuous assessment, monitoring not only the products of the activity, but also the learning processes and the progress of the pupils.

From the multitude of advantages mentioned, we can conclude that it is beneficial to use complementary assessment methods also in online school, through a harmonious blend with traditional ones, with 64.7% of respondents ticking the option that they had no difficulties in using complementary assessment methods in the online environment. Genevieve Meyer (2000) has made it clear that no evaluation is ‘pure’ or ‘perfect’ in itself or in absolute terms. The perfection of any assessment arises from the consistency

of the ways in which it is carried out with the proposed goals. It is therefore necessary to know the ways in which we can improve existing practice and focus on modernising and adapting these methods. Thus, the majority of teachers reacted to the challenge and offered valuable ideas. By analysing and summarising the approximately 137 options listed for modernising and adapting complementary assessment methods to online learning, we can conclude that these should make use of media resources, games, adapt to children's needs with the possibility of presenting material in modules of varying degrees of difficulty, involving them in their own assessment. Platforms for the use of complementary assessment and learning methods in online schools were also specified. The apps used for online learning activities were found to be, in order of frequency of response, *Zoom*, *Google Meet* and *Google Classroom*, followed by *WhatsApp*. The following apps were also specified: *Aservio*, *Webex*, *Microsoft Teams*, *Kinderpedia*, *Jambord*, *Padlet*, *Wordwall*, *Kahoot*, *Miro*, *Book Creator*, *Story Jumper*, *Voki*, *Canva*, *Liveworksheets* through which quick feedback is provided, which shows the concern of teachers to adapt to the requirements of online learning. The need has also arisen to create media programmes to support applications where *individual and group work can be combined*, the use of *graphics* and *interactive virtual whiteboards*, *quizzes*.

What the online school experience has provided us with, both advantages and disadvantages, are practices worth considering for improving future teaching work that will be carried out either directly or indirectly. In this respect, 80% of respondents indicated that it would be beneficial to keep these methods and use the experience gained in the online school when returning to face-to-face teaching, for example:

- Media platforms that are recently being developed to be used as alternative resources to stimulate learning, providing access to short videos, photos and apps to make learning more fun;
- After-school communication can be continued on different networks to keep educational agents (pupils, teachers, parents) in continuous contact;
- Content materials, both varied and adapted to be delivered online, for individual study and for preparation of discussions to take place directly in the classroom, thus avoiding dictation for word-for-word reproduction.

Much of the pre-pandemic classes were taught using more expository methods, which were less cognitively and/or socially demanding. In the online school, most teachers felt the need to move beyond this traditional, magisterial teaching style and shift the spotlight from the teacher to the learner, as the agent directly involved in their own learning. Now, when information is just a click away, teachers' roles change, as they become the *conductors and organisers of the knowledge produced by the student*. Learning means stepping out of the control zone, and teachers must find the resources to reach children's hearts and minds, with the awareness that motivation lies at the heart of all good learning. The teacher has a duty to encourage access to knowledge, but above all to make pupils feel the desire to study a particular subject. "The best way for the teacher to

generate *interest* in a subject is to present it in such a way that it appears worth knowing.” (Bruner, 1970, p. 31)

Considering their role as *facilitators* of knowledge, the postmodernist teacher’s goal is to teach their students *how* to think, not *what* to think. The postmodernist teacher is in *partnership* with pupils, negotiating learning objectives as well as forms and methods of assessment. The aim is not necessarily to train them in formulating answers to formulated questions and problems, but rather to help them discover ways of asking questions and critiquing matters. Classrooms of learners in the postmodern view are seen by Appelbaun Peter (2001) as true communities of inquiry, demonstrating the importance of the social for all learning. The aim is not necessarily to train students in formulating answers to the questions and problems posed, but rather to help them discover ways of questioning and critiquing problems.

Combining new technology-based methods that focus on creating and sustaining the pleasure of learning, discovering and applying, by fostering intrinsic motivation (avoiding “learning for the grade”), creates interactive and even fun learning/assessment opportunities. What is important is how the learner uses what they have learned, focusing on the formative, the development of cognitive processes. In the online environment the lesson becomes a *dynamic* process that is tailored to the specific needs, preferences and sensitivities of the learners and should remain so. Not unfrequently teachers complain that pupils, and even students, do not turn on their cameras. Apart from well-founded reasons, this could also be interpreted as a protest against the lack of interest or attractiveness of the subject or the way it is taught.

The social relationships between teacher and students during online schooling have been reshaped, undergoing changes in order to maintain the mediated connection necessary for indirect learning. They have become more *open*, based on mutual support, constructive dialogue and cooperation. The teacher’s *authority* is *implied* rather than imposed, with an emphasis on dialogue, negotiation processes, fostering autonomous learning. Pupils and students should be encouraged to participate in decisions about what/how they want to learn, how they will use what they have acquired and what assessment methods will best demonstrate what they know and can do – a direction in line with postmodernist views. The opinions of teachers who have used complementary assessment methods in online schools more than they did in face-to-face teaching bear witness to this.

I believe that, in addition to its drawbacks, the pandemic has also provided some advantages for the Romanian school: firstly, an advantage that I felt to be very important is that of *access* from anywhere (relying solely on the Internet connection), followed by access to documents and content supports for information.

In conclusion, it can be said that, in order to stimulate learning, assessment must favour *negotiation* processes involving decision-making collaboration between the student(s) and the assessing teacher. Since assessment is not an end in and of itself but should lead to the optimisation of the overall process carried out in school, the lack of alternatives creates routine, conformity and does not lead to the full development of an individual’s personality. Based on the idea that the way in which the pupil/student is assessed and feels

assessed influences his/her performance and success in school, the following conditions must be met for effective assessment:

- evaluation should be a learning experience;
- it should be challenging, non-stressful, enjoyable (because it attests what the student knows);
- be constructive rather than destructive;
- focus on what has been learned and not on what has gone wrong;
- to encourage and enable the pupil/student to learn to construct his/her personal form of learning behaviour;
- provide opportunities for deliberation, reflection and revision;
- be clear, explicit, adaptive, dialogical and reflective;
- develop self-assessment skills;
- value error as a necessary step towards evaluation.

Effective assessment does not stop at the end of the process, but creates new alternatives, studies their impact and contemplates new directions.

A teacher can be considered a *director* who can showcase what his actors can do best. The development of meta-evaluative skills involves stimulating the learner to reflect on their own evaluation procedures. The aim of post-modernist science education is – as Matthew Weinstein (2001) states – *not only to understand science, but also to feel the excitement of studying it*; education must be one that leads individuals to be in a continual state of questioning, a state in which they are constantly asking questions and seeking answers. The postmodern school must train social agents capable of diagnosis, intervention and change of the existential framework.

Being aware that students come to school to learn, we asked ourselves the following question: *When can the teacher be satisfied with the assessment carried out in such a way as to stimulate learning?* We will mention some possible answers below: when the pupil has a better *understanding* of how to learn; when the pupils have *acquired* the necessary knowledge and have the opportunity to *improve* their work in order to avoid mistakes; when they can *reflect* on their own results, by carrying out *self-evaluation* of the learning process, of the work carried out and of the achieved results; when the evaluation does not induce stress in the participants; when the pupils wish to be *evaluated* again – giving them opportunities to affirm/prove what they know and what they can do.

Complementary assessment methods have the major advantage of providing insight into the internal learning process, requiring reflection both on the part of the learner on his/her work and on the part of the teacher on the process and context in which learning has taken place. Based on cooperation between teacher and learner, these methods particularly call for discussion of the stages of the activity and the achieved results, highlighting the positive elements and the errors that can be constructively rectified. They are intended not to penalise in a particular way, but to guide the way forward for a better construction of the pupil's knowledge and learning.

With this article we want to highlight the need to adopt ideas and methods to modernise assessment practice in schools, which aim to promote the idea that we assess to see what the pupil knows and can do, to see what progress the pupil has made since the previous stage, and to value the positive aspects of assessment to encourage further learning. Through assessment we must not hunt for pupils' mistakes, as this will lead to a negative perception of the learning and assessment processes and of the assessor. As Monteil states, "failure to perform a task should not lead to the general failure of the sufferer" (1997, p. 45), recognising the learner's right to be wrong: "Knowledge is a road that opens up as we go." (Varela Francisco, 1990, p. 110, apud H. Siebert (2001)).

Just as teaching must support learning by providing the right conditions for it to emerge, be nurtured and unfold, so *assessment* must aim to stimulate increasingly effective learning.

The e-school experience, besides its downsides, has the great advantage that it has led to an important restructuring of how the entire teaching and assessment system should be reorganised in order to support the learning process.

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Mara Doriană Oprea is a second year student at the UNATC "I.L. Caragiale", Acting Department and at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Pedagogy Department, University of Bucharest. She is a graduate of the "Elena Cuza" National High School – pedagogical profile, she attended piano courses at the School of Music and Fine Arts No. 4 in Bucharest, classical ballet courses at the National Opera of Bucharest, and is currently performing the leading role in the series *Adela* (2021), produced by Ruxandra Ion.