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## THE SOCIAL PURPOSES OF LEARNING ASSESSMENT

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*Arthur Abulencia*

### **Abstract**

*Assessment has been studied by many researchers and educators from the prism of educational theories viewed purely from an instructional or pedagogical analysis, but there is an open space in which learning assessment could be further scrutinized using sociological perspective so as to explore its social roles. The paper analyzes the social consequences of assessment and its resistances from the various participants of teaching and learning process. Assessment has been widely used for accountability, control, and sorting mechanism of society to distribute the limited available social positions. Thus only those students properly equipped with knowledge, values and competencies excel in the assessment devices. Students in the lower echelon of society, however, are left with few opportunities for social mobility and employment due to their limited capacity to pass through this filtering machine called assessment. Teachers and student demonstrate some manifest and latent resistances to the negative consequences of assessment. Hence, assessment both serves as a system to improve learning or account teachers and schools and as an instrument for academic segregation and tracking. It should be viewed beyond the walls of classroom by looking at the close, but intricate linkage of assessment to society.*

*Keywords:* Assessment, Social Roles and Purposes of Assessment, Academic Performance

### **Introduction**

According to John Dewey, education is never complete, its process is inevitable and continuous. Going to school helps prepare

ourselves for the greater tasks that await us in the real world. Better yet, acquiring those skills and knowledge does not only serve as a preparation for life, but life itself. Ballantine (1983) cites the social dimension of Emile Durkheim's concept of education (1956), "Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those who are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined...."

Education is acknowledged across the world as the most vital public service of all. The roles of both the government and the private sector are visibly observable in promoting quality education at all levels. Most societies, including the Philippines, recognize the complementary roles of the public and private institutions in the educational system. As partners of the public schools, the private institutions equally educate the youth of the land, but generally, the curriculum and other aspects of education fall under the auspices of the state through its agencies like the Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, being the overarching hand in monitoring, supervising and controlling of the entire education system.

Educational assessment is a major feature of the educational landscape. When we talk of schools, it is difficult not to deal with tests, examinations or assessment - a mechanism designed to measure the effect of educational policy, programs, and practices. Prof. Ian Diamond (2009) of The Economic and Social Research Council explains the importance of assessment: "Assessment is essential to allow individuals to get the educational support they need to succeed, to see the effectiveness of different educational methods, and to ensure that education budgets are being spent effectively. Inevitably, assessment also risks marking teachers, learners and institutions as successes or failures".

Afflerbach (2002) argues that "testing culture continues to exert strong influence in school communities on how and what teachers teach, how students are viewed, and how (or how not) they succeed".

The teacher, as the primary actor-implementer in the assessment process, employs variety of ways to assess the students. Most of the time, examinations in various types and forms are the means to measure achievement.

### **Role of Teachers in Assessment**

In the last two decades, an assessment movement has emerged and spread throughout a variety of social sectors including businesses, social services, and education. In every structure of society, assessment is being implemented in different levels – institutional, divisional, departmental, program, and classroom level – and on both the academic and administrative sides of the institution. Admittedly, selecting one's future mates needs assessment or appraisal. Most importantly, assessment is part and parcel of preschool, elementary, secondary and technical-vocational education.

In everyday life, assessment is deployed by ordinary people in their social interactions. For instance, a consumer appraises or evaluates an item or good that s/he would like to buy in terms of its price, features and quality. A child readily gives his/her comment and judgment, if asked about the lesson of the day as to whether it is interesting or not. Broadfoot (1996) holds that "passing judgment on people, on things, on ideas, on values is part of the process of making sense of reality and where we stand in any given situation".

Teachers, as key actors in education, are ensnared, if not enmeshed in evaluative settings. Whenever teachers decide whether a certain student needs a remedial class or not is an example of their evaluative function. Teachers' evaluation maybe based on their personal knowledge of the students or they may rely on a particular technique such as tests or anecdotal record to know the real score. With the knowledge at hand, they know best to help and encourage the students to study hard and perform well.

Since appearance is illusory and personal knowledge is biased, the educational system tries to organize and systematize a body of

knowledge and processes which we call educational assessment. Heavily anchored on educational statistics, the educational assessment resembles scientific objectivity in assessing and evaluating pupils/students performance or achievement in the learning environment. The results of testing are considered as measures of individual's ability, aptitude, and achievement. Teachers can, therefore, categorize students as below average, average, above average based on the scores of their students resulting and perpetuating the pre-existing stereotypes such as 'lazy', 'dull', or 'bright'. With test scores, the teacher, as powerful authority in the school is more equipped with knowledge of students to label their personae.

In the Philippines, assessment has been instituted as one of the backbones of the education system. The measure of student and school performance is quantitatively gauged through the results of national examinations. Basically thought of as achievement tests, they measure the extent of learning among the students in terms of the prescribed competencies of the national government as well as indicate teachers' performance and school rankings.

Assessment is so complex that it is not only a matter of education. Since the education system is within the purview of society, the various institutions such as legislative, business, parents, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are interested in education as stakeholders. A case in point is the EDCOM (Education Committee) Report in 1991 which stresses the direct link of education and legislation. The various NGOs are committed to enhancing the quality of education through certain efforts such as donating books, school building and providing technology. These stakeholders would rather base their evaluation of the education institutions according to some empirical data, i.e., test scores in national or international (competitive) examinations.

The EFA (Education for All) 2000 Assessments: Philippine Country Reports recommend three points to improve the quality of education in the country by highlighting the role of testing. The national

government through its education agency should 1) Enhance the use of National Elementary Achievement Test (NEAT) results for analyzing sub-sector performance and improving individual school performance; 2) Develop and employ more varied instruments to measure multilevel intelligence including life skills in classroom teaching; and 3) Evolve a comprehensive testing program vis-à-vis the curriculum with the assistance of the guidance counselors, in coordination with the subject teachers.

Although responsibility for assessment falls on the shoulder of the entire educational system, teachers and students are the primary designers, collectors, and users of assessment data in the direct service of learning. Recognizing the unique position of the classroom teacher, the school standards seek to uphold, legitimize, and extend the purview of the teacher in a range of assessment purposes and practices. In a comprehensive and coherent assessment system, teachers must accommodate the range of purposes that classroom assessment must serve—from self-reflection on practice, to monitoring achievement for individual students and assigning grades, to gauging levels of engagement, to reporting to parents, even to making decisions about the placement of students. Teachers are not solely engaged in teaching but also preoccupied with assessment as a one crucial task.

Like masters in an apprentice system, teachers need to implement teaching and learning processes to determine whether their students for whom they are responsible are learning adequately. Teachers would always be forced to determine whether students are learning the appropriate knowledge, skills and values that are supposed to be learned. Given that knowledge and skills are simple and if there are only few students, student learning can be reliably monitored through informal means such as recitations and informal conversation with them. But with burgeoning knowledge that students need to learn, informal assessment no longer suffices to measure student learning. There is a pressure to shift to more efficient and rational way of determining student progress by the teacher and the school.

In the modern secular society, assessment by testing has gained strong grounding. Every social institution resorts to testing as an instrument to identify people who are qualified or not for a certain role or position. Test results or assessment are chief vehicles to determine who will receive the awards and honors that society offers. Test as considered being objective is relied upon by schools to distinguish the intelligent from the less intelligent, the competent from not-so-competent, those to be promoted or retained. Truly, a modern society is characterized as a competitive society.

Test results are, therefore, so powerful mechanisms that delineate and classify students. Testing or assessment has been institutionalized in our education system which is equally supported by the bigger society by always referring to the results of tests, as basis of employment, promotions, awards and incentives.

### **Educational Assessment**

Educational assessment, to Pellegrino (2001), seeks to determine how well students are learning and is an integral part of the quest for improved education. It provides feedback to students, educators, parents, policy makers, and the public about the effectiveness of educational services. Educational assessment is an institutionalized mechanism in every school system so that the abovementioned functions are carried out. School managers and education policy makers as well as classroom teachers are interested in their students' educational performance and achievement. The only way to measure and know the level of learning of the students and pupils is by implementing assessment. Thus every enrolled student and every employed teacher, as parts of a school are subject to assessment. The students are targeted as the takers of tests, examinations or any assessment technique to establish their learning in a given learning context. Likewise teachers have no choice, but to implement a kind of assessment or evaluation of their students' performance. Far from just being secondary or non-primary aspect of teaching, assessment serves as an integral part of the role of teachers. The results of assessment are scores which will serve as the bases of students' grades or marks.

Students are labeled based on the scores obtained from the examinations given by teachers.

Since assessment is an integral part of the school or education system, its implementation is regularized. All the actors of education, namely: learners, teachers, school managers and supervisors, parents, and even the business sector have accepted the inevitable role of assessment whether in the classroom setting or national context. Policy makers and legislators are fully aware of international testing standards and organizations. Assessment has acquired a life of its own, if not reified by the way people perceive the instructional purposes of assessment. Thus, assessment is a social fact.

Corbett (2008) asserts that educators and educational thinkers are in search of an “illusive holy grail” that will measure educational achievement. Corbett termed this as *edumometer*, “the technology, and more recently the set of technologies, which will, once and for all, provide an objective measure of what a person has learned and what a person is capable of learning”. *Edumometer* is basically the standardized test that has been developed to measure and grade intellectual and academic performance. Thus Corbett, confirms the existence of “legions of specialists working (school psychologists, learning disabilities specialists, psychometrists, educational statisticians, etc.) in schools whose entire professional mandate is shaped by the assumption that learning and intellectual ‘capacity’ can be measured”. After these tests are developed and validated, they are used by teachers who have been trained in and work in administrative structures which routinely and unproblematically grade and sort children and youth on the basis of technologies of mental measurement that have come to characterize what school is all about for everyone involved.

Ollman, an American social critic, provides an interesting and brief justification of the presence of examination in our society. He explains the emergence of assessment or examination culture in the light of a capitalist society. To this effect, he says that in a capitalist system:

...the capitalist class is the one who controls the main levers of power in our society, required from a system of education. Here, it is clear that capitalists need a system of education that provides young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for their businesses to function and prosper. But they also want schools to give youth the beliefs, attitudes, emotions and associated habits of behavior that make it easy for capitalists to tap into this store of knowledge and skills. And they need all these not only to maximize their profits but also to help reproduce the social, economic and even political conditions and accompanying processes that allow them to extract any profits whatsoever. Without workers, consumers and citizens who are well versed in and accepting of their roles in these processes, the entire capitalist system would grind to a halt. It is here—particularly as regards the behavioral and attitudinal prerequisites of capitalist rule—that the culture of exams has become indispensable.

Obviously, examination is an invention of the elite or the ruling class to serve their economic interest and perpetuate the status quo. In modern society, examination or assessment is the legitimate and acceptable means to sort talents from the general population rather than the use of physical violence.

In Orwell's contention in his satirical novel, *Animal Farm*(1961): "all animals are created equal. But some animals are more equal than others". Orwell is clearly stating that society is unequal in terms of the distribution of resources or wealth. Sociologists and social thinkers like Marx have clearly elaborated the social inequality in all known human society, either on individual or group level. Schaefer and Lamm (1995) define social inequality as "a condition in which members of a society have different amount of wealth, prestige and power" (p. 208). This system of inequality is called stratification. Members of society are ranked or structured according to some given criteria which are usually



wealth, power and prestige. In every educational system, there is educational inequity in terms of power and control, allocation of opportunity, and enjoyment of privileges. Since there is limited opportunity to admission in schools, scholarships, employment, a mechanism of selection is explicitly in place. In the process of selection that is better fit and qualified for a certain role, the ideology of competition becomes a natural interaction in school.

From social inequality the meritocratic society rises. A meritocratic 'contest' system really depends upon the talented people being correctly identified; despite any unpromising social aspects they may display (low status, skin color or gender, or any of the signs of a 'lower class' upbringing). In school context, assessment is the way to determine the merit of a particular person to hold or be conferred a degree.

### **Social Roles of Assessment**

Educational assessment is mainly the task of the national agency for education. In the Philippines, the Department of Education serves as the steering agency to develop and implement policy and rules on educational assessment. More specifically, DepEd has a specialized bureau to do the aforementioned functions, that is, the National Education Testing and Research Center (NETRC). Presently, the NETRC is implementing the annual testing of graduating elementary pupils and high school students. Educational assessment, being in the hands of the national government, is a way to control and rationalize the educational practice in the country.

The use of formal assessment to effect control by way of accountability has become a typical and prominent feature of education policy making. The concept of quality assurance and quality control is being employed by various educational institutions so that universities or schools are very strict in their admission standards for students and hiring policies for their faculty. Indeed, the inputs of education are assured of quality by setting higher standards of admission. On the other hand, they also employ quality control for their procedures and

examinations so as to produce quality graduates/products. Quality assurance and quality control are attained because of assessment or evaluation.

Assessment is connected to the ideology of the mainstream education. Technically speaking, the curriculum content is the one being measured by national examinations based on the competencies of the curriculum; hence, close and direct relationship of the curriculum content and the instrument or assessment. In short, only those students who are socialized and equipped with adequate knowledge, skills and competencies pass the examination and are certified to move upward to the academic ladder.

Farganis (1993) says that in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim “demonstrates the dramatic increase in the differentiation and specialization of functions in modern society”. This proliferation of division of labor in a modern capitalist society requires new forms of social control in allocating new positions or roles in society. It was formal assessment which was accepted and legitimated as a means to control those qualified and fit to occupy the positions. The modern rational society embodies these features: calculability, uniformity, predictability and standardization, as articulated by Max Weber (Ritzer, 1996). In filling up the vacant roles, the state employs a mechanism that is also rational in character. Unlike during the period of premodern society, allocation of roles was highly non-rational or traditional, i.e. selection was based on tribes, kinship, or ascribed status.

Competence to perform the job is highly important in the appointment of position. Anyone who can demonstrate competence to discharge the functions will be appointed. But the competence is gained through a process of formal education in established schools and universities which later on certify the trainees as someone who has the qualification and skills. Allied to certification of competence, the idea of selection or competition is needed to strongly demonstrate one’s claim to have gained the required skills.

In a competitive examination, the ones who passed the test are given the opportunity to rule and exercise authority while those who failed are rejected. Ironically, their failure serves to further legitimize so-called the passers's success. This so called condition of fair competition breeds a kind of frustration on the part nonpassers or nonperformers. In reality, the level of self-esteem and self-confidence of the passers will be enhanced or chastened by comparison. Even a relative degree of positive achievement is likely to be transformed into something negatively perceived as failure, if not the lowest or worst mark in the class.

In the context of educational assessment, Dearden (1979) asserts that "comparative assessment effected by prescriptive distribution also invites competition, a precondition of which is scarcity of some desired good, for example 'A' marks". Admittedly, learning achievements are infinitely repeatable or progressive, if not incremental. Educational achievements are limited only by such things as variations in educability and scarcity of access to limited educational resources, for example, places in certain institutions or expensive equipment. Students who enroll in a well-funded school have the advantage in learning and in the test results by virtue of the learning resources, as compared to those in a public school situated in a far flung area – depressed, disadvantaged and underserved.

### **Social Purposes of Assessment**

Assessment may vary in its purpose when we consider the level of analysis. National examinations or assessments of students are viewed as the means of setting higher and more rigorous standards for student learning. Assessment may also provide necessary information to the schools and the national government regarding the needs of teachers such as staff development, learning resources, bulk of work and related matters, through periodic assessment of students and teachers, we could set the rubric or direction for curriculum reform. But generally, the purpose of assessment from the minds of teachers and bureaucrats of Department of Education is to improve instruction in the

classroom. In almost all cases, Ravela, et. al. (2009) assumed that assessment can serve:

- as a basis for better-grounded education policies,
- as a means of improving the management of education systems,
- as an instrument to foster collaboration and continuous learning within those systems.

Skidmore (2003) enumerates the uses assessment information:

- “validating existing knowledge and acting as a passport to further learning opportunities
- screening for different vocational pathways, broadly corresponding to professional/white collar/trade-specific/occupational schemes
- gaining access to some schools
- informing employers’ hiring decisions
- generating performance information about schools, leading to differential status and precipitating particular kinds of intervention strategy”.

For his part, Black (1997) categorizes the purposes of assessment into those concerned with (a) support of learning; (b) certification, which includes reporting individual achievement, or grading, placement and promotion; and (c) accountability. Because different people are making judgments about students for different purposes, there are often serious areas of overlap that lead to ambiguities and tensions. Teachers, for example, must balance their roles as facilitator and coach to promote learning along with their role as judge when they assign grades at the end of the term.

External assessments are usually standardized tests which are developed and implemented by national governments or international organizations. These external assessments usually “indicate who is better and who is best, are intended to provide information about how national education systems perform compared to those of other

countries and are thus generally competitive in their outlook. Findings are utilized by national governments to inform educational policy, often under the banner of raising standards” (Biesta, 2008).

Mansell and James (2008) aver that assessment performs an increasing number of functions in recent years: “from judging individual pupils to evaluating schools and monitoring national performance”. Harlen (2007) sums up the aims of summative assessment as: “internal school tracking of student progress; informing other teachers, parents, students; certification/accreditation or selection; monitoring national standards; evaluating school provision”.

National tests at the end of high school have a number of functions within an educational system to rank students, selection process for universities, for teachers, a guide to the implemented aims of the course, and as such they are a teaching resource.

Assessment exerts a powerful influence upon students, potentially playing a vital role in determining their understandings of the formal curriculum, and having a huge impact on learning and shaping students' views of appropriate learning behavior. Assessment defines what students do, how they spend their time, and how they come to see themselves as students.

Be that as it may, then assessment acts as a powerful mechanism for communicating important messages to students about what we want them to be able to achieve during their academic lives and how best they might go about it. McDonnell (1994) in her study says that “assessment has become a form of regulatory policy: rules are promulgated to govern the conditions under which rewards and sanctions will be imposed on individual students or schools”.

A number of studies have demonstrated that in some contexts assessment poses a detrimental effect on learning. Assessment methods that are perceived by students as threatening and stressful, for instance, may prompt them towards a surface approach to learning, which inhibits the development of depth of understanding.

McDonnell (1994) gains an insight into Stone's (1988) idea that assessment results are to some extent, used as propaganda or persuasive appeal of an educational institution. We can easily observe among schools and universities in front of their school campuses banners of the results of licensure examinations. They post their national or regional rank or performance in national examinations being administered by the government as propaganda of their school's performance or achievement. These are, therefore, ways of enhancing the image and attractiveness of the school among future enrollees as well as funding assistance.

### **Assessment, Academic Performance and Accountability**

Holding the school accountable for a discrepancy between the set goals and the performance is a way of improving instruction. Through assessment, the national government could monitor if the educational reforms are being carried out by schools. Large-scale assessment programs that feature accountability for performance as a key purpose are often unable to fulfill equally the popular purpose of improving instruction.

In this regard, Hanushek and Raymond (2005) hold that when teachers and their schools are held accountable for the educational performance of their pupils and face consequences when the children do not measure up to goals, student grades in reading and mathematics do improve. The analysis relies on the National Assessment of Educational Progress testing of fourth and eighth graders in reading and math. The data provide performance information for whites, blacks, and Hispanics. In their analysis, Hanushek and Raymond (2005) separate the effects of accountability from the impacts of the racial composition, of family characteristics of students, and of other state policies on achievement.

### **Assessment and Social Control**

In the early feudal society, land was the basis of wealth and power, thus, landlords tried to preserve and expand their territory, but

over the next decades after the growth of the Industrial Revolution in England, the basis of wealth and power was capital. Capital accumulation was through the production of goods in the factory. Industrialization then forced the privileged class of societies to resort to schooling as a new way of perpetuating their status because land and capital could no longer ensure their former privileges as a class (Broadfoot, 1996). While education was strengthened, it was also controlled, virtually making education serve as the basis of social stratification or social differentiation in the industrial society.

The government plays a key role in controlling education through the institutionalization and constant administration of public (national) examinations. Government could only control who are the qualified personnel by formal assessments. McDonnell (1994) asserts that the actor or institution that assesses may quickly become the one who controls.

### **Assessment and Regulation of Competition**

For a long time certification and selection have been the social purpose of educational assessment. The government represented by experts sets both the goals and the content of curriculum and testing. In the guise of meritocracy, as the defining characteristic of modern society, the experts or the government through assessment serves as gate-keeper of society. Truly, society is closed, but it can be opened if individuals are able to pass the competitive examinations. The ancient Chinese, to cite an example, practiced the civil service which has been adopted by most of the modern countries today. Civil servants in Imperial China were people who passed the various levels of examinations given by the government. For a civil servant to attain the highest position, he must pass the most difficult examination of the world, the Imperial Examination<sup>1</sup>. Failing the examination was tantamount to limiting the Chinese's life chances, while those students

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<sup>1</sup> Imperial Examination is commonly referred to "examination hell" because of its notorious difficulty and only few passed the examination, thus creating an elite government leaders and bureaucrats.

who passed the examination had the gates opened for them to higher positions and opportunities.

The participation of examinees also serves as a way to legitimize the successful passers.

### **Assessment and Accountability**

Assessment, for Pellegrino (1999), is closely linked to accountability. He states that “external assessments have become the instruments of the accountability movement. Almost every state has compulsory achievement tests at multiple grade levels in multiple subjects, and all are required to have such tests under current legislation”.

Assessment can serve many purposes when the results are used for accountability; they can inform judgments on the effectiveness of particular teachers, subject departments, schools, local authorities, the government, other institutions, policies, and on national education systems as a whole.

Being accountable means being responsible for one’s actions and being able to explain to stakeholders why and how certain things are done or not done. But people can only be held accountable for actions or outcomes over which they have control. In the context of students’ learning, Madaus (1993) was among many authors who have pointed out the unfairness of evaluating teachers and schools using the same tests and criteria when there are gross inequalities between schools in social, health, family and education resources and support.

Teachers can be only held accountable for what they do in the classroom, the learning opportunities they provide and the help they give to students. But they are not necessarily responsible for the achieved externally prescribed learning outcomes, since there are other factors, over which the teachers lack control, such as the students’ prior learning and the many out of school influences and conditions that affect their learning (Madaus, 1994). These factors need to be taken



into account both by teachers in setting and working towards their goals for students' learning, and by those who hold teachers accountable for students' achievements.

### **Resistances and Inadequacies of Assessment**

In all aspects of educational practices, there is always the possibility of resistance. Innovative educational practices or reforms face the challenge of resistance. Organizationally speaking, those in the position of power and authority are usually the implementers of reforms. Whether reforms are of good intention and beneficial to the organization or system, resistance is inevitable. Foucault, the French thinker, has articulated very well that power is ubiquitous, thus he clearly paves the way for looking at power from a new lens, as compared to power as zero-sum game. This conception of power tends to justify the resistance of any group against the power or will of the rulers and wielders of power in both the societal and group levels.

The school system as an organization has encountered varied forms of resistance in terms of educational reforms in the curriculum, philosophy, standards and assessment. Policy makers, parents, teachers and students are well aware of their rights to say their piece in a particular policy or practices in education. The stakeholders' principle is the anchorage of parents and other sectors of society to participate and be consulted in introducing reforms.

Educational critics and social thinkers point out resistances in assessment. To exemplify, Patricia Broadfoot almost dedicated her education career not only as administrator but also as a scholar and researcher who exposed the social purposes or consequences of educational assessment of English, French and American societies.

A US Department of Education Report (2008) on accountability echoes John Dewey's idea that testing and accountability are problematic. "The fact is that real learning often can't be quantified, and a corporate-style preoccupation with 'data' turns schooling into something shallow and lifeless," wrote education author Alfie Kohn in *Education Week*. Assessment for the sake of pure accountability either

reduces complex educational process as routine slackens quality education. To this effect, Johnson, Rhodes and Rumery (1975) reinforce that “The evaluation of teaching by the measurement of learning outcomes as manifest in students has, however, met with considerable resistance, principally on pragmatic grounds; but, logical, theoretical and more rigorous empirical objections can be raised as well. Inadequacy of technical evaluation resources inadequately specified or understood goals of instruction, and incomplete or unwilling faculty participation are some of the possible pragmatic obstacles to measurement of learning outcomes as an evaluation of teaching”.

Following this line of thinking, Glaser and Silver (1994) convincingly argue that “standardized assessment and the conditions of instruction and schooling have coexisted largely as decoupled systems”. This decoupling of instruction and assessment results in dysfunctional uses of the assessment, as shown in the misalignment of assessment content and curricular goals. Therefore, testing procedures are not helpful to teachers or students in their day-to-day efforts to teach and learn.

Shor (1980) shows his acumen into the current assessment environment which, he says, involves undemocratic approaches: “A standardized testing instrument brought in from the outside, or designed by the teacher separate from the class, would only contradict the emergence of students as subjects”. Consistent with Freirean model of pedagogy, Shor would like to promote an assessment that is dialogical wherein students and teacher are both participants in learning and assessment. But the power structure in the classroom is a restraining factor for students to fully participate in their learning and the way they are assessed by their teachers.

Mansell and James (2009), in joining the educational clash, foresee some foreboding effects: “But there may be negative consequences for the pupil, if an institution takes actions designed to improve its performance in the measured assessments which go against the young person’s long-term educational needs, for instance, where teachers drill pupils in techniques for earning marks at the expense of teaching for deeper understanding”. Thus we need to consider the

individual needs and realities of the learners in both teaching and assessment.

Apropos of the preceding discussion on assessment of students and learning is the teacher licensure test that has been strongly criticized. The Committee on Assessment and Teacher Quality, National Research Council (2000), for instance, said that critics have charged that many of the “tests fail to measure critical knowledge and skills in effective ways and that the use of inadequate tests may inappropriately affect the supply of well-qualified teachers and the preparation future teachers receive”.

Maylone (2002) in his dissertation, cites the critique of Kaufhold (1995) published in the *American School Board Journal* to the effect that he sounded a strong warning that school board members and administrators should not rely heavily on the results of standardized tests. He cited numerous reasons: curricula vary, money makes a difference to academic success, children are not standardized, good facilities lead to higher test scores, different types of textbooks can be influential, school climates vary, some schools coach students in test taking and some do not. Kaufhold’s observation that “money makes a difference to academic success” makes sense, after all.

Along this argument Gordon (1995) advances that traditional standardized tests are not real representation of the true nature of knowledge because knowledge is constantly changing and that it is differently acquired and utilized by each one of us. He further argues that traditional tests and procedures both penalize weak and bright students.

By and large, Ollman (n. d.) criticizes assessment by saying that “examinations are educational rituals, and exposing a number of myths that surround exams and exam taking in our society; a) that exams are a necessary part of education; b) that exams are unbiased; c) that exams are objectively graded; d) that exams are an accurate indication of what students know and of intelligence in general; d) that all students have an equal chance to do well on exams, that even major differences in their conditions of life have a negligible impact on their performance; e)

that exams are the fairest way to distribute society's scarce resources to the young, and hence the association of exams with the ideas of meritocracy and equality of opportunity; and f) that exams, and particularly the fear of them, are necessary in order to motivate students to do their assignments”.

Assessments are not, therefore, objective measures of performance and self-worth of students. They are clothed with various seemingly legitimate fronts, but are generally deceptive and exploitative.

Afflerbach (2002) succinctly explains his major point on assessment when he said: “whatever the seeming scientific nature of tests, tests are created by human beings driven by visions that may be egalitarian, classist, racist, half-baked, laudable, or fallible. These visions figure large in how tests are conceptualized, created, marketed, and used”.

McDonnell (1994) confirms that “despite expert criticism, not only has testing remained appealing to policymakers as an instrument of education policy, but an even greater variety of uses for it have been found. Interviews with national and state policymakers indicate that they hold diverse expectations for what assessment policy can accomplish”. Both inside and outside the classroom, teachers, students and parents are preoccupied with assessment. As mentioned earlier, assessment is a social fact – it has been institutionalized, legitimized by all stakeholders to have acquired a life of its own.

### **Synthesis**

Educational assessment is a reality of educational institution that needs to be scrutinized to expose its intended and unintended consequences to the society. It has been the domain of psychometricians and educators over the last three decades or even more, but now, there is an imperative that assessment should look and dissect from the viewpoint of sociology. Thus, strengthening the new area of sociology of education which is called sociology of educational assessment.

Since assessment is a social fact, we need to consider how it is developed and practiced in everyday life of teachers and students. Education is and can never be neutral, holds Paulo Freire, the Brazilian social scientist, although resisted by some sectors of society, it is still a very strong mechanism used to classify and rank people. Better yet, it purposely perpetuates a society's present order as well as a site to perturb the existing order by its results.

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