



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

Book Chapters

February 2006

Learning and modes to ascertain learning: Perception, purpose and practice

Unaeza Alvi

Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/book_chapters

 Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alvi, U. (2006). Learning and modes to ascertain learning: Perception, purpose and practice. *Quality in education: Teaching and leadership in challenging times*, 2, 845-846.

Available at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/book_chapters/87

Learning and Modes to Ascertain Learning: Perception, Purpose and Practice

Unaeza Alvi, AKU-IED, Pakistan

Formal testing and examination has remained the most prevalent mode to ascertain learning, however, it is under constant criticism, for reasons of its narrow scope, norming, de-motivating, testing of atomized and low-level knowledge and its back wash influence on the quality of teaching and learning. Hence, a need for a paradigm shift towards wider school-based assessment reform and the use of alternative and formative methods to ascertain learning to promote the teaching and learning process and assess deeper and wider range of knowledge and skills, as proposed by experts (Gipps, 2002; Hargreaves, et. al., 2002; Black, 1998; Gitomer and Duschl, 1998). However, due to limited research evidence and in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, practices, purposes and the complexities involved in the implementation processes of such practices, any large scale implementation is yet to be evidenced. Hence, this qualitative, case-study investigated this particular phenomenon to develop and present an in-depth and holistic view of assessment.

The research aimed to understand in-depth the perceptions and practices, the basis of practices, and the complexities involved in the implementation of such practices. Hence the qualitative research paradigm, which has the advantage of providing a rich understanding, seemed to be more suitable. To be more specific, a case-study approach was used as it allows a rich study of the complexities of the situations, phenomenon and instances in their natural settings. In-depth interviews, observation, document analysis and the researcher's reflective diary were used to collect data. The research was conducted with five teachers – three secondary (Mathematics/Science) and two primary teachers – from schools/colleges in Melbourne, Australia, and four academics conversant with rich assessment practices – one science/generalist educator, one mathematics educator, and two science educators from a university in Melbourne, Australia.

The research aimed to understand in depth the perceptions and practices, the basis of practices, and the complexities involved in the implementation of rich and formative assessment with the purpose of enriching the thinking, discourse and limited empirical knowledge available in this field. However, in this paper, I will discuss the nature of participants' personal experiences of learning about such practices, their perceptions of learning and their practices to ascertain learning.

The study reveals that participants did not experience such methods of establishing learning as school students themselves, but did experience these at higher levels. Their learning about such methods happened through interaction with active peers and in-service professional development, and through interactions with professionals and academics that were more conversant in such practices. The study also suggests that teacher learning was facilitated internally in schools through setting up of learning team structures with innovative colleagues, of similar disciplinary areas and class levels. It was also facilitated by in-service professional developments and networking with professional and academics and open and shared school culture in which work, ideas and workloads related to the designing of the task, criteria and reporting were shared.

It is evident that all participants viewed learning and assessments as very broad and rich. The participants also practiced a broad range of methods and approaches to ascertain students' learning but the essential purpose of such practices was to support and facilitate the demonstration of students learning.

The study recommends that in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, it would be essential to provide practitioners with opportunities to conceptualize and re-think views of learning and purposes of assessments through interactions with innovative peers and academics. Moreover, flexibility during practice and collaborative reflections on practices would be fundamental to the process.