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Assessment to promote in the educational process: changes in understanding learning outcomes

Avaliar para promover no processo educacional: mudanças na compreensão dos resultados de aprendizagem

Evaluar para promover en el proceso educativo: cambios en la comprensión de los resultados de aprendizaje

José Alcir Wanzeler Prestes – Master's degree in Education and Culture (UFPA, 2018); specialist in the School that Protects program (UFPA, 2015); graduate in Portuguese Language and Literature (UFPA, 2018), Pedagogy (UNINTER, 2019), and Mathematics (UNIASSELVI, 2012); tenured teacher at SEMED/Tomé-Açu. E-mail: josealcir13@gmail.com.

Maria Barbara da Costa Cardoso – PhD in Education (UFPA, 2020); Master's degree in Education (UFPA, 2012); specialist in Rural Education, Development and Sustainability in the Amazon (UFPA, 2013), School Management (School of Government/UFPA, 2015), Coordination and Organization of Pedagogical Work (UFPA, 2005), and Education (SEDUC/PA); teacher at SEMEC/Abaetetuba; graduate in Pedagogy (UFPA, 2004) and Theology for elementary education (UFPI, 1994). E-mail: mbarb2911@gmail.com.

Abstract: This article discusses assessment as a component of the educational process and its contribution to understanding learning outcomes, considering different ways of learning and the specific characteristics of learners. The objective is to analyze how assessment practices can contribute to understanding learning, monitoring students' development, and constructing educational processes oriented toward learners' autonomy and emancipation. The theoretical framework is based on the contributions of Hoffmann (2013), Vasconcellos (1998), Souza (1995), Méndez (2002), Haydt (1994), and Sant'Anna (1995), whose studies address conceptions of assessment, assessment practices, and different ways of monitoring learning processes and outcomes. Methodologically, this is a bibliographic study with a qualitative approach, using content analysis procedures to organize and interpret the selected theoretical contributions. The analysis highlights the existence of different assessment modalities and functions that can be integrated into teaching practices, considering diagnostic, formative, and continuous assessment as instruments for monitoring learning. From this perspective, assessment goes beyond the classification or measurement of performance and assumes a pedagogical function related to identifying difficulties, recognizing progress, and redirecting teaching practices. It is concluded that an assessment approach committed to the continuous monitoring of learning can foster more dialogical pedagogical relationships and contribute to the development of students' autonomy, provided that assessment results are used as elements for reflection and intervention in the educational process.

Keywords: Learning assessment; Assessment practices; Educational process; Emancipation.

Resumo: Este artigo discute a avaliação como componente do processo educacional e sua contribuição para a compreensão dos resultados de aprendizagem, considerando as diferentes formas de aprender e as especificidades dos educandos. O objetivo consiste em analisar de que maneira as práticas avaliativas podem contribuir para a compreensão das aprendizagens, para o acompanhamento do desenvolvimento dos estudantes e para a construção de processos educativos orientados à autonomia e à emancipação dos sujeitos. A fundamentação teórica apoia-se nas contribuições de Hoffmann (2013), Vasconcellos (1998), Souza (1995), Méndez (2002), Haydt (1994) e Sant'Anna (1995), cujos estudos abordam concepções de avaliação, práticas avaliativas e diferentes formas de acompanhar os processos e resultados da aprendizagem. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica, de abordagem qualitativa, com utilização de procedimentos de análise de conteúdo para organização e interpretação das contribuições teóricas selecionadas. A análise evidencia a existência de diferentes modalidades e funções avaliativas que podem ser articuladas às práticas de ensino,

considerando a avaliação diagnóstica, processual e contínua como instrumentos de acompanhamento da aprendizagem. Nessa perspectiva, avaliar ultrapassa a classificação ou a mensuração do desempenho, assumindo uma função pedagógica relacionada à identificação das dificuldades, ao reconhecimento dos avanços e à reorientação das práticas docentes. Conclui-se que uma concepção avaliativa comprometida com o acompanhamento contínuo da aprendizagem pode favorecer relações pedagógicas mais dialógicas e contribuir para a construção da autonomia dos estudantes, desde que os resultados da avaliação sejam utilizados como elementos de reflexão e intervenção no processo educativo.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação da aprendizagem; Práticas avaliativas; Processo educativo; Emancipação.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la evaluación como componente del proceso educativo y su contribución a la comprensión de los resultados de aprendizaje, considerando las distintas formas de aprender y las particularidades de los educandos. El objetivo consiste en analizar de qué manera las prácticas evaluativas pueden contribuir a comprender los aprendizajes, acompañar el desarrollo de los estudiantes y construir procesos educativos orientados a la autonomía y la emancipación de los sujetos. La fundamentación teórica se apoya en las contribuciones de Hoffmann (2013), Vasconcellos (1998), Souza (1995), Méndez (2002), Haydt (1994) y Sant'Anna (1995), cuyos estudios abordan concepciones y prácticas de evaluación, así como diferentes maneras de acompañar los procesos y resultados del aprendizaje. Metodológicamente, se trata de una investigación bibliográfica, de enfoque cualitativo, que utiliza procedimientos de análisis de contenido para organizar e interpretar las contribuciones teóricas seleccionadas. El análisis evidencia la existencia de distintas modalidades y funciones evaluativas que pueden articularse con las prácticas de enseñanza, considerando la evaluación diagnóstica, procesual y continua como instrumentos de seguimiento del aprendizaje. Desde esta perspectiva, evaluar supera la clasificación o la medición del desempeño y asume una función pedagógica vinculada con la identificación de dificultades, el reconocimiento de avances y la reorientación de las prácticas docentes. Se concluye que una concepción evaluativa comprometida con el acompañamiento continuo del aprendizaje puede favorecer relaciones pedagógicas más dialógicas y contribuir a la construcción de la autonomía de los estudiantes, siempre que los resultados de la evaluación se utilicen como elementos de reflexión e intervención en el proceso educativo.

Palabras clave: Evaluación del aprendizaje; Prácticas evaluativas; Proceso educativo; Emancipación.

1 Introduction

Learning assessment has occupied a prominent place in contemporary educational discussions. Throughout the history of education, different conceptions of assessment have been developed, many of them marked by classificatory and selective practices that require reflection and debate capable of promoting change because, in this context, assessment was often understood as an instrument for measuring student performance, centered mainly on the application of tests intended to verify the assimilation of content and the reproduction of knowledge.

In recent decades, however, researchers in education have begun to question this restricted conception of assessment, defending the need to understand it as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Among these researchers, Jussara Hoffmann (2013) stands out; her work offers important reflections on mediating assessment and on the need to transform the assessment practices present in schools.

Vasconcelos (1998) also approaches assessment from a dialectical perspective, emphasizing a liberating conception within teaching and learning processes and a logic that sees assessment movements as transitional processes that help verify educational action in school learning.

According to Méndez (2002), assessment requires knowing not only the instruments and techniques but also clearly examining the processes and results of assessment production, with the objective of obtaining satisfactory data that foster human development. For Haydt (1991), assessment in the learning process makes it possible to verify "how the subject is assessed and the determinations that legitimize the result by the person conducting the assessment." This highlights the need to understand the factors that influence the production of school knowledge, because assessment must be reconsidered as a means that enables individuals to discover their shortcomings and make corrections in order to progress in their studies.

In addressing the assessment of school performance, Souza (1995) characterizes this action as an "opportunity to recognize how students assimilate the content taught in the classroom and put it into practice," because learning should bring about transformations that encourage each subject to think from the standpoint of their own reality and intervene through their knowledge.

According to Hoffmann, "assessing is not simply measuring students' knowledge, but monitoring their process of constructing knowledge." This perspective shows that assessment must focus on student development and not only on verifying final results in the school environment.

Thus, understanding assessment as a process implies recognizing that teaching and learning are dynamic and complex and require a reflective and investigative stance from the teacher. In this sense, assessment becomes a fundamental instrument for guiding pedagogical work and fostering the construction of a more meaningful and inclusive education.

Based on these needs, we raise the following research problem: how can assessment promote changes in the conception of learning outcomes within the educational process while taking students' realities into account?

Regarding methodology, we adopt a qualitative approach because, according to Teixeira (2013), it is "crucial in scientific research that focuses on the deep understanding and interpretation of the phenomena studied," exploring the complexity and richness of the social, cultural, and individual contexts of human relationships.

As an analytical procedure, we use content analysis, which, according to Minayo and Gomes (2001), is currently understood as a "set of techniques with their principal functions in their application," since it involves testing hypotheses and discovering what lies behind manifest content—that is, what is expressed or concealed in messages—requiring analysis and interpretation, description, and theoretical articulation in order to reach a possible conclusion concerning knowledge.

According to Hoffmann, "assessing is not simply measuring the student's knowledge, but monitoring the process through which knowledge is constructed." This perspective shows that assessment should focus on student development rather than only on verifying final results in the school environment.

Thus, assessment, teaching, and learning must be understood as dynamic and complex, requiring a reflective and investigative stance from the teacher. In this sense, assessment becomes a fundamental instrument for guiding pedagogical work and fostering the construction of a more meaningful and inclusive education.

2 Educational assessment

For a long time, school assessment was understood mainly as a mechanism for controlling and classifying students. Under this model, teachers administered tests to determine how much students had memorized from the content presented in the classroom. This practice contributed to the consolidation of a school culture centered on grades and on students' approval or failure. In this context, many students came to associate assessment with feelings of anxiety, fear, and insecurity.

Hoffmann strongly criticizes this perspective by stating that "classificatory assessment limits the learning process." Assessment therefore ceases to fulfill its pedagogical function and acts merely as a bureaucratic instrument.

Another problem with this model is its tendency to disregard individual differences among students. Each student has their own learning pace, as well as different experiences and prior knowledge that influence how they understand the world and social realities.

In the teaching-learning process, students' successful development is considered a priority. For this to occur, teachers must adopt a reflective pedagogical practice so that they can diagnose delays in student performance, and this diagnosis can be made through assessment. "To issue a value judgment on the reality being questioned, whether in relation to the requirements of an action that was planned for it or in relation to its consequences" (PCN, 1997, p. 86).

We know that assessment does not take place in a conceptual vacuum; it is shaped by a model of the world and of education aimed at obtaining increasingly satisfactory results. The true role of assessment is to assist in the construction of learning by overcoming authoritarianism and establishing learner autonomy.

Current assessment practice must therefore attend to ways of overcoming authoritarianism and serve a pedagogy concerned with transforming society in favor of human beings. Only by assuming a diagnostic role will assessment become a dialectical moment in the student's learning process.

For this to occur effectively, educators must plan their pedagogical practice while understanding the stage at which each student finds themselves, so that they can work with them and help them advance in relation to the necessary knowledge.

> Students must be willing to engage in learning and make an effort to establish relationships between what they already know and what they are learning. Such learning requires the boldness to pose problems, seek solutions, and try new paths, unlike mechanical learning, in which students limit their efforts to memorizing or establishing direct and superficial relationships (PCN, 1997, p. 99).

The quotation above allows us to reflect on the teacher's role in the teaching-learning process, since the teacher must reconcile what the student already knows with what the student is learning. In the reality of schools in our society, we know that this work becomes difficult because each classroom has only one teacher to assist more than twenty students.

Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties, some teachers manage to plan and carry out all their activities in ways that benefit everyone involved in the learning process. Many schools use assessment as a classificatory tool for approval or failure at the end of the school year. This should not occur, because assessment must be viewed as a tool that assists the teacher—that is, as a means of intervening in student learning.

Assessing correctly is a very difficult task because it requires qualifications, commitment, competence, ethics, flexibility, and many other qualities expected of a good

education professional. In general, however, few conditions are provided for delivering quality education, which is directly related to the way assessment is conducted.

For a long time, assessment, as mentioned earlier, was merely a matter of grades and of quantifying knowledge through tests or examinations. Those who earned the highest grades were considered the “best students,” while those who earned lower grades were ridiculed by the class, even called “stupid,” and nothing was done to change this reality, since assessment was not seen as an aspect of student development.

Luckesi (1995) warns us about the danger of continuing to practice the same type of assessment used in past decades, which valued promotion rather than genuine learning.

> Parents, the education system, education professionals, teachers, and students all focus their attention on whether or not the student will be promoted from one grade level to another (...). Our pedagogical practice is permeated more by a pedagogy of examination than by a pedagogy of teaching and learning (LUCKESI, 1998, p. 18).

To a certain extent, we remain tied to grades, which are viewed as necessary in the assessment process because educators lack both the conception and the time required to conduct more precise assessment through observation and more effective means. A range of other factors also hinder diagnostic assessment, including overcrowded classrooms and alarming differences in students’ learning levels.

This is due to the precarious conditions under which education takes place in our country. Although we have fought for quality public education, it has still not been achieved, given the unfavorable conditions of many schools and the social inequalities in our society. Esteban (2003) criticizes the proclaimed “quality education for all”:

> The discourse of “quality education for all” becomes hegemonic and spreads in association with a supposed equality of opportunity, disregarding unequal social conditions and attributing failures solely to individual responsibility. Such an understanding strengthens and maintains unequal access to education and learning because it does not question the processes that naturalize these inequalities (...) (p. 58).

Within the objectives of education, and especially from the perspective of social inclusion, it is impossible not to reflect on the assessment currently predominant in schools, since it is fundamental to the teaching-learning process and to decision-making aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. This is precisely what Article 9, item VI, of Law 9,394/96 states among the responsibilities of the Federal Government: “To ensure the national process for assessing school performance in elementary, secondary, and higher

education, in collaboration with education systems, with the purpose of defining priorities and improving the quality of education" (BRASIL, 2002, p. 10).

This reinforces one of the most important objectives of school assessment: improving the quality of education, which requires much greater effort. Assessment is important so that educators can reconsider their practice and follow new paths toward actions that genuinely enable students to learn. Méndez states:

> (...) assessment becomes important when it provides teachers with practical information about the quality of the learning students are achieving. At the same time, it offers a valuable opportunity to improve both the learning process (...) and future teaching actions through reflection, self-criticism, and self-correction based on school practice (MÉNDEZ, 2002, p. 74).

The quotation above highlights the role of assessment as a mediator of students' teaching-learning process because it enables reflection based on the data obtained through that process. If teachers perceive that their practice is not benefiting everyone, they can reflect and adapt it to make it more accessible and equitable.

3 Assessment criteria

All assessment activities contribute to students' intellectual, social, and moral development and seek to diagnose how the school and teachers are contributing to learning. The purpose of teaching and education is for every child to develop physical and intellectual abilities, as well as independent and creative thinking, through theoretical and practical activities that foster understanding of knowledge.

Assessment should foster the development of all children, taking into account that everyone differs both socioeconomically and in individual characteristics. Assessment makes it possible to identify each student's knowledge and position in relation to the class, establishing a basis for teaching-learning activities in the school environment.

Accordingly, three types can be discussed: diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment. Each can be described, characterized, and differentiated through its procedures, instruments, technical methods, and results.

Diagnostic assessment makes it possible to identify students' processes and difficulties and, on that basis, modify the teaching process so that its objectives can be achieved. It can establish whether students possess particular knowledge or skills required to learn something new and can identify, distinguish, understand, and characterize the determining causes of

difficulties. It is therefore an element that permits theoretical resignification, as expressed below:

> Diagnosis consists of surveying, projecting, and retrospectively examining the student's developmental situation, providing elements that allow the student to verify what was learned and how it was learned. It is a stage of the educational process whose objective is to determine the extent to which prior knowledge has been acquired and what must be planned in order to address the difficulties encountered (SANT'ANNA, 1998, p. 33).

We consider it important to conduct a diagnosis at the beginning of the school year because it provides teachers with data about students' knowledge levels. Teachers can then plan their practice more effectively, emphasizing the areas in which deficiencies are greatest and enabling students to appropriate experiences that lead to learning. Formative assessment must also be highlighted because this mode seeks to identify the principal shortcomings in the initial learning required for subsequent learning. It is formative insofar as it shows how students are performing in relation to the objectives proposed in the organization of educational action.

Formative assessment can be characterized as follows:

> Formative assessment would also seek to understand the student's cognitive functioning when faced with the proposed task. The data of greatest interest concern the student's representations of the tasks and the strategies or processes used to reach particular results. "Errors" are a special object of study because they reveal the nature of the representations or strategies developed by the student. The purpose of pedagogical remediation is to help the student discover relevant aspects of the task and commit to constructing a more appropriate strategy (SOUZA, 1998, p. 67).

Formative assessment is therefore continuous and seeks interactive regulation; that is, every relationship between teacher and student involves assessment that permits adaptations in daily practice aimed at improving student learning in the processes of knowledge formation.

We understand that summative assessment has an authoritarian and conservative character and does not function as a dialectical instrument for advancement or new directions. It does nothing to promote transformation because it is extremely effective in preserving the social structure: it intensifies authority, oppresses learners, and prevents their growth as producers of knowledge.

Teacher arbitrariness can be total in this context. Without prior criteria or regard for relevant data, the teacher decides to award or withdraw points. Competence is disregarded in favor of the teacher's authoritarian will, which can approve incompetent students, favor preferred students, and repress or subordinate restless or disliked students. Within the pedagogical ritual, assessment thereby assumes the right to reward or punish.

Nevertheless, summative assessment can be described as follows:

> It presupposes comparison, because the student is classified according to the level of achievement and performance attained, generally in comparison with classmates—that is, with the class group. Emphasis on comparison is characteristic of the traditional school. Summative assessment is used for this purpose, with a classificatory function, because it consists of classifying the learning outcomes achieved by students at the end of a semester, year, or course according to predetermined achievement levels. It therefore consists of assigning the student a final grade or concept for promotion purposes (HAYDT, 1991, pp. 25-26).

From this perspective, assessment creates a dichotomy between education and evaluation. Awareness and reflection are required regarding this mistaken understanding of assessment as the judgment of results, because it has been turning into a dangerous educational practice that emphasizes only learning outcomes.

For assessment to acquire the importance it truly has in the teaching-learning process, deeper and more reliable knowledge of students' learning difficulties is required. Teachers cannot remain indifferent to these deficiencies, since no one is better positioned to make an overall judgment of each student's school performance. Caution is nevertheless necessary: if the teacher is an educator, student assessment is an integral part of the teacher's duties. To assess is therefore to develop all the potential of a human being; it is to correct deviations while the plant is still tender and malleable.

Above all, assessing means guiding the forces of a life that is unfolding so as to transform it into a fully human, conscious, and responsible existence. From this perspective, Hoffmann (2013) points toward an assessment process with the following characteristics:

> The fundamental meaning of assessment action is movement and transformation. Researchers are often satisfied with discovering the world, but the assessor's task is to make it better. This implies a process of interaction between educator and learner and a personal commitment from which no educator can withdraw without completely depriving assessment of its dynamic meaning (HOFFMANN, 1998, p. 110).

In this sense, teachers must act as true philosophers, reflecting on the effectiveness of their work as they seek to improve educational practice, which often becomes mechanized and acquires a heterogeneous relationship in which the teacher's role is emphasized. Student activity and interaction with the educator are fundamental, however, because this interaction fosters, stimulates, directs, encourages, and drives the teaching-learning process. This understanding can be characterized as follows:

> Assessment is an intentional and discriminatory verification system whose objective is to make learning more effective. We conclude that assessment,

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> as a process, aims to improve learning. The validity of this position, although partial, is significant because of the emphasis placed on assessment as an educational process (SANT'ANNA, 1998, p. 36).

Assessment must therefore adapt to the nature of learning, taking into account not only the results of completed tasks—the product—but also what happened along the way—the process. It is a kind of mapping that identifies students' achievements and problems throughout their development. Teacher and student must then reflect together on the errors that occurred, turning the moment into a learning situation so that everyone can conclude: we got things right, we made mistakes, we learned, we took risks, and we achieved objectives.

The true function of assessment in the education system is expressed in the following quotation from Soares:

> It is one of the most effective instruments for controlling the supply and use of educational and social opportunities and for disseminating a selection process in which, under an appearance of neutrality and equity, some are offered successive educational opportunities and, consequently, social opportunities, while others are denied those opportunities. This process develops according to criteria that transcend the stated purposes of assessment. According to those stated purposes, educational assessment seeks to verify whether, and to what degree, the student has achieved the objectives proposed by the teaching process. It also covertly implies control of social hierarchies (SOARES, 1981, p. 47).

In fact, all the reflection developed thus far can be summarized as the need to adapt assessment to the purposes of the school, where there should be neither selective nor classificatory mechanisms. The school seeks to provide students with the basic education to which every citizen is entitled; exclusion is therefore a violation of that right and of the act of teaching and learning.

Educational assessment should support decisions concerning the continuation of pedagogical work rather than deciding who will be excluded from the learning process. It should be seen as a positive practice that provides help according to the deficiencies diagnosed in each student during the teaching-learning process. Nevertheless, this still does not occur in schools in our current reality.

Final considerations

In view of the theoretical evidence concerning assessment, we consider it fundamental in the school context for verifying learning outcomes and encouraging student reflection, since it makes it possible to identify progress and difficulties and to devise strategies for possible

interventions. Assessment requires new concepts and knowledge that facilitate the appraisal of teaching activities developed within the curriculum and help achieve successful learning. It must be continuous over time and capable of recognizing the best in students, allowing teachers to reach clear conclusions about their own teaching practice.

Teaching and learning are dynamic processes that require theoretical and practical epistemological conceptions aligned with the educational experiences and realities of the environments involved in education and learning. This alignment enables assessment to serve as a means of identifying learning, difficulties, and contributions to change.

Debating the assessment of school learning necessarily requires breaking with the traditional model that exists only to classify students through a type of judgment resulting in quantitative data. Assessment must instead promote learning and be intrinsically related to the student as the protagonist in constructing knowledge.

Assessment should stimulate the development of teaching that guides verification with the objective of identifying possible conditions for access to learning. This allows the teacher to act as a mediator who works with students by guiding and assessing them and by providing the conditions for an emancipatory assessment process that considers different methodological instruments and techniques for verifying learning.

The analysis of Jussara Hoffmann's work (2013) and that of other authors demonstrates the need to think deeply about the assessment practices present in the school context. Assessment should not be understood merely as an instrument for verifying results, but as a continuous process of monitoring learning throughout the formation of knowledge.

The proposal for mediating assessment presented by the authors emphasizes the importance of valuing students' learning paths and recognizing that error is part of the educational process and can contribute to the construction of knowledge when assessment serves to support students' education.

Therefore, assessing in order to promote means making a commitment to student learning and seeking to develop more reflective, inclusive, and democratic pedagogical practices. Only through this change in perspective will it be possible to build an education capable of promoting learners' comprehensive development in educational institutions.

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