

# USING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT TECHNOLOGIES TO PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING

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## Abstract

The author tries to define alternative assessment as an act of acquiring and analyzing information about students for a purpose, identifying and diagnosing the special educational needs of education and informing planning for further actions. It forms an integral part of the process of providing support and educational wherewithal. This information includes knowledge about an individual's personality, way of thinking and style of learning, as well as it helps to discover his/her cognitive abilities, environmental status, academic achievement and social competence.

In this paper we consider each type of assessment, highlight the relative strengths and weaknesses of each one, and discuss how teachers can choose among many options with two primary considerations: the importance of the effect and the crucial need to use multiple sources of information.

The article also dwells on the effective ways of developing alternative assessment to promote active learning. Our next step is the sharing of the results of the survey methods we consider particularly productive in assessing alternatively. To reach our aims we organized a range of experimental lessons, conducted surveys with questionnaires and organized a debate to prove that set of activities chosen by us can enrich and reinforce the students' comprehension of alternative assessment, as well as it can stimulate the usage of alternative assessment in the practice of teachers.

Key words: alternative assessment, traditional assessment, purposes of alternative assessment, lifelong education

## Introduction

Nowadays, educational institutes, especially schools, face new challenges, which require taking into consideration the relevance of learning content, humanitarian values and the mechanisms of shaping the civic consciousness of learners, as well as the ways of adaptation of students with the changing conditions of society. To accomplish the following purpose, a huge significance is given to alternative assessment technologies.

During the last few years educators have witnessed the introduction of various assessment technologies into evaluation research discussion, elucidating not merely a semantic change but a profound conceptual one, with assessment construed to be an overarching term used to refer to all methods and approaches to testing and evaluation.

Alternative assessment is a very important factor in education. A specialist working in educational settings must be able to effectively evaluate and assess the student's progress and knowledge of the disciplines. A teacher must also be able to assess how a student learns and if the methods used are effective.

It is important to be aware of a student's performance in the classroom for many reasons. If a teacher is able to accurately assess student's progress he or she will know if the teaching methods work, or if and where the students need further help. Assessing students with alternative means and methods helps to determine what they have learnt and what they are having difficulties with. Teacher assessing their students with alternative methods can help them reach their goals easier and faster.

## Defining alternative assessment

Huerta-Macías (1995) refers to alternative assessment as “an alternative to standardized testing”. He then enumerates some alternative assessment procedures as checklists, journals, logs, videotapes and audiotapes, self-evaluation, and teacher observations. He also puts forward some of the characteristics of alternative assessments which are as follows:

- alternative assessments are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered,
- alternative assessments go beyond the day-to-day classroom activities already in place in a curriculum,
- alternative assessments allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day, and
- provide information about both the strengths and the weaknesses of students. (Huerta-Macias, 1995, 48-52).

In a similar line of inquiry, Aschbacher (1991) enumerates some other common characteristics of alternative assessments, pointing out that they.

- require problem solving and higher level thinking,
- involve tasks that are worthwhile as instructional activities,
- focus on processes as well as products,
- encourage public disclosure of standards and criteria, and
- use real-world contexts or simulations.
- require students to perform, create, produce, or do something,
- tap into higher level thinking and problem-solving skills,
- approximate real-world applications,
- use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities,
- ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment,
- call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles.

Hargreaves (2002) also pinpoints that alternative assessments are often intended to motivate students to take more responsibility for their own learning, to make assessment an integral part of the learning experience, and to embed it in authentic activities that recognize and stimulate students' abilities to create and apply a wide range of knowledge, rather than simply engaging in acts of memorization and basic skill development. Alternative classroom assessments are not ends in themselves but they are designed to foster powerful, productive learning for students (Hargreaves, 2002, 60-62).

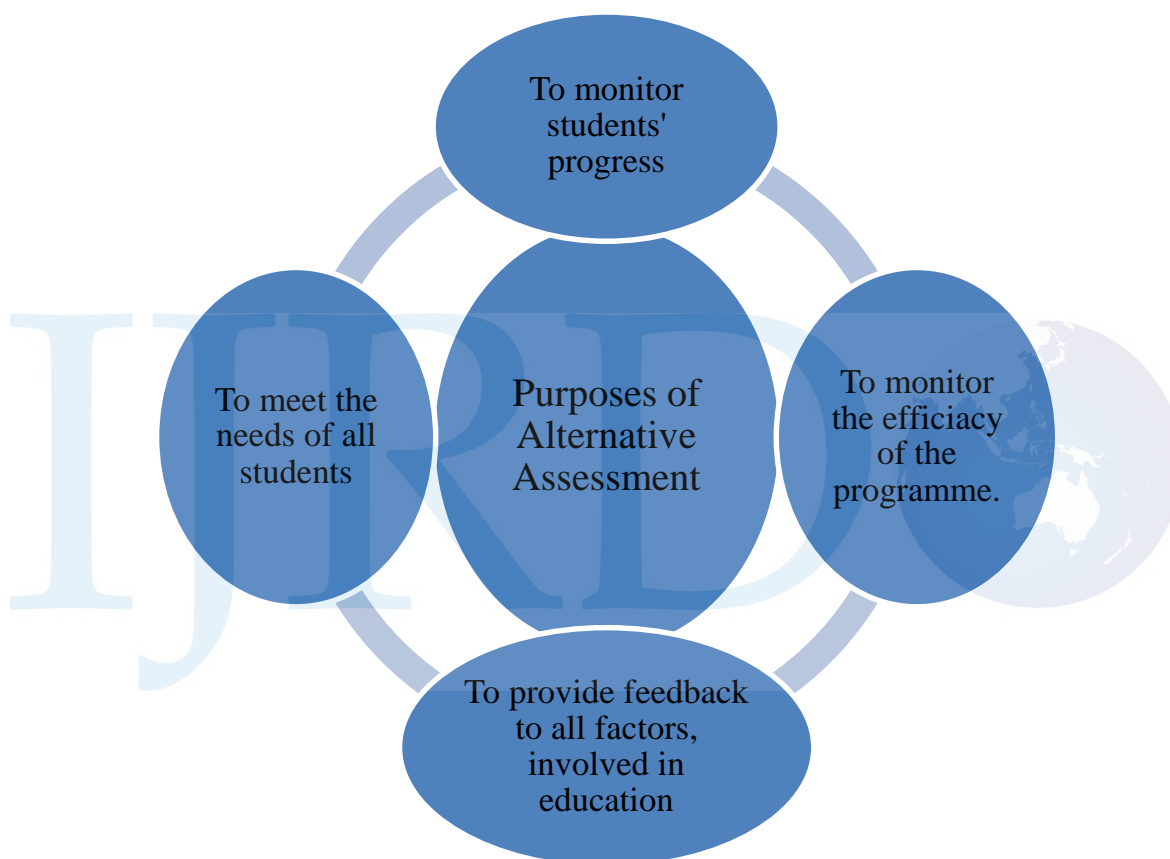
As it is cited in Hargreaves' book (2002), House (1981) views alternative assessments from three different perspectives, namely; technological, cultural and political. As far as the technological perspective is concerned, House (1981) believes that teaching and innovation are technologies with predictable solutions that are transferable across different contexts. This perspective focuses on issues of organization, structure, strategy, and skill in developing new assessment techniques. This perspective views alternative assessment as a complex technology that requires sophisticated expertise in, for example, devising valid and reliable measures for performance-based assessments in classrooms, which will capture the complexities of student performance. The challenge of alternative assessment, in this view, is not only to develop defensible technologies that are meaningful and fair but for teachers to develop the understandings and skills necessary to integrate assessment techniques, such as performance-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment, video journals, and exhibitions, into their practice. (Aschbacher P.A., 1991, 275–288).

### **Purposes of alternative assessment**

A closer look at all the data and changes in educational sphere indicate that there has been a movement from traditional assessment toward alternative assessments. Alternative assessment

started being used as a means for educational reform due to the increasing awareness of the influence of testing on curriculum and instruction (Dietel, Herman, and Knuth, 1991). Similarly, Nelson stated that traditional assessment, which is generally called testing, is challenged by alternative assessment approaches (Nelson, 2001, p. 16-18).

Taking into consideration the above said we have highlighted the ultimate purposes of alternative assessment.



### **Results of our study**

In order to find the answer to the research: whether the alternative assessment technologies are effective to use in the classroom or not, two types of data (quantitative and qualitative) were collected. In terms of qualitative section, we opted for a phenomenological approach to explore students' experiences and their perceptions of alternative classroom assessment. First, we chose this approach, because we were interested in learning the meaning of alternative assessment forms from the students' perspectives.

So, we organized a survey with BA second year students at Khachatur Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, Department of Foreign Languages. The participants of the survey had different ideas, attitudes, skills and knowledge about alternative assessment.

In order to give them brief information about alternative assessment, we showed a Power Point Presentation about alternative assessment. Then, the participants of the survey were given a questionnaire to fill in. They made some comments about alternative assessment as well. The questions were initially structured to inquire about alternative assessment approaches used by the instructors and the meaningfulness of those alternative assessment approaches from the students' point of view.

During the second stage of the survey we had a survey with the BA first year students of Khachatur Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, Department of Foreign Languages. This time we thought that the best way to reach for a good result, is to conduct a debate.

So, we organized a debate on Traditional Assessment versus Alternative Assessment. We divided the group into 2 parts, gave each group one of the following positions: "For or against the Traditional Assessment or Alternative Assessment".

During the debate, we allowed each group to brainstorm arguments for their position and to form their ideas into 4 and 6 big points. And at the end of the debate we made some points that Traditional Assessment and Alternative Assessment have in common in order to consider our debate succeeded.

## Lesson Plan for the Debate

### TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT VERSUS ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

<b>Date</b>	30.11.2016
<b>Year</b>	BA I year
<b>Level</b>	Intermediate
<b>Debate Theme</b>	Traditional Assessment vs. Alternative Assessment
<b>Duration</b>	80 minutes
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To understand different levels of decision making, their advantages and disadvantages.</li> <li>➤ To be able to form arguments and structure them into a speech.</li> </ul>
<b>Main Activity</b>	<p><b>Group Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Split the class into two groups.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give each group one of the following positions (choose the two topics you want to focus on) " For or against the Traditional Assessment or Alternative Assessment"</li> </ul> <p>Allow the group time to brainstorm arguments for their position and to form their ideas into between 4 and 6 big points. They should then split those points between the two allotted speakers for their group (you may wish to choose the speakers and repeat the activity with different topics to allow everyone the chance to be a speaker).</p>
<b>Plenary</b>	Take the votes again - have the debate changed anybody's mind and why?

Our investigation did not stop here, we continued it in the public school. This time our purpose was to explore the teachers' attitude towards the alternative assessment technologies. We went to the middle school N3 in Armavir Region. The director of the school gave us his permission and allowed to conduct our research. This time also we have prepared questionnaires for seven teachers to fill in.

The teachers were provided a clear explanation on how to rate the questions in the instrument ranging scaling from 1-11 (agree, disagree).

### **Conclusions**

Having conducted the survey and summarizing all the data we have in hand, we conclude that in order to learn continuously and independently during these times of change, alternative assessment needs to be situated at the heart of assessment practice so that learners regulate, or self-regulate their learning in a meaningful and sustainable matter.

Finally, for the development of lifelong learning, current assessment practices in educational contexts as well as the ways in which teachers and learners perceive assessment must be changed. The learning process of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners will become more effective if teachers use new types of assessment technologies, especially alternative assessment, which is a vehicle by which the pupils and teachers can organize, manage and analyze life inside and outside the school.

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