

## **Eurocentrism in Assessment and Evaluation**

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### **Abstract**

The structural and systemic arrangements and the legal provisions are to a large extent protecting our idiosyncratic decisions and subjective judgments of us. The way teacher educators involve ourselves in student evaluation and assessment is highly objectionable and anti to the entire process of education. And their practices of assessing student's performance and work are not leading to any kind of fruitful results. An attempt is made in this paper to reconstruct public trust and provide intellectual direction to the teacher educators in the field of student /student teacher assessment and evaluation.

**Keywords:** euro-centrism, assessment, evaluation, curriculum.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teacher Education institutions across the country have lost public trust and respect primarily due to their unprofessional and anti-educational activities. This is clearly evident in teacher educators' understanding and practices of student teacher assessment and evaluation. Majority of teacher educators frame question papers without an adequate understanding about the basic idea of student assessment and evaluation. They religiously adopt certain words (like "discuss", "describe", "explain", etc.) and frame questions. Students/student teachers and experts interpret the questions differently according to their will and wish.

Objectivity in designing the process and tools of evaluation is a major concern today. Majority of teacher educators do not consider and take seriously the philosophy and the principles of question paper setting, including the importance of purpose of testing or assessing students. They take arbitrary decisions, operate in narrow conceptual frames and marginalize students' background and institutional values. They do not stop such undesirable practices at the stage of paper setting but also extend it to the stage of correcting and evaluating student responses and answer papers.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) rightly pronounces, *“A glaring weakness of existing teacher education practices is the restricted scope of evaluation of student teachers and its excessively quantitative nature. It is confined to measurement of mainly cognitive learning through annual/terminal tests; skill measurement is limited to a specified number of lessons. The qualitative dimensions of teacher education, other professional capacities, attitudes and values remain outside the purview of evaluation.”* Teacher educators in our country have become very much unplanned, casual and easy going. They are least careful about the standards and principles of examination and simply frame some questions from the prescribed syllabus arbitrarily. They consciously and continuously commit such offence and crime because they know that no one in the system can punish them.

The structural and systemic arrangements and the legal provisions are to a large extent protecting the idiosyncratic decisions and subjective judgments of teacher educators. The way they involve themselves in student evaluation and assessment is highly objectionable and hostile to the entire process of education. And their practices of assessing students' performance and work are not leading to any kind of fruitful results. An attempt is made in this paper to reconstruct public trust and provide intellectual direction to the teacher educators in the field of student /student teacher assessment and evaluation.

Why do we assess? The answers to this question are multiple. Most of the answers are based on the assumptions about utility, usefulness, efficacy and advantage. One can trace out the roots of the present system of evaluation in the modernization and westernization processes that shaped the Indian society and culture. The current understanding of education and educational evaluation/ assessment are imported from Europe and the western world. Our ideas of measurement, assessment and evaluation are groomed and shaped by the Eurocentric discourses in our institutions of learning, including universities and other national level establishments like NCERT, NCTE, NIEPA etc. Industrialization and the consequent developments in economy and culture led to the disciplinary formation of educational assessment as an independent body of knowledge.

The developments in theory and experimental sciences, including psychological assessment and testing, consolidated and positioned the evaluation sciences in a respectable position in the academy. The modernity and its theoretical and cultural expressions generated various institutional and organizational support systems to carry out the capitalist, industrialist, consumerist, commercial and entrepreneurial mode of economy and life. The assessment/evaluation are closely construed and defined in terms of the ideas like “performance”, “standardization”, “benchmarking”, efficiency”, “productivity”, “out put”, “competence”, “proficiency”, “expertise” etc. These developments over a period of time gradually made educational evaluation, as a mechanical enterprise for the purpose of controlling and regulating the behavior of students/student teachers.

The appropriation of the recent developments in computer and communication

technologies (ICT) led to the proliferation of specialists, experts, consultants and organizations across the world. Such agenda of regulation through assessment/evaluation/accreditation/examination is clearly evident in the mandate of the national institutions like NAAC of the UGC, NBA of the AICTE, NBE of the MCI.

In order to meet the employability requirements of the industrial and corporate world on one hand and on the other the multiple demands of evaluation (that encompass the entire system of education) the importance of establishing a national level institution was visualized by the NPE - National Policy on Education and its POA - Programme Of Action , the NPE (RC) - National Policy on Education (Ramamurthy Committee) and also the CABE - Central Advisory Board on Education. On the recommendations of these Commissions of Education and with the concurrence of the Central Planning Commission, the Government of India established National Testing Service-India(NTSI). This move is the hallmark of the regulatory mechanisms and objectivist quantitative models in education.

The basic mission of National Testing Service-India (NTSI) is to cater to the evaluation requirements of the country for academic auditing and quality maintenance to account for the huge amount of public funds spent on education. For the first time in the country, action to establish benchmarks (in terms of academic targets to be achieved at every level of education) has been initiated by the NTS-India, as a step towards creating a centralized mechanism for quality control. This account is just a part of the whole story of the institutionalization of regulatory evaluation technologies and practices in the country. With this the state moved the idea of adherence of accountability to all those in the field of education such as teachers, learners, evaluators, policy planners, and decision makers. And the other policy move is setting standards / benchmarks for admission, certification, and employment purposes by appropriately covering the entire strata of the country's complexity of education.

The above developments make us realize that the existing theory and practice in teacher education in our country are inscribed in such institutional regulations and cultural formations. The typical thinking of any teacher educator in this country is by and large modeled upon the structures and functions of the national institutions. In other words the discursive practices, assumptions and beliefs about assessment/evaluation of students/student teachers among the teacher educators and teacher education institutions in our country are inherited, normalized, controlled by the national level regulatory bodies and the corporate models of education.

The above said dominant and official framework of assessment /evaluation greatly damaged our institutions of learning and made our clientele inactive, sterile, pedantic, unproductive and useless. Patricia Broadfoot ( 2008) says, “ .....we find ourselves today in a society dominated by various forms of assessment, especially in the world of education. Our schools and universities, colleges and training centers are increasingly driven by assessment requirements. Yet, despite the enormous impact of this culture on all our lives, its desirability is rarely questioned, its effects rarely debated. ”

**Educational Assessment/Evaluation**

Educational assessment/evaluation is a complex multidimensional professional process. It influences each and every activity that we do in our professional life and institutions of learning. It is not an exclusive isolated academic activity, but prominently an integral part of our teaching, learning and becoming processes. Assessment in education affects our professional life from micro level to macro level. In other words it affects the following:

- i. Individuals
- ii. Institutions, and
- iii. Education Systems and Society

Student teachers must recognize the interrelationships and interactions between the above three levels and contextualize the assessment and evaluation processes. They need to understand how the changing historical conditions, new social and global market forces influence, condition and generate new possibilities of scientific thinking in evaluation and assessment studies.

**Critical Evaluation Literacy:**

Assessment and evaluation in teacher education is highly problematic and challenging. Teacher educators, on one hand need to critically reflect on their own ideas of assessment and on the other they need to inculcate critical literacy skills of assessment and evaluation among student teachers. Meaningful and scientific assessment/ evaluation of students' performance demands comprehensive understanding of the contexts of learning and a set of rigorous skills. In general evaluation consists of a number of component processes, including metacognition, goals, personal disposition, signals (which initialize an evaluative episode), deliberation, and decision. Most importantly the contextual factors, including environment, problem structure, and processing depth, impact evaluative processing as well are a few aspects need to be considered. Recent research studies clearly showed that a number of factors influence evaluation, including cognitive development, epistemological beliefs, emotional sensitivity, affect, and level of prior knowledge.( Mary Ann Fitzgerald: 1999; Edwards, K., and E.E. Smith. 1996; Kahneman, D. 1991) .

Critical evaluation literacy skills are centered on the following five central questions. (Patricia Broadfoot, 2008)

1. Why do we assess?
2. What is to be assessed?

3. When is it to be assessed?
4. How is the assessment to be undertaken?
5. Who is to be assessed and who is to be assessing?

Empowering students/student teachers through critical evaluation skills would create new possibilities for teacher training and teacher development.

Mary Ann Fitzgerald( 1999), says “Evaluation is closely associated with critical thinking. Some writers such as Beyer (1985), D’Angelo (1971), and Yinger (1980) seem to equate “critical thinking” with “evaluation.” Most theorists, however, describe critical thinking as including evaluation among several other higher- order thinking processes (Cromwell 1992; Ennis 1989; Paul 1992). Because of these ties between evaluation and critical thinking, much theory and research about critical thinking informs an understanding of evaluation”. Evaluation is not a simple process and it is also not an easygoing process. It is immensely difficult and complicated process. Evaluation is a challenging decision-making process and value judgment activity. It requires cognitive and non-cognitive skills along with critical perspective, conceptual clarity and context sensitivity.

### **Deconstructing Binaries in Evaluation/Assessment**

For radical change and institutional transformation, teacher educators need to put serious efforts to dismantle and deconstruct all the binary assumptions such as Context versus Content; Quality versus Quantity ;Independent versus Dependent; Logical versus Emotional; Society versus Individual; Mind versus Body; Culture versus Nature; Right versus Wrong; Pass versus Fail; Continuous versus Discontinuous; Formative versus Summative; Assessment of Learning versus Assessment for Learning etc. It is necessary to understand the genesis and purpose of these binaries, including their role in shaping institutional cultures and everyday life. Teacher educators need to go beyond the conventional wisdom and make an effort to see student teachers’ performance in a continuum and unified way. Also recognize the violence of such binary thinking in our professional life.

### **Dialectics of Assessment/Evaluation**

The other important aspect we need to learn is that assessment can be used to support the learning process itself. We need to enable student teachers to distinguish between:

1. Assessment of Learning
2. Assessment for Learning

### 3. Assessment as Learning

What is important for student teachers is to understand the dialectics between all the above mentioned three purposes of assessment/evaluation. Assessment of learning is summative in nature and is used to confirm what students know and can do, to demonstrate whether they have achieved the curriculum outcomes, and, occasionally, to show how they are placed in relation to others. Teachers concentrate on ensuring that they have used assessment to provide accurate and sound statements of students' proficiency, so that the recipients of the information can use the information to make reasonable and defensible decisions. Assessment of Learning is usually summative evaluation and is mostly done at the end of a task, unit of work etc. The Manitoba Education report says, *"It is designed to provide evidence of achievement to parents, other educators, the students themselves and sometimes to outside groups ,e.g., employers, other educational institutions."*(Minister of Education : Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth -2006).

The primary objective of assessment should be to promote learning and ultimately achievement. Students need to know about their processes of learning and understand the following before learning can take place ( Cheryl A Jones ,2005):

1. What is the aim of the learning?
2. Why do they need to learn it?
3. Where are they in terms of achieving the aim?
4. How can they achieve the aim?

The assumption here is that when students know and understand these questions, the quality of learning will improve. Sharing this information with learners will promote ownership of the learning aims and a sense of shared responsibility between the teacher and student to achieve those aims.

In assessment for learning the emphasis shifts from summative to formative assessment. Assessment for Learning happens during the learning, often more than once, rather than at the end. Students understand exactly what they are to learn, what is expected of them and are given feedback and advice on how to improve their work.

Manitoba Ministry (2006) in its document enunciates, *"Assessment for learning is designed to give teachers information to modify and differentiate teaching and learning activities. It acknowledges that individual students learn in idiosyncratic ways, but it also recognizes that there are predictable patterns and pathways that many students follow. It requires careful design on the part of teachers so that they use the resulting information to determine not only what students know, but also to gain insights into how, when, and whether students apply what they know. Teachers can also use this information to streamline and target instruction and resources, and to provide feedback to students to help them advance their learning."*

Improving students' confidence and self-esteem reflects positively in students' work and their motivation is improved. Cheryl A Jones (2005) says "to promote effective assessment, teachers need to :

*1. Explain the learning aims to learners and check their understanding; 2. Demonstrate the standards learners are required to achieve and help them recognize when they have achieved that standard; 3. Give effective feedback on assessment decisions, so that learners know how to improve; 4. Demonstrate high expectations and make it obvious to learners that they believe that they can improve on their past performance; 5. Provide regular opportunities for teachers and learners to reflect on the last performance and review learners' progress; 6. Develop learners' self-assessment skills, so that they can recognize what aspects of their own work need to improve."* ( Cheryl A Jones ,2005)

The other important aspect related to students' learning is 'Assessment as Learning'. Through this process students would be able to learn about themselves as learners and become aware of how they learn – become metacognitive (knowledge of one's own thought processes). Students reflect on their work on a regular basis, usually through self and peer assessment and decide (often with the help of the teacher, particularly in the early stages) what their next learning will be. Assessment as learning helps students to take more responsibility for their own learning and monitoring future directions.

Monitoba Ministry (2006) in its document pronounces, "*Assessment as learning is a process of developing and supporting metacognition for students. Assessment as learning focuses on the role of the student as the critical connector between assessment and learning. When students are active, engaged, and critical assessors, they make sense of information, relate it to prior knowledge, and use it for new learning. This is the regulatory process in metacognition. It occurs when students monitor their own learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in what they understand. It requires that teachers help students develop, practise, and become comfortable with reflection, and with a critical analysis of their own learning.*"

Schraw (1998) emphasizes the following in construing 'assessment as learning' in teaching students. This actually leads to the monitoring of one's own metacognitive thinking processes.

- What is the purpose of learning these concepts and skills?
- What do I know about this topic?
- What strategies do I know that will help me learn this?
- Am I understanding these concepts?

- What are the criteria for improving my work?
- Have I accomplished the goals I set for myself?

Teacher educators need to design their role in developing critical perspectives, metacognitive skills among students/student teachers for motivating them to become critical thinkers, and organic intellectuals.

Teacher training /teacher education is essentially a complex multifarious progression comprising multi-level reflective cognitive and non-cognitive web of dynamic processes. It is characterized by a wide range of developmental activities and variety of curricular and co-curricular inputs spread over the entire duration of training designed systematically and logically.

### **Understanding Self**

Teacher development is a self -reflective cognitive activity and also a dynamic cultural formation. Understanding self and moving towards achieving the objectives and goals of professional development is a primarily a subjective process of becoming. The NCFTE -2009 documents enunciates, *“Evaluation in teacher education needs to be objective while giving value to subjective understanding of the developing teacher. It also needs to be comprehensive so as to cover the entire gamut of conceptual, pedagogical dimensions as well as attitudes, dispositions, habits and capacities in a teacher incorporating both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of growth. These include: engagement with learners in their contexts; school curriculum and textbooks; process of learning and knowledge; psychological and professional development; understanding of institutional arrangements, policy perspective, pedagogy and curriculum.”* According to the NCFTE -2009 document assessment and evaluation in teacher education must be based on understanding of the following aspects :

1. the process of child and adolescent development;
2. societal context of education;
3. nature of children’s thinking – mathematics, language, natural and social phenomena;
4. philosophical and sociological frameworks;
5. the school as a system and
6. the ways in which developing teachers demonstrate their changing dispositions, professional skills in organizing group learning and team work.

In order to liberate our teacher education institutions from such ideological undercurrents and unimaginative streams of consciousness we need to debate, question, critically reflect on our own epistemological assumptions, mundane practices and imbibe fresh blood to look at the reality from comprehensive unified philosophical perspective with inter-disciplinary/multi-disciplinary connotations and implications. NCFTE-2009 recommends, “ *Courses, theory and practicum on the development of the self; personal growth can be assessed using the criteria of the capacity of participants to question and be critical of their own assumptions, thoughts, opinions and ideas, developing insight into one’s own self: articulating one’s own limitations and strengths, capacity to integrate thought and action, feeling and intellect, developing self- confidence and questioning over-confidence, open-mindedness, ability to listen with empathy and attention, social sensitivity, ability to take initiative, developing positive attitudes and reflecting on negative attitudes. Self-evaluation of students would use the same criteria of personal growth.*”

We need to develop understanding of student teachers about themselves – the development of the self as a person, as a learner, and as a teacher, through conscious ongoing reflection. One of the objectives of the teacher education is to facilitate the development of individuals who can take responsibility for their own thoughts, learning and action and give a conscious direction to their lives. Student teachers need to be encouraged to explore and develop through self-reflection a greater insight into their aims of life, strengths and weaknesses and dynamics of formation of identity and individuality. (B.El.Ed. Programme of Study:2001)

Teacher education should focus on developing sensitivity, effective communication skills and ways to create harmony within one’s own self and society. And also aim at equipping the student teachers with positive attitudes, attributes and skills that help in facilitating the personal growth of their own students while teaching. In this context NCFTE-2009 pronounces, “*Teacher trainees need to study issues related to self and identity, human relationships, adult-child gaps, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes. They could explore the meaning of ethics and values, observe and understand feelings of fear and trust and their influences in personal and social attitude, attitudes towards competition and co-operation, analyse and observe the impact of competition in personal and social life, observe the role of listening, attention and empathy and the role of a teacher in establishing relationship with children and as a communicator. A greater insight into one’s aims of life, one’s strengths and weaknesses and the dynamics of identity formation provides the base for developing a professionally competent teacher who is sensitive to issues of equity, democracy and social justice.*”

What is important is that we need to address the aspects of development of the inner self and the professional identity of a teacher. This shall enable student teachers to develop sensibilities, dispositions, and skills that will later help them in facilitating the personal growth of their own students while they teach. It is important for student teachers to develop social- relational sensitivity and effective communication skills, including the ability to listen and observe. The teacher education curriculum should enable student teachers to develop a holistic and integrated understanding of the

human self and personality; to build resilience within to deal with conflicts at different levels and learn to create teams to draw upon collective strengths. (B.El.Ed. Programme of Study:2001; B.Ed. 2-Year Curriculum Framework-2015)

As an individual in society one has different identities – gender, relational, cultural – and it is important to address one’s implicit beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices resulting from these identities. It is important for the student teachers to be aware of their identities and the political, historical, and social forces that shape them. NCFTE-2009 emphasizes, *“student teachers need to engage with their childhood experiences, personal aspirations and aspirations to become teachers, their views on issues of gender and identity, personal, familial and social conflict. This can be best done through workshops in drama, art, music and craft. They need to be encouraged to record and analyze observations to interpret reality within varying theoretical and experiential frameworks.”*

The curricular activities should make use of personal narratives, life stories, group interactions, film reviews – to help explore one’s dreams, aspirations, concerns, through varied forms of self-expression, including poetry and humor, creative movement, aesthetic representations, etc. Teacher education curriculum must provide possibilities for revisiting one’s childhood experiences – influences, limitations and potentials – while empathizing with other childhoods, and also the childhood experiences of one's peers. As discussed above Evaluation/Assessment involves several components, which include understanding self, metacognition, goals, a personal disposition toward evaluation, a signal to begin the process, deliberation, and decision. (B.El.Ed. Programme of Study:2001; B.Ed. 2-Year Curriculum Framework-2015).

## CONCLUSION

Teacher educators, need to subvert the age-old assessment/evaluation practices that are centered around quantitative measures and operational concepts. By destabilizing the mechanistic conventional wisdom and deconstructing the institutionalized positivist models of evaluation and assessment they can empower student teachers and communities of teacher education practitioners. Teacher educators need to develop a new culture of thinking in our institutions of learning about assessment/evaluation to comprehend the politics and political economy of the emerging ideas and purposes of evaluation/assessment and to move beyond the standardized norms , procedures and psychometric practices in teacher education.

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