

Exploring Alternative Assessment in Education from Different Lenses

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I. INTRODUCTION

Assessment has necessarily become the vehicle and engine that drives the delivery of education and other related educational processes. It is a truism that 'what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught' (Broadfoot, 2004). Governments across the globe have realized the potential of educational assessment in engendering the much coveted educational goal of enhanced pupil learning. Impact of alternative assessment forms on pupils learning can be discerned from the fact that this framework of assessment is popularly called as *assessment for learning*. Recent decades have witnessed marked changes in the assessment perspective, assessment systems and assessment regimes. These changes entail integration of assessment in the teaching- learning process, making students partners in the learning process, empowering teachers to make judgments about their pupils' progress, and motivating teachers to provide their learners with individualized and qualitative feedback which could purposefully inform the next steps in learning. As pointed out by Birenbaum (1996), the term alternative assessment is like a large umbrella, 'a generic term currently used in assessment literature' (p.3) that shelters multitude of potential alternatives to traditional tests, such as, performance based assessment, authentic assessment, self- peer assessment, inquiry based learning projects, portfolios, etc.(Fox, 2008). Gardner (2012) further suggesting the centrality of learning emphasized in alternative assessment framework suggested that it is popularly called as 'assessment *for learning*' (Gipps et al., 1997).

Though this framework of assessment seems learner friendly yet it poses many intriguing issues still in the process of educational enquiry. For instance, what are the purposes, functions of the new modes of assessment? How will the goals of selection and certification will be handled through the alternative assessment framework? If allegations levied on traditional forms of assessment are severe then are we sure that 'assessment for learning' will be error free? Is there any positive or negative *backwash effect* (Broadfoot, 2004) of alternative assessment? What kind of alterations are to be incorporated in the long established educational regimes, school calendars required to integrate newer forms of assessment? What are the provisions made for re-orienting the conceptions and interpretive frameworks of various competing stakeholders- parents, teachers, school administration? And most importantly, how will this paradigm of educational assessment synergise the role expectations of educational assessment between home, school and society at large? These are few deeper questions whose solutions are to be sought for. Also, restricting oneself in the

boundaries of any one discipline may not help us locate all the solutions; therefore, an inter-disciplinary approach to alternative assessment is required.

This paper examines 'alternative assessment' reform (Fox, 2008), from few different perspectives, namely, economic, socio-political, psychological, and technological (Hargreaves, 2002). Each perspective analyses alternative assessment from differing lenses highlighting different issues and problems.

II. THE STUDY

Due to longstanding criticisms of traditional board examinations in the Indian society, and the advocacy of NCF 2005, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has introduced an assessment reform in all its affiliated schools, i.e, instating Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). This reform, as the name itself indicates, while acknowledging the role of learning in educational process makes an attempt to assess learners on 'continual' and 'periodic' basis so as to diagnose the learning difficulties and take the appropriate action there and then instead of postponing it to the year end. In addition, CCE considers both the scholastic and co- scholastic aspects of pupil's growth, thereby, making the assessment of pupil's personality comprehensive in character (NCERT, 2006, p. 25). Along with this reform, several other steps, such as, making X standard board examination optional etc. have also come up into the picture.

The study is based on the research conducted in three different pedagogical settings (Leach, 1999) in the region of New- Delhi in which the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is launched in the year 2009 in secondary classes.

Research tools included non- participatory classroom observations and observations of Parent- Teacher Meetings, semi-structured interview protocol with teachers, students, and school heads; focused group discussions, an attempt was being made to probe into the teachers' pedagogical beliefs and assumptions, their epistemological stance, views about learners, perception about assessment practices, position on assessment reform etc. Furthermore, informal conversations with students were done to gauge their understanding and experience of assessment reform.

[Document analysis of school records, teacher diaries, summative assessment question papers, formative assessment tasks-worksheets, school handbooks, school newspapers, textbooks, and helpbooks was done.](#)

Detailed field notes were prepared of unobtrusive observation made of the formative assessment episodes, class discussions, practical laboratory observations and other contexts

of formative assessment. Further, teachers' ways of recording evidence, compiling records and ways of providing feedback were considered.

III. THE TECHNOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

House (1981) suggests that everyone shares a common interest in advancing the innovation. The only remaining issue is how best to implement it (Hargreaves, 2002). From the standpoint of assessment reform, the technological perspective explores the issues of organizing, structuring, and strategizing the development of new educational techniques along with the skills for implementing these tools in the existing system. The development of defensible technologiesⁱ - which are valid, reliable, fair, generalisable- not only requires adequate time, assessment literacy (Stiggins, 1997; Harlen, 2008) but also a mindset that respects the inclusion of these tools in the teaching-learning process (Harris & Brown, 2009). Apart from these, research cites problems of insufficient teacher development, inadequacy of time and resources for teachers to collaborate and implement their ideas into practice (Black, 1998b), apparent inability of alternative assessment forms to handle huge population through their child centric approaches leads to the emerging international trend of 'assessment *as* learning' (Torrance, 2007).

Teachers are often found grappling with various assessment issues with the introduction of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation in schools. They complain of the lack of training done in this regard and find it an imposition by authorities. Nobody seems to be clear about its goals, principles, practices. All regurgitate standard statements 'it is learner friendly assessment' while lacking the basic skills on how to incorporate it in the system, how to balance the summative and formative demands, development of tools and techniques, creation of assessment criteria, providing qualitative feedback and using it for further learning. All are struggling to understand the basic philosophy behind it and re-orienting their mental frameworks in consonance with the assessment reform. Teachers often mention:

'I had studied, taught for several years in an educational system driven by traditional testing.....I am skilled at teaching to test.....hmmm..though CCE system may be good but I don't know how to handle it'

Black (2003) had quoted a teacher calling formative assessment 'scary' and 'loss of control'. Research often reports that teachers tend to abandon the teaching profession when it comes to practicing alternative assessment practices in real time classrooms.

Few teachers were in strong favor of assessment reform but could not integrate the reformed practices in their classrooms. The incongruence between their perspective and classroom practices was glaring. Teachers mentioned that 'we had only one training session in the beginning of the year.....and they told us unit tests is the tool for FA. It left me wondering.....Am I not doing it already in the traditional exam system.'

These statements are evident of the lack of professional training – both in- service and pre- service (as teacher training institutes in New- Delhi region do not offer any compulsory paper on assessment) – that has a detrimental impact on

alternative assessment reform. Further, an unpublished research on the beginning teachers' problems states that Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation has made the educational system messy. In fact, various studies have reported highly experienced teachers are mostly resistive of the change. Research reports that it is only by indulging the teachers in the process of action research that they can actually realize the potential of alternative assessment to their professional practice (Mathews, 2007).

.....Apart from this, development of assessment criteria, communicating and sharing it with pupils and parents; making learners decide their course of learning themselves; and making them autonomous were equivalent to madenss.

Classroom assessments present a morass of technological issues. Almost all the teachers in the three pedagogical settings were hassled by the recording compulsions made by Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation. Some teachers quoted 'Our position is reduced to that of clerks now....look at the copies we are try to come to grips with (referring to assessment record books and students response scripts).

Teachers found fault with the increased recording compulsions under Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation. they suggested that earlier (referring to the traditional examination system) they had to make report card once at the end of every term, now, most of their time is occupied compiling assessment outcomes of pupils. In of the school, administration introduced a CCE Record book for these purposes (which had the provision of filling in detailed assessment criteria, demanded students' portfolios description, specific remedial measures taken for slow learners and other details) was called off due to teachers' protest on account of increased workload. While others retorted

...I don't think we are assessing human potential...we are actually reducing it to a grid...categorizing each and every aspect.....segmenting the child's capacities to fill our procedural requirements....

Hargreaves (2002) at this juncture noted down that 'each individual is made into a documented case, judged and compared as someone who may now, or at some other future unknown point, need to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded and so forth' (p. 86). This sort of disenchantment due to procedural compliance (Torrance, 2007) infiltrates in the teaching- learning process. As they say,

We are not left with any time to plan our lessons constructively, develop new teaching- learning material for our pupils....as we have to be on our toes to collect assessment evidence from pupils on the basis of which we can fill up the table.

It is noted that even the most change committed teachers felt exasperated due to increased requirements of assessment recording. Also, they lacked time management skills and were unable to manage the large number of formative assessment cycles as required under the CCE. This observation corroborated with Wilson's (1996) findings where he noted that formative assessment tasks such as writing anecdotal records, undertaking one-to-one conferencing and managing the expanding armory of assessment technology placed teachers under huge time pressures (Hargreaves, 2002). For instance, one teacher observed:

By the time, I finish one F A term is about to and I had to rush to take other formative assessments so as to complete the preliminary requirements

Moreover, it was common in the schools that as SA approached all the teachers hastened to complete their formative assessments. Consequently, the quality of tasks deteriorated and instrumentalism set in under the guise of formative assessment, thus, leading to the emerging trend of 'assessment as learning' (Torrance, 2007).

Broadfoot (2008) had noted down students' perception of alternative assessment reform in the following quotations:

I'd like the feedback to be a bit more personal but there are lots of students and I suppose the lecturers can't spend all their time giving feedback.

I'd love the opportunity to sit down with the person who has marked my work and go through it with them but it's not going to happen.

I try and read the comments and make note of them for the next time but I won't feel involved. I feel like a number.

On a daily basis you don't feel part of a two-way process at all because you don't have contact with the people you are supposed to be learning from. I've adopted the attitude now that if I want this degree I'm going to have to get on with it. Whether I do it with the aid of a lecturer doesn't matter to me.

It should be to judge what we have learned and how good the teaching is but I think it is just a way of categorizing us all.

Underlined text in the above quotations provides a glimpse of what is it that students are looking for in a feedback: may it be personal remarks, something which is relevant and familiar to them; or sitting down with examiners to unpack that is hidden in the feedback remarks, engage in assessment conversations with them; or noting it down to devise ways that could facilitate better performance next time. Further, students feel that feedback should be indicative of what learning has occurred up till now and what is left along with how it can be improved.

In addition to an urge of getting quality feedback, it could further be inferred that learners are so much accustomed to absence of feedback, or to low-quality feedback that they find it impossible for the teachers to work upon this aspect of educational assessment. An ingrained helplessness, at times frustration, is reflected within these quotations evocative of the urge for facilitation by teachers in the learning process, acquiring ways to foster their grades but somehow they are not feeling *involved* in the process or assume it not only difficult rather impossible to operationalise the formative assessment perspective in real world classrooms. Infact, quote 4 suggest that students are adapting their learning patterns in accordance to the absence of feedback as getting promoted to the next class is considered more important than learning.

As it was seen in the schools, teachers are engaged in the practice of formative assessment with an absolute absence of feedback or feeding back only in terms of marks or grades which do not satiate the necessary condition of formative feedback, i.e., 'for assessment to be formative the feedback information has to be used (Black, 1998)'. If the information about the gap is just recorded and summarized, then the action cannot be formative (Sadler, 1989).

And unfortunately teachers don't have an understanding of what is wrong with the process. They are administering endless

number of short and atomized tests in the name of formative assessment but not indulging in the developmental and diagnostic process with the students. Consequently, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation has immensely increased the teachers' burnout and students' stress raising panoply of technological issues.

Furthermore, formative assessment requires changes in the timetable patterns of schools, for instance, teachers found it difficult to initiate and wind up a group activity in a single period and yearned for a double period which was unavailable due to the rigidity of school timetable, yielding to compromise in the quality of formative assessment practices. As teachers often bellowed, '....Half of the period is spent in making groups of students and explaining the activity, by the time, they start working and collaborating with each other bell rings and the activity has to be called off leading to abrupt breaks in the developmental plan....'.

Whereas in schools that had pre-empted these difficulties and planned for a double period in advance had witnessed integration of 'assessment for learning' framework in their classrooms. To further illustrate this point, one of the schools witnessed for the study involved its students in science symposiums as a formative assessment activity. They had planned a weekly double period in advance during which students and teachers can indulge in detailed formative assessment activities.

Also, formative assessment is a resource intensive practice. In many scenario, teachers complain of lack of resources as the prime technological problem behind abandoning formative assessment practices. To illustrate this point further, a change committed teacher in a government school argued that 'even though I develop different assessment tools.. such as..this crossword for assessing students' conceptual knowledge ... but in spite of investing so much time and effort principal asks me to leave it as he does not have money to get it photocopied for all students.' This observation resonates with Hargreaves (2002) finding that even though teachers broaden their assessment repertoires yet they are unable to confront problems in terms of their school's ability to accommodate implementation. These kind of constraints were well captured in the study of Stiggins (1997) where he argues that insufficient time, resources, professional development, and consultancy support for teachers to become virtuoso performers are but a few problems faced by teachers. Another pertinent technological issue is to manage large student population and carry out individualized, child centric assessment. One of the administrators commented 'reduce the class size from 50 to 30, and my teachers will do wonders', thereby, reflecting one of the facets of many technological problems faced by teachers involved in the alternative assessment reform.

In summary, technological perspective on alternative assessment draws attention to the issues of devising valid and reliable forms of assessment; problems faced by teachers while changing their perspectives, assessment beliefs, acquiring range of assessment skills and strategies, implementing them in classrooms and co-ordinating with students, parents and administration; handling the issues of time and resource constraints. Consequently, it seems that the challenge lies in creating assessment technologies which efficiently combine the

two diverse roles of assessment- selection & certification and motivating learning. As field suggests, only policy changes, structural modifications and imposition of different tools to so-called assess new skills will not help as there is a tendency to slip into old ways when the new methods are not easily adaptable.

However, Broadfoot (1996) notes that these are not simply technological challenges but represent an upshot of inappropriate use, political and bureaucratic interference or as Wilson (1996) suggests that these issues are deep down rooted under differing institutional priorities and requirements that can mitigate against any significant changes in assessment (Hargreaves, 2002).

IV. THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Hargreaves (2002, p.76) argues that cultural perspective to alternative assessment entails the challenge of ‘reculturing’ (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994) or rethinking the nature and purpose of classroom assessment. Historically, assessment had the sole purpose of reporting (making a comment or label) to parents and society at large about the quantity of learning that had taken place at the end of quantum teaching. This approach had origins in the tremendous faith held by societal forces in the principles of apparent fairness and scientific rationality of the formal testing. This form of assessment legitimized one’s position in the society and assisted in the perpetuation of inequitable social order (Broadfoot, 1996).

Alternative classroom assessment, however, shifts the focus of assessment processes from product to the process of learning. A focus on self- progress rather than competition with peers; that is criterion based approach to assessment as compared to norm-based evaluation is the prime feature of ‘assessment *for* learning’ practices. Gardner (2012) argues that deceptively simple looking definition of formative assessment entails ‘a complex weave of activities involving pedagogic style, student- teacher interaction, self- reflection (teacher and student), motivation and a variety of assessment processes.’ (p.3). prior knowledge structures as held by learners come to play an important part in the learning and a common understanding about the teaching- learning processes needs to be arrived at by the means of dialogue about when the learning occurs (Harlen, 2000; Shephard, 2000). Broadfoot (2008: 126) has suggested that improving learning through assessment depends on the following factors:

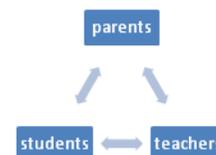
“A recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self- esteem of pupils both of which are crucial influences on learning; the creation of classroom culture based on mutual respect; the active involvement of pupils in their own learning and in self- assessment; the provision of effective feedback to pupils which allows them to recognize the next steps and how to take them; a view of teaching and learning in which feedback is seen as an essential part; adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment; sharing learning goals with pupils; the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve; helping students to know and recognize the standards they are aiming for; the confidence that every student can improve; both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data.”

These principles or recommendations suggest a shift away from curriculum coverage and fixed response assessment towards ‘uncoverage’ (Hargreaves, 2002) in which the focus is to

explore students’ understanding of the concept. An openness is inherent in the approaches- opening up of a ‘window’ (Broadfoot, 1996) into one’s mental representations, prior knowledge structures, understanding of the concept to the teacher, peers, and self ; and unpacking the assessment criteria for all to judge, in collaboration with teacher, the performance of the pupil. This openness is both the merit and demerit of the alternative assessment. As teachers put it,

‘ now, we have to be careful as parents can question us how did my child got that mark or grade....Record Books can’t be cooked up as students and parents demand authenticity’ leading teachers to be more cautious and snatches their dictatorial powers (Kumar, 1991) of the classroom.

The cultural perspective of alternative assessment involves an interaction of cultures. As House (1981) puts it, ‘...it is blending of ideas with a cultural history’ (Hargreaves, 2002), indicating the harmonization of understanding, role expectations, and cooperation among all those involved, in our case, teachers, students and parents.



Upon reflecting the role conflicts among the three participants, Filer (2000) argued that assessment outcomes interpretation by parents form a crucial component of assessment circle. Though methods of assessment changed with the launching of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation yet construal of assessment outcomes by parents, and society at large remain same as in the case of formal examinations which create confusion. For instance, in a Parents Teacher Meeting, parents are often found enquiring about the position or ranking of the child relative to others in the examinations; qualitative feedback seemed useless as they are habitual to comparison and competition approaches.

Ma’am, please help me understand where my child stands when compared to others of his age. Is his development- physical & mental- as per his age? Is he a bright or a dull child?

Specifically, parents of so- called ‘high achievers’ were disenchanted with the system as they used position of their child in classroom, in the batch for affectation to other parents. This observation was corroborated in Hargreaves (2002) work where he pointed out a teacher’s concern: ‘Parents would love to see how their child stacks up in the class, position in the class’ (p.79).

All the more parents held a view that assessment tasks such as making power point presentations, models, charts; designing experiments; doing authentic activities (as opposed to cookbook science labs) etc. are ‘*extra- curricular*’ activities and amount to wastage of their child’s time. Pupils pointed out that their parents do not see the educative value of formative assessment tasks and ask them to study towards the examination rather than squandering to complete non- intellectual, crafts based tasks. Study habits valued by parents were incongruent to the

philosophy of formative assessment. Like teachers parents also urgently required training and change of outlook to understand the perspectives embodied in authentic and performance based tasks. It further highlights the issue of establishment of human communication among all the key players engaged in the assessment processes.

The sources of uncertainty in the execution of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation were multifarious. Teachers engaged in the formative assessment pursued an alteration of formative assessment thinking that it is assessment for learning. For instance, research had cited that teachers want their kids to see it's not just a good job but why it's a good job (Hargreaves, 2002, p.78) but in practice they are unable to translate it into practice. Teachers in the name of qualitative feedback gave their learners comments on their performance, such as, 'very good', 'outstanding', which did not elucidate any information about the learners' strengths and weaknesses. It is simply a comparative norm, a rating scale which had focus on competition rather than cooperation among learners. They use such adjectives as feedback, in lieu of anecdotal records, and for reporting to parents which do not provide any measures for adaptive action and modification of the teaching- learning process (Sadler, 1989).

An integral part of alternative assessment is devising and applying the assessment criteria themselves by the learners, together with the teacher. In a classroom, teacher asked students to generate the assessment criteria for their assignment of *investigatory projects* themselves. She divided them in groups and asked them to discuss and devise criteria for their own assessment by the teacher.

Ss: don't you know what to look up for a good work?

Ss: how do we know what are you expecting?

Ss: (giggling)haven't you planned enough for the class time today?

T: (patiently) ... yes, you are right. Please help me in the assessment of your work. I'm a bit new and naïve....

The above episode is representative of the discomfort students' face when involved in the assessment process. They love it to be a mystery and have extreme faith in teacher's judgment. Planning of assessment criteria for themselves was interpreted as wastage of classroom time, inability of teacher to develop criteria by herself, and lack of lesson planning on teacher's part. Pupils doubted teachers' professional skills, assessment literacy, pedagogical content knowledge, thus, reflecting misconstrued perceptions of students, inadequacy of faith in the alternative assessment practices by the students themselves.

However, eventually students of the same class realized the importance of devising assessment criteria collaboratively. A *culture of mutual sharing*, participation in the assessment practices got a hold in the classroom practices. In the initial phases, teacher developed the practice of self assessment along with the practice of devising assessment criteria by students to which students reacted 'Why should I be truthful? Why would I rate myself low if the power is in my hands?'

But teacher instead of explaining handled it tactfully. She made two copies of all the answer scripts, one she assessed herself based on the criteria developed and the other she asked them to do themselves. Students were amazed to find that teacher

as well as students could reach at same grades with the help of criteria. This form of transparency gradually allured them and they started asking for this practice for all their future assignments. This made acquire responsibility of their own learning.

Moreover, while working for assessment criteria, students, at times, came up with such criteria which were not even anticipated by the teacher. For instance, while working for the criteria of making NETS for 3D shapes:

Student pointed out the characteristics like neatness, accuracy to which teacher explored what does it mean to be accurate and student clarified is a prism constructed actually a prism, i.e., are the dimensions correct?.....and so on.

It reflects that students not only develop assessment criteria but a crisp conceptual understanding, in line, with the fact that conceptual clarity is enhanced teachers teach (Black, 2003).

In contrast, the culture of self assessment remained a surprise for parents, students and administration. Most of them looked at this practice as shirking the professional responsibilities and teachers often had to toil hard for demonstrating the educational value of it.

S1: My papa says why are you checking yourself...what does your teacher do?

S2: I may change my answers to align them according to criteria and hence raise my grades...

And it was accompanied by teachers' doubt that truthful self assessment may amount to malpractices. As one of the teachers said, 'I wondered what I will do if they all give themselves good marks.'

In one of the schools observed, teachers pre- planned assessment criteria for all the activities and pasted them on the bulletin board of the classroom and provided a copy in *Science Handbook* in the school's library for parents to access. They shared that the benefit of this process is that

In PTMs, no parent turns up asking why this grade or mark....they know the quality of their ward's work beforehand To which another teacher added 'accusations of assessment biases, favouritism levied on us reduced and system became clean...'

Another key component was reflecting on one's progress over the period of time. to further illustrate the point, I would like to cite a mathematics workshop session conducted with pupils. Resource persons provided a sheet in which algorithm to make a 'paper fish' was given. Students made it while reading it and then they asked 'what are the learning outcomes?' to which students replied 'Measurement skills, reading with comprehension, sequencing of instructions, developing a whole by integrating parts...'

Initially, it seemed that learning outcomes like 'reading with comprehension, sequencing of instructions' are part of a language classroom. But while engaging with students I realized that measurement (which to me was the mathematical objective of the activity) only happened when students could read it thoughtfully and made sense of it. This highlights an individual's ability to ascertain various educational objectives when they were made to reflect upon it themselves.

It could be said that to successfully integrate alternative assessment in the socio- cultural fabric of any society an interplay between the values, beliefs, and points of view between

all involved is mandatory. In this case, 'the task of educators is not to pander to popular prejudices and assumptions about assessment but to deepen everyone's understanding of learning and assessment issues' (Hargreaves, 2002, p.80).

V. THE POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Assessment serves as a 'communicative device' between the world of education and society at large. The spectrum of communication ranges from the most informal of exchanges to the extremely formal, spanning everything from school reports to high-stakes public examinations, and from individual job interviews to national monitoring (Broadfoot, 2004, p.9). The extreme faith in assessment outcomes by society manifests it with immense power which further raises the issue of power relations these new forms of assessment manifest- whether they amount of the Benthamite notion of panoptic surveillance (Broadfoot, 1996) or is it amount to a compromise on quality of education as there is no external check on what is happening inside the school premises in the name of classroom based assessment. According to Hargreaves (2002), political perspective on assessment acknowledges the inherent fact that all forms of assessment are acts of power- whether sheltered or exposed. All the more, alternative assessment encompasses the power struggle between the ideologies and interest groups between school and societies (p.82).

Torrance & Pyror (1998) identified two conceptually distinct approaches to classroom assessment. In Convergent assessment, learner is evaluated against a pre-determined external criterion. The power of choosing the assessment tool, way and time of its execution and decision making all resided in the hands of teacher. Divergent assessment, on the other hand, is integral to the teaching-learning process. The focus is on pupil's learning and the processes employed while learning. Students are not the mute spectators of assessment happening to them rather an active participant in the process of their assessment. Assessment Reform Group (2002) has culled out 10 principles of 'assessment for learning' framework which are as follows:

- Is a part of effective planning
- Focuses on how students learner
- Is central to classroom practice
- Is a key professional skill
- Is sensitive and constructive
- Fosters motivation
- Promotes understanding of goals and criteria
- Helps learners know how to improve
- Develops the capacity for self assessment
- Recognizes all educational achievement

By the same token, in classrooms teachers recollect from their experiences that communicating assessment criteria to students has its added benefits as students themselves know what is quality work to which they are striving for and teachers need not explain why pupils are getting particular grades as they know in advance the criteria to which they can compare their work to. By creating assessment criteria available to all, publicly contestable teacher often tends to redistribute classroom power. Assessment judgments become 'acts of explicit negotiation among all those involved' (Hargreaves, 2002: 82). In a classroom

practicing alternative assessment, it is a common feature that students disagree to teachers' voice; choose the kind of assessment tool through which he wants to be formatively assessed; possess the liberty to be assessed according to his learning paces and so on. It inadvertently manifests greater power in the hands of learners who, for instance, in case of portfolio assessment, possesses free will to choose the samples of his work to be assessed. It seems that changes of role necessitated by successful implementation of alternative assessment leads to making assessment processes more democratic and student friendly. However, a closer look at the assessment processes may reveal few hidden features of alternative assessment reform.

On looking at assessment reform for students' lens a mixed viewpoint emerged that suggested the establishment of another form of power regime through alternative forms of assessment. Manifestation of power in the hands of few leads to establishment of hierarchical orders even more sinister as compared to traditional forms of examination. One student recounted that

It seems that I am under closer surveillance all the time.....My body language, my interaction with my friends, listening skills, clarity of expression all is being watched upon by an external eye. I feel I am caged....

Hargreaves (2002) suggest that the political risks associated with alternative assessment becomes grave when it comes to assessment of affect as it tantamount to exercising behavioral surveillance over everything students do and teachers developing a questioning, judgmental attitude towards their pupils' activities- both inside and outside the classroom. With teacher also showing the similar concerns....

What do you want out of me...to ask a question and simultaneously open by Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation Record Book to enter who participated, who was active....in this way, focus of classroom interaction goes away from teaching-learning to making assessment records.

In a Focused Group Discussion, teachers' interaction on the issue of using 'Class Response' as a formative assessment activity is indicative of the restlessness that this expectation of prolonged surveillance through formative assessment measures seems to have created:

X: had we not taken quiz earlier? What an enjoyment and learning activity it used to be? But now they expect me to open the jinxed (as students often call it) Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation Record book and note down who took the initiative, who was more alert, who reasoned well.... And so on. Isn't rooting competition in everyday class practices? Y: I simply can't ask questions from all the 50 in one class. And....I don't wish to initiate a 'rat race' for marks or assessment (as they now call it) in my class.

Also, Hargreaves (2002) mentioned a teachers' similar concern in his work in Ontario, Canada

There is just so much going on that all you are doing is testing. All you are doing is assessment. There is very little so called teaching-learning going on because we are spending so much time testing (p.83).

The above statements reflect the stress created by new system by manifesting teachers with more power to judge their students which may be turn otherwise in practice. Teachers, in

some contexts, may use assessment as a tool to exercise power over students, their parents and may lead to several untoward consequences. One of which can be exemplified through the following extract

Students pointed out that ‘Now, I don’t wish ‘Good Morning’ to my teacher out of affection but in order to appease her as I had disagreed to her viewpoint yesterday in the class...’

To which researcher questioned ‘is disagreement not accepted in your classroom?’

Student: though she says she encourages differing viewpoints yet it may go against me in co-scholastic assessment where they assess positive attitude, seeking extra help with teachers etc...I can’t afford to lose grades

Teachers are often found making statements such as ‘don’t make noisemarks of formatives are in my domain’, thus, suggesting the use of classroom based assessment as a ‘disciplinary mechanism’ (Foucault, 1977 as cited by Gipps, 1999) by teachers. By the same token, Hargreaves (2002) points out that alternative assessment has come to be synonymous for students compliance with the behavioral norms of schooling. Not only teachers, but peers also tend to use decadent techniques to harm fellow classmates when it came to group assessment and peer assessment. Peer assessment techniques which could be highly educative have deteriorated to snitching and spying by students. In group work, group leaders tend to dominate and present the work letting him to catch the spotlight while others are shadowed. These ideas found resonance in the works of French social theorist Michel Foucault (1977 as cited by Gipps, 1999; Broadfoot, 1996; Hargreaves, 2002). Hargreaves (2002) points out that Foucault (1977) argues that discipline is ‘.....finely graded, carefully regulated process of administrative control over body and mind where surveillance is perpetual and pervasive, intense and intrusive, continuous and remorseless in its applications and effects’ (p.86). Further arguing that

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy with those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish (p.184).

Thus, suggesting that ‘normalising judgment’ – concept of a norm that acts as a basis of categorization- coupled with the act of surveillance makes educational assessment one of the most powerful instruments of locating each individual its place in society (Gipps, 1999: 259). The political implications of building a dossier of human capacities, in alternative assessment, may be in the form of portfolios, continuous student assessment, self assessment, peer assessment etc. ‘permit educational selection to be self guided and failure to be disclosed gradually, in stages, as in therapeutic, rather than sudden and shocking, disclosures about terminal illness that medical staff makes to hospital patients (Hopfl & Linstead, 1993 as cited by Hargreaves, 2002, p.86).

By the same token, Bernstein argued that there has been shift of emphasis from overt to covert assessment and from specific to diffuse evaluation criteria. Overt assessment, or “objective” evaluation, is based on specific criteria, precise measurement and standardization; while in progressive pedagogy, assessment is covert and assessment criteria diffused thus making direct comparison between pupils difficult. Though covert assessment seems to be benign, however, they are potentially controlling

rather than progressive and liberating as they give more control over performance and success to teachers (Hargreaves, 1986 as cited by Gipps, 1999).

By the same token, Broadfoot (1996) and Hargreaves (2002) have argued that unending alternative assessments seem akin to the Benthamite’s notion of panoptic surveillance which could be interpreted as a sophisticated new form of selection and scrutiny. Panopticism is a principle of discipline in which power is exercised through an all-seeing, invisible observer. Consequently, “the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed. Its strength is that it never intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise” (Foucault, 1977, p. 206 as cited by Hargreaves, 2002). He goes to the extent of comparing alternative assessment to the ideal system of modern penal treatment which would be an indefinite discipline; an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a particular and ever more analytical observation, a judgment that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed (p.227).

Also, formative measures of assessment envision liberatory classroom contracts (Gipps, 1999) and a re-organisation of teaching contracts between the teacher and the taught. It needs to be explored how the class power is redistributed among its members. Are the teaching – learning interactions democratic or there are other ulterior motives being propagated? To this end, teachers point out that ‘I’m no more the boss...’, arguing that transparency in the system has increased now. Teachers relate that making assessment criteria explicit leads to opening up the system to public scrutiny. They share that

‘...unlike previous times, now students would come up and ask on what basis this grade is awarded... parents in parents teacher meeting ask us to open up the record books and would look into the basis on which we are assessing their wards’

These statements indicate an enhanced awareness on the part of parents in the alternative assessment framework and a forced openness of teachers’ world to the public domain. Furthermore, this opening up takes place in several directions from students to students, teachers to teachers, teachers to parents, from student to teacher and so on.

The basic irony of the implementation of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation in classrooms was moving towards democratization of assessment outcomes through use of formative assessment on one hand and at the same time preparing children for high- stakes board examinations and entrance test in senior secondary classrooms. Parents, teachers, administrators all bothered for the loss of skills in students to study to the test in an objective manner and loss of teachers’ abilities to teach to the test while engaging in Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation assessment. One teacher recollected her own child’s study patterns while preparing for class X board examination with respect to the current batch of students (who are being assessed under CCE):

My child developed studying patterns while X standard boards.... He knew what is relevant and disentangled it from what is noisy for examination. Skills like presenting your thoughts on paper, development of conceptual clarity, recognizing their own study cycles and... attitudinal skills of perseverance, managing work pressure from multiple ends and regulating stress.....are seemingly absent in this system as the

pressure of 'marks' is over. They know that all will pass.... Some with A grade others with C, but they will get through. However, I wonder how are they going to organize themselves for upcoming challenges in senior secondary classes.

To this end, another Senior Secondary Chemistry Teacher noted that (while showing the comparative evidence of two consecutive years result sheet for first term of class XI science students:

You could see the difference..... the batch passing through CCE takes an entire term to acclimatize with the new system. Their first term result is bound to go down which is a prime concern for us.

These concerns exert considerable political pressure on the principal and administration to take recourse to standardized forms of testing and reporting in X standard otherwise the XII standard result would suffer. This was also acknowledged in the work of Hargreaves (2002) where he noted that political pressure at micro and macro levels can undermine the successful implementation of new strategies. By the same token, Principal of one of the schools said

Even I want learning to be enhanced, to assess my students with more democratic tools and reduce the pressure of marks from their heads but can't help as the accountability of my institution is counted through the number of distinctions in XII class, by the number of students clearing high stakes medical and engineering entrance examination.

Hargreaves (2002) had cited that due to amplified pressure of higher education, many states in USA are gradually moving towards standardized assessment. He noted that under this pressure teachers forsake their so-called liberatory forms of alternative assessment practices in favor of rote test preparation, and exhausting themselves teaching to the test. This role conflict evident from the above statements leads to an undemocratic implementation of formative assessment in schools. The conflicting ideologies- where the policy makers are promoting formative assessment vs. school administration who are pressurized by the demands of high stakes examination – often end up making assessment reform a 'schizophrenic activity' (Earl & LeMaheu, 1997; Firestone, Mayrowetz, & Fairman, 1998 as cited by Hargreaves, 2002). School and society; the world inhabited by educationists and the world of real and imagined public to whom assessment outcomes cater hold different and at times contradictory expectations from assessment and hence end up stressing differing assessment perspectives and practices in classrooms. This raises the issue of human communication and co-ordination among the competing stakes of various stakeholders involved- i.e. promoting assessment for learning vs. stressing assessment for the purposes of selection and certification, accountability and monitoring standards. Hargreaves (2002) further raises the question as in whose responsibility is to bring the vision of alternative assessment to fruition- state or school. While exploring the answer to this question in the context of Indian setting, it could be suggested that though policy makers seem to have made a movement in the direction of assessment reform yet the onus of making the real time change is manifested in the hands of schools. The purpose of assessment reform is to improve pupils learning and it lies under the purview of teachers and students who live and work in classrooms and only they themselves could only make it

happen. With State bearing the responsibility of providing the appropriate support structure to the school.

Conclusively, it could be suggested that political risks to alternative assessment have its origin in contradiction in the philosophy of alternative assessment that makes it democratic on one hand and dictatorial on the other.

VI. THE ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

This perspective delves deeper into the role of globalization, new means of livelihood, neo-liberal policies and change in assessment forms. Newby (2005) argues that curriculum for the new world- information revolution, dawn of knowledge era- requires pupils who are problem solvers, lifelong learners and hence fit into the economic setup of the present millennium. Harlen (2008) points out, that the conception of 'literacy' is no more restricted to the ability to read and write rather it connotes the ability to engage effectively with different aspects of modern life. In this age, literacy is no more unit-dimensional, it is probably a cluster of multi-dimensional abilities such as 'technological literacy', 'scientific literacy', 'mathematical literacy', 'political & social literacy' so on and so forth. Moreover, as OECD (1999) pointed out that, 'students cannot learn in school everything they will need to know in adult life. What they must acquire is the prerequisites for successful learning in future life' (p.9). Now, the focus seems to have shifted from *learning* to *learning how to learn*.

Consequently, assessment processes need to value learners who are capable enough to sift and select from the large pool of information available at a click of mouse from the internet, analyse the information and creatively solve problems. All the more, the need of the hour is not only to value the content of the material produced by children (as it is largely impossible to differentiate the real from the copied one) but the way they are reorganizing it, expressing the information in a more cogent, relevant manner to contribute to the growth of vast pool of knowledge. In this information age, Broadfoot (2008) argues that 'the espoused values of Higher Education are independence of thought, personal development and the ability to reflect on one's own practice and to use feedback to assess and manage one's own performance through self-reflection' and the paradigms of assessment which concentrate on the acquisition of the content knowledge are outdated.

To this end, it is found that people coming out of the education system are often termed as 'unemployable'- as NCF (2006) notes that 19 out of 20 graduate applicants and 6 out of 7 post-graduate applicants are unemployable- as they lack the requisite problem solving abilities. Such kind of education which cannot provide jobs to its successful candidates belies the hopes of upward mobility associated with educational processes.

Therefore, the question emerges '*How far the current assessment systems help or hinder in the achievement of academic and economic goals?*' To answer this question, it is necessary to unearth the subtleties associated with assessment processes.

Teachers, in the field, suggested that with the advent of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation academic rigour has taken a backseat. Teachers retort

As per the requirements of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation, a student who is being assessed formatively should show improvement in grades as learning difficulties are assessed on continuous basis and adaptive actions taken.....failure of improvement is tantamount to lack of adaptive efforts on teacher's part and is an accountability issue.....hmnn..though it is unethical but we have to take recourse of fake incremental grading.....

At times, it is seen that teachers' (in a Focused Group Discussion) are also found grudging that

Teacher 1: Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is another name of 'no detention policy'.....we can't fail them whether they work or not.....lower grades or failing means teacher is inefficient.....

Teacher 2: Principal and government inspectors say 'can't you make him (children) learn in repeated efforts ..'; 'failure means teachers are not doing their duty responsibly'....

Teacher 3: we have to run after students for assessing them continuously and they don't care.....as they know they will be promoted to next class in any case..

Also, a consonant version is elaborated by students suggestive that 'ma'am, no worries.....our teacher handles it all.' Another source of loss of motivation is the relative low stakes of formative assessment activities. Students say 'who will work so much for 0.5 marks?' portraying lack of any intrinsic motivation among children to learn.

By0 the same token, concern emerging out of the field observations is about the nature of youth being created through alternative forms of assessment. Will they be problem solvers; or an educated unemployed generation is in process having no productive skills at all. Hargreaves (2002, p.90) argues 'Much of what passes for authentic curriculum and authentic assessment in the jargon of contemporary pedagogy,' says Meier (1998), 'seems to miss this point by giving into the search for entertainment and avoidance of boredom rather than in pursuit of clear purposes and powerful learning' (p.598). Furthermore, promoting alternative assessment as benign, humanistic and highly educative ways of assessment has a danger of propagating low educational standards in the upcoming generation further lowering the academic diligence. Hargreaves further points out the dilemma associated with alternative assessment

The danger of making "authentic assessment" into a "holy grail" of educational change is that it might well contribute to and become part of this wider discursive, rhetorical distortion, promising "feel good" improvement and empowerment in a world where poverty and inequity continue to rise. (p. 90)

Moreover, sheer complexity involved in creation of newer assessment technologies competent enough to assess 'ephemeral' educational objectives such as creativity, practical knowledge, social skills etc. tend to demotivate educationists and hence continue with traditional models or merit "mediocre" pieces of work as sophisticated forms of representing learning can seduce students and teachers 'into valuing form over substance, image over reality, with glossy covers, elegant fonts, and a sprinkling of multicovered graphs and flowcharts.' (p. 91). These forms of learning pose a serious threat and may lead to diminishing and trivializing the substance of learning, reducing it to mere surface appearances. While critiquing self assessment Hargreaves (2002) points out that such assessment tools have the tendency of

cultivating an inwardly narcissistic, self indulgent, and self centered personality.

VII. DISCUSSION

Each of these perspectives on alternative assessment points to issues which can either hinder or foster the use of classroom based assessment for pupils learning. These lenses of viewing alternative assessment can make assessment an integrated and embedded teaching- learning process; a more critical, empowering and collaborative act; motivating pupils to be responsible for their own learning, encouraging them to be reflective and self-aware. Or alternatively, it highlights the potential risks associated with alternative classroom based assessment which might impact the educational processes adversely.

By drawing thoughtfully and critically from the above four perspectives, we can use move towards using assessment in educationally equitable and sustainable directions.

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ⁱ In the context of performance assessment, Harlen (2008) has cited Pine et al. (2006) study in USA who had observed that there exist no correlation between performance of an individual on different items testing the same skill but in differing contexts. In order to assess fifth grade students, they used several hands-on performance tasks, such as, 'paper towel' - finding which type of towel would hold more water, 'Spring' - investigating length of the spring when different weights were hung on it, but found no correlation for an individual student's scores.