The Extended Teacher Assessment Role

One of the many duties teachers have to fulfil is that of assessing their students' learning. The task is also one of the most important in view of the momentous consequences misjudgements in this area may have when it comes to students' educational ambition and further career opportunities. Meanwhile, recent research and governmental reviews suggest that teacher trainees as well as active teachers are in great need of support in the areas of assessment and grading. According to national assessment surveys during the last couple of decades a high percentage of teachers experience considerable difficulties when grading their students.

Furthermore, students increasingly demand that the grades they are awarded are "fair" and in accordance with agreed goals and explicit assessment criteria. However, according to the findings of some recent investigations many students feel that their grades are not in harmony with what they intuitively feel they have achieved; according to some critics of assessment practices in our schools, teachers often tend to test what is easy to test, rather than what is most important to test. A broader approach involving complementary or alternative assessment procedures is often advocated as a solution to this problem.

While the more traditional forms of assessment in the classroom have been very well researched and documented, much less attention has been devoted to investigating alternative approaches such as portfolio assessment, performance tasks, student peer- and self-assessment, and student/teacher co-operative assessment. Likewise, there is a dearth of research activities dealing with problems related to the teacher's role in these more autonomous assessment contexts. Furthermore, an increasingly common hypothesis is that traditional classroom tests are overused as assessment instruments, especially in view of their often rather limited measurement qualities and questionable validities, and that they are at times even employed as "instruments of power" rather than as tools that can help to improve students' learning.

With examples taken from everyday classroom experience as well as from research and development work, this project describes and investigates teachers' acquaintance with various forms of assessment of learning, primarily in the area of foreign language learning. The chief aim of the research is to investigate teachers' need for and use of new approaches in the field, in particular such that promote autonomous learning and student self-assessment.

Methodological procedures employed for the collection of research data include teacher interviews and questionnaire surveys. In addition to working with data generated by the project, we also make use of data emanating from the Swedish National evaluation conducted in 2003 as well as results from a Swedish Research Council project entitled "Self-Assessment of Learning: The Case of Languages" (further information on these projects appears on this web page).

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