



ADJUSTMENT OF CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL TESTS AS A PART OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT OF PUPILS' PROGRESS

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Abstract:

Writing tests is a huge stress for students. Teachers must be flexible when working with children and young people. They should take into consideration another step onto the way of formative assessment of pupils' progress, which is the assessment of knowledge with a choice of three different criteria. A child is responsible for his or her knowledge and he or she can decide at what level is it. There are so many ways of testing and assessing knowledge, and this is just one way out of many, why not trying it?

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1. Introduction

In Slovenia, teachers in regular schools stick to the rule that tests, in terms of contents, aren't adjusted to anyone, even to the students with identified learning disabilities. Teachers, who mostly work with students with difficulties in acquiring certain topics, can see, that sometimes, despite the individual's enormous effort and all the help in school and at home, all the adjustments in the terms of increased print, forms, extension of time, and other adaptations of tests, these pupils at certain school subjects can never reach 50% of all possible points and cannot pass the test. This also applies to some students who, for one or another reason, aren't identified as students with learning disabilities, but they still have many troubles with understanding, remembering and acquisition of school materials or just with a part of materials.

In primary school, we should in the first place stick to the rule to assess students' knowledge in such a way that we respect students' personal integrity and diversity

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among them all the time. If we want to work according to this and at the same time take another step onto the way of formative assessment of pupils' progress and also make a step towards all students, assessment of knowledge with a choice of criterion would be an important contribution to this aim.

If we want to get enough realistic results of level of pupils' knowledge, the tasks of the tests should consist of about:

- 50% of the tasks that require basic knowledge,
- 35% of tasks that require basic knowledge and
- 15% of the tasks that require a higher level of knowledge.

If this condition is met and the students are already accustomed to self-evaluation and furthermore the overall learning environment is in favor of this, we can make a change that leads to the point and make tests friendlier to all the students. Other adjustments and conditions for the students with identified learning disabilities remain unchanged. The only difference is just the transformation of the criteria for all the students;

- The first criterion covers 100% of the points and consists of 5 different school grades. This is the criterion that is well known, even though it differs slightly from school to school and from teacher to teacher.
- The second criterion includes 85% of all the points, and it consists of 4 school grades.
- The third criterion covers 70% of all the points and consists of 3 school grades.

It is important to leave a gap in front of the three criteria so that a pupil can decide and clearly mark, by which criterion he or she wants his or her knowledge to be assessed. This is also an advantage over the adjusted tests, where teachers decide which tasks might be easier for a certain student. In our case, the student solves the tasks that he or she knows best but the criterion is softer. It is recommended that each student chooses the criterion at the end of the test, when he or she already gets the feeling, how was the test going. In case someone forgets to indicate which criterion he or she chooses, the teacher assesses the test according to the first criterion of 100% of all points. I've presented the assessment method the entire staff at our Glasser quality school. Some teachers decided to try this. After analyzing the results, we have come to the conclusion that criteria set out below is very suitable.

- ___ The criterion of five grades: 0-49%= F, 50-62%= D, 63- 74%= C, 75-87%= B, 88-100% = A
- ___ The criterion of four grades: 0-49% = F, 50-66%= D, 67-83%= C, 84-100%= B (The maximum score is 85% of the total points).
- ___ The criterion of three grades: 0-49%= F, 50-75%= D, 76-100%= C

(The maximum score is 70% of the total points).

For explanation; if we assume that a test has 50 possible points, the criterion is then set as follows:

- _____ 0-24.5= F, 25-31= D, 32- 37= C, 38-43.5= B, 44-50= A
- _____ 0-20= F, 21-28=D, 28.5- 35= C, 36-42.5= B
- _____ 0-17= F, 17.5-26= D, 26.5-35= C

Some teachers were wondering what happens if someone exceeds the number of points within the selected criterion. Some successful but not so self-confident students may prefer to choose a softer criterion. To get a grade B in this case is needed slightly lower number of points. These students obviously need such a safe environment in the process of their growing up and learning about their abilities, so the mature teacher will give them a chance, in the case of exceeding points within the selected criterion, to obtain a higher score and will assess their knowledge by the previous criterion.

For example, the student has ticked the second criterion and reached 44 points, so his teacher will assess the test with grade A, although the student had thought his knowledge was not perfect. Or a student who thought his knowledge is weaker and therefore chose the third criterion, but then got 37 points, the teacher will give him or her a grade B.

Another dilemma that has emerged was that a student could pass the test if he or she chooses the softest criterion, and he or she even doesn't reach half of all possible points. At this point, we should understand the relativity of the assessment. Can teachers really be so sure that few points more or less mean somebody's knowledge is sufficient or not? How can we be so sure that the tasks that we've chosen for the test are exactly those that lead to the most accurate indicator of his or her knowledge? I think when working with people, we should be flexible enough and when working with children, this must be even more so. There are so many ways of testing and assessing knowledge, and this is just one way out of many.

According to the first analysis of this kind of way of assessment, I note that students are generally more satisfied with the results. They have a good feeling, because they can choose the criterion. They prefer this kind of assessments to the conventional one. The teachers, who decided to try this type of adjustment of criteria, realized that the results were quite true reflection of students' knowledge. More students who are otherwise always between grades F and D, got grade D. This reduces their stress at review tests and teacher's work with those tests, too.

But when are schools and students' parents ready for such a change in the assessment of knowledge? Teachers or schools can go onto this way when the students are already well accustomed to self-evaluation and when parents accept the fact that

their child is responsible for his or her knowledge and that he or she can decide at what level is it. It is true that students could sometimes gain a higher score, if they had chosen other criterion, but this is a part of learning of awareness of their knowledge, which is one of the major goals in the process of somebody's education. This is the aim, which steadily leads to autonomous and responsible individuals, which today's society urgently needs.

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