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ИЗВЕСТИЯ

НА СЪЮЗА НА УЧЕНИТЕ - СЛИВЕН

ТОМ 19, 2011 г.

25 ГОДИНИ

**ИНЖЕНЕРНО-ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ -
СЛИВЕН**

Announcements of Union of Scientists - Sliven

ИЗВЕСТИЯ

НА СЪЮЗА НА УЧЕНИТЕ – СЛИВЕН

***НАСТОЯЩИЯТ ТОМ СЕ ПОСВЕЩАВА НА
НАЦИОНАЛНАТА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ
С МЕЖДУНАРОДНО УЧАСТИЕ
„ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛНИ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ 2011”
НА ТУ – СОФИЯ, ИПФ - СЛИВЕН***

***25 ГОДИНИ
ИНЖЕНЕРНО-ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ –
СЛИВЕН***

В настоящия том 19 на сп. "Известия на Съюза на учените - Сливен" са публикувани доклади, изнесени на Националната конференция с международно участие "Образователни технологии 2011", проведена 30 септември - 2 октомври 2011 г. в гр. Сливен.

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С Ъ Д Ъ Р Ж А Н И Е

Николай А. Лобанов НЕПРЕРЫВНОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ВСЕОБЩИХ ПРАВ ЧЕЛОВЕКА.....	9
Красимир Спиров, Пламен Мацински СИСТЕМА ЗА РАЗРАБОТВАНЕТО НА ДИДАКТИЧЕСКИ МАТЕРИАЛИ ЗА ДИСТАНЦИОННОТО ОБУЧЕНИЕ	12
Маргарита К. Бонева ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО В ГЛОБАЛИЗИРАЦИЯ СЕ СВЯТ – СЪСТОЯНИЕ И ИНОВАЦИИ	18
Елена М. Боричевская РОЛЬ ИНФОРМАЦИИ В УПРАВЛЕНИИ ВЫСШИМ УЧЕБНЫМ ЗАВЕДЕНИЕМ.....	24
Петинка Р. Галчева, Антоанета И. Хинева ПОРТФОЛИОТО - СРЕДСТВО ЗА МОНИТОРИНГ НА ПРОФЕСИОНАЛНИТЕ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ НА УЧИТЕЛИТЕ ПО ПРИРОДНИ НАУКИ.....	27
Румен К. Коджейков, Керанка Г. Велчева ПРОГРАМНА МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ В ОБУЧЕНИЕТО ПО СПЕЦИАЛНИ ТЕХНИЧЕСКИ ДИСЦИПЛИНИ	32
Светлозар П. Вацов УЧАСТИЕ НА РОДИТЕЛИТЕ В УПРАВЛЕНИЕТО НА УЧИЛИЩЕТО	36
Владимира С. Ангелова ЕДИН КЛАС ЕЛЕМЕНТАРНИ ТЕКСТОВИ ЗАДАЧИ С МУЛТИПЛИКАТИВНА СТРУКТУРА В НАЧАЛНОТО ОБУЧЕНИЕ ПО МАТЕМАТИКА.....	42
Радка Ж. Бъчварова ПЛАН ЗА ПОВИШАВАНЕ МОТИВАЦИЯТА ЗА УЧЕНЕ НА СТУДЕНТИТЕ	47
Радка Ж. Бъчварова ИЗНЕНАДВАЩАТА НАУКА ЗА МОТИВАЦИЯТА	51
Антоанета Н. Чобанска КРЕАТИВНО МИСЛЕНЕ, РАЗСЪЖДЕНИЕ И РЕШАВАНЕ НА ПРОБЛЕМИ ЧРЕЗ МЕТОДА „ШЕСТ МИСЛЕЩИ ШАПКИ” В ЧАСОВЕТЕ ПО УЧЕБНИТЕ ПРЕДМЕТИ ОТ ЦИКЪЛ „ФИЛОСОФИЯ” ...	55
Вяра Т. Гюрова, Ваня Б. Божилова ИНТЕРАКТИВНО ОБУЧЕНИЕ НА УЧИТЕЛИ В МУЛТИКУЛТУРНА СРЕДА	61
Николай Янков ПАРАЛЕЛНО ИЗУЧАВАНЕ НА РАЗГОВОРНИЯ И СПЕЦИАЛИЗИРАН НЕМСКИ ЕЗИК.....	66
Ганка И. Янкова ИНОВАТИВНИ ПРАКТИКИ В ОБУЧЕНИЕТО ПО БЪЛГАРСКИ ЕЗИК.....	69
Violeta Janusheva, Milena Pejchinovska FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE TEACHING PRACTICE THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE TEACHERS	73
Violeta Janusheva, Jove D. Talevski IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROCEDURES FROM STANDARDIZED TESTS ON PREPARATION OF INFORMAL OBJECTIVE TESTS.....	79
Юрий Петров Клисarov ОБУЧЕНИЕТО ПО ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИ ДИСЦИПЛИНИ ОСНОВАНО НА ИДЕИТЕ НА КОНТРУКТИВИЗМА И ТЕОРИЯТА ЗА СТИЛОВЕ НА УЧЕНЕ	85

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE TEACHING PRACTICE THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE TEACHERS

Violeta Janusheva, Milena Pejchinovska

ABSTRACT: *The concept formative assessment is relatively new in the educational practice, and it is introduced, primarily, through various projects for promotion of the assessment of students' achievements. Formative assessment is an assessment which takes place whilst students are still in the learning process, i.e. an assessment which helps to improve the learning and the achievements of the students. Our researches show that this concept has shown certain stability in the educational practice, but still, in a large extent, some weaknesses are present, connected in the first place, with those characteristics which in the vocational literature are pointed out as a vital and required components of the formative assessment.*

In that sense, in the article all these vital and necessary components of the formative assessment are stressed out and through surveys and informal conversation with the teachers it is shown how they have been seen through the prism of teachers regarding the possibility of their real implementation in the teaching process.

KEYWORDS: *formative assessment, necessary components, real implementation*

The different terms for formative assessment (FA)¹ add its essence up to a continuous assessment through which information for students' achievements is collected, used for directing students' activities towards certain aims and contents, to boost their following steps in order to improve their accomplishments. FA is a component of the planning of teaching process (TPr), i.e. of the teacher's teaching and the students' study. This concept, although relatively new, in our daily teaching practice is characterized by certain stability, but however, our research, as well as our long practice show that certain flaws can be found in its use, connected to the characteristics, which are said to be a vital and a necessary component of effective FA in the professional literature. In addition, those characteristics are briefly described, and through surveys (S) and informal conversations (IC) teachers'² considerations are perceived with

reference to the efficient implementation of FA in the TPr.

1. **FA is a component of the scheduling of the TPr.** The effective and efficient FA which completes its function in the TPr has to be planned in advance. The results from A, IC and our long term practice show that, at least for now, FA is created without planning, unsystematically and perhaps, the reasons for the difficulties which teachers encounter whilst using it in certain segments, should be searched for in the lack of planning. For ex., teachers are supposed to plan by what means they are going to ensure an effective feedback (F) from the students with, regarding to the knowledge that will be gained at the end of the lesson (by observation, questioning, self-assessment activities, etc.) Teachers are supposed to plan how to follow the mutual cooperation among the students, how to assess the effort of the group, and the contribution of the individual to the result of the group as well etc. The incorporation of FA into the scheduling of TPr is shown to be its very weak segment in the organization and realization with reference to the effective implementation of FA in the TPr.

¹ Continuous, current, assessment for learning, assessment whilst the students are still in the process of learning, s. G. Gojkov. (2003). Dokimologija. Vršac: Visha škola za obrazovanje vaspitacha; K. Popovski. (2005). Dokimologija, str. 174-178. Skopje: Kitano; Prirachnik. (2007). Unapreduvanje na ocenuvanjeto vo uchilishtata, str. 7-13. Prirachnik za sredno struchno obrazovanie. USAID, SEA. Skopje

² The research (S and IC) refer to 160 teachers (80 from 10 primary schools in RM, participants in the project „Modernization of education”, which was realized in 2009/2010), s. J. D. Talevski, V. Janusheva, M. Pejchinovska. (2010). Learning through Research, a Possibility for Permanent Professional Improvement of the

Teaching Staff in the Elementary Education, p. 251-255, vol. 17. Educational Technologies: National Conference with International Participation. Sliven, as well as 80 teachers from high schools. Most of these teachers were participants in projects for promotion of assessment, for ex., SEA and PEP (Secondary Education Activity and Primary Education Project)

2. Feedback (F)³. The great significance of the feedback in TPr is undeniable.

2.1. F from the students. All the information that teacher receives during the FA are, in fact, F from the students. Through the F, teacher perceives how well students have understood the teaching material, their development, behavior in the process of studying, style of studying and communication, the level of efficiency/inefficiency of the methods, techniques and strategies used to teach, the level of efficiency/inefficiency of the techniques used to assess the students' accomplishments⁴, the validity, reliability and objectivity of the assessment, his own strong and weak points as a teacher etc, which is why the F is essential, so that, based on all of this information, teacher can adjust, i.e. modify the TPr aiming to improve students' accomplishments. The results from the S and the IC emphasize the view-point that the F will be used for improving students' achievements, but the key question arises: How does the teacher adjust, i.e. modify his teaching work to respond to students' needs? How much can TPr be adjusted, i.e. modified to the demands of studying which are identified through the F in the absence of a systematical and scheduled FA?

2.1.1. The adjustment, i.e. modifying the TPr. It's a fact that teacher teaches students who differ by their opportunities, intellectual capacities, abilities etc. In that regard, the results from the S and the IC show that the adjusting, i.e. the modifications generally refer to change in the way teacher teaches: using different techniques, strategies and activities for teaching and assessing the students' accomplishments, in order to improve the validity and objectivity of the marks, additional teaching after the teaching for a certain concept, a change in the vocabulary that is being used etc. The knowledge from the S, the IC and our practice, show that adjusting, i.e. a modification in terms of a deviation from a certain teaching content (TC), at least for now, is not practiced, because the TC, is provided in the teaching program

(TP), also the indications for keeping to the TP as well as to the number of classes for realization of a certain TC are constant, although in the didactical literature there are different considerations⁵, and still, there is a small number of teachers who sometimes do not comply with the number of classes⁶. The teacher can undertake all of the activities mentioned above, the F can stay the same (the concept can still be unclear). However, teacher continues with teaching of other TC because he is limited with the annual fund of classes of the subject he is obliged to realize.

2.1.1.1. Strategies, techniques and activities for improving teaching and assessment. Relating to the strategies and techniques for teaching and assessment, a few key points can be made. These strategies and techniques in the Macedonian educational system are a result, primarily, of the numerous projects. Teacher is supposed to have attended these projects or to have taken part in the disseminations within the school. In this regard, a relevant factor is the teacher's will for their use, change and improvement of teaching practice, because it is a well-known fact, and that is confirmed through results of the S and the IC, that teachers rarely change the established practice and that there is a resistance in numerous teachers towards the use of the strategies of active methodology, as well as towards the techniques for FA⁷. The number of strategies presented on the project is limited (they are sort of an impulse, not constant models), so because of that, teacher should continuously pay attention to his professional development⁸ and permanently upgrade himself, to search and find, to create and combine different approaches for

³ For F and its characteristics, s. Popovski, str. 40; For the motivational function of FO, s. M. Pejchinovska. (2011). Мотивационата функција на повратната информација во наставата по ЗО, природа, општество и подобрувањето на успехот на учениците. CD, International Conference: Assessment for Learning in 21 century. Skopje

⁴ Knowledge is not simple concept, it contains achievements on cognitive, psychomotor and socio-emotional level. Achievements contain knowledge, skills and other competences, s. Popovski, str. 40

⁵ s. M. Vilotijević. (1999), Didaktika 3, Organizacija nastave, str. 54-56. Beograd: Nauchna knjiga

⁶ Stepping back from the number of classes for realization of certain TC given in the TP may in large extent, affect the achievements of students in a negative way, but those implications are not stressed in the paper

⁷ Most of the teachers continue with their old practice of teaching after the financial stimulus from the projects is over. About the reasons for unsustainability of the projects, s. J. Richardson, V. Januseva. (2011). The Lasting Impact of Reading to Learn and Sustainability of Professional Development. CG Publisher: The International Journal of Learning (manuscript accepted for printing)

⁸ s. J. D. Talevski, V. Janusheva, Milena Pejchinovska. (2011). Teacher's development in relation to evaluation - Learning teams as a possibility for more effective assessment process of student's achievement. Journal Plus Education - ISSN: 1842-077X, E-ISSN: 2068-1151, Vol. VII (2011), No. 1, p. 44-57. Retrieved June 11, 2011 from <http://www.uav.ro/en/journals/educatia-plus/volumes>

teaching and assessment. Teacher is supposed to be professionally qualified and to act constructively so that he can plan effective FA. The S and the IC show that these activities take too much time. It is also indicative that teacher should be careful when using the techniques of active methodology and FA because the students can experience monotony if teacher uses the same strategy over and over again or if as a result of the FA with no planning a few teachers use the same strategy in different classes in the same day. It is of a great importance that some of the teachers instead about the concept, i.e. the TC, teach about the strategy⁹. All of this, to a great extent, complicates the effective use of the FA.

As to the students' achievements, according to the S and the IC as a result of use of the techniques for FA the students' motivation and activity has indeed improved. Among the most used are: the verbal response (structural conversations, verbal presentations), the student's self-assessment and the peer-students' assessment, portfolios, project assignments, objective tests with multiple choice and short answers, the verbal and written F, depending on the students' age. But, for now, according to some of the teachers there isn't any relevant improvement in the students' success. The main cause of this might be located in the insufficient competences that teachers have in this field, in the high expectations of teachers, in the complicated procedure of planning the key elements of FA etc. It should be emphasized that FA is also a new concept for the students and that it will take time for the awareness for passing from traditional to a completely new way of teaching and assessment to be raised. Students too, accept the changes in teaching and assessment more difficult, especially, if for ex., teacher during the teaching includes the students in self-assessment activities, and when forming the final grade, does not take into account those results. Or there can be a disagreement in the way teacher teaches and the requests he introduces to the students, i.e., when teaching, the teacher can explain a certain concept without stressing that it is important for the students to know a certain definition, but in the exam one of the tasks should be

specifying the given definition¹⁰.

Despite the great significance that these strategies have, it should not be neglected, that teacher is supposed to put great effort while they become a part of daily practice and stop being treated as a game. It can be perceived from the S and the IC that, in this regard, the consistency in teachers' behavior is indicative, i.e. the most of the teachers who accept FA as an essential component in teaching practice, the greater the chances are for the concept to revive and to become its component. The role of directors and all involved in the Tpr, is as important.

From the S and the IC it is obvious that most of the teachers highlight the fact that certain contents are not suitable for none of the techniques of active methodology or FA, generally because of the nature of the subjects they teach, so, according to that it can not be used continuously. It is true that certain TC are difficult to be taught through certain strategies, but referring to FA, teachers' confusion is evident, because there are no difficult or easy TC, FA is an assessment which helps the level of achieving a certain TC to be assessed, i.e. the level of achieving of a certain TG, to diagnose the level of achieving of certain TC, to diagnose difficulties in the study etc., in order to undertake activities which will help students in the process of studying, gaining knowledge of TP, if necessary etc.

2.2 F from the teacher. Neither giving F from the teacher is an easy task. Firstly, in order for teacher to give a relevant information to a student, primarily, both the student and the teacher are supposed to be familiar with the criteria according which the accomplishments will be assessed, and this indicates the need of a necessary plan of FA. It is well-known that creating of criteria and indicators for assessment of students' achievements is the most complex task. Bearing in mind that teacher still prepares the criteria and the indicators, and that from the S and IC his insufficient competence is concluded, the relevancy of the F can be questioned, as well as its quality, its motivational and stimulating function.

Next, teacher is supposed to judge which aspects from all of the information he receives dur-

⁹ A proof for this claim is our long practice and participation in observing classes of teachers who used certain strategies of the active methodology and techniques of FO, after the dissemination in school was finished (after the project was over)

¹⁰ IC show that this happens very often and here we can see the reasons for teachers being not satisfied with the success of the students, because it is a fact that one cannot teach in a new way, and assess the achievements in a traditional way, for the new teaching approaches demand new assessment approaches

ing FA are relevant for improving the students' achievements. Teacher should explain to students how to use this information to improve his own development. What, if for ex., teacher misjudges and if the aspect which is given a F upon is irrelevant to student's accomplishments? Or, if a student lacks to understand how to use the F from the teacher? These questions clearly indicate the importance that FA needs to be understood with, the need of steady planning, as well as the need of teacher's psychological, pedagogical and professional competence to perceive all the information, to elaborate them and to make a genuine judgment.

Teacher is supposed to have a differentiated F to every student for the development in the studying, for his strong and weak points and to direct and motivate his following activities. Through the prism of teachers this characteristic of FA is extremely important, but unfortunately, it can not be realized continuously, because according to them, the number of students in one class is too big for them to use the F in its genuine function. It is impossible to give a F to 34 students in one lesson. There is a great number of teachers who do not give F at all, or whose F are reduced to banal statements which have no connection to the genuine function of the F.

It's a fact that for the F to have its genuine function, it has to be individualized. This way, the F individualizes the Tpr too. It's a fact that in order the F to complete its function, teacher is supposed to know all of its characteristics and specifics, to be pedagogically and psychologically qualified, professional, with solid verbal and communicational skills etc. and that is not simple. If, for ex., teacher has seven lessons during the day and works with 200 students, it is possible that he forgets the verbal F given to the student. In this regard, the number of students in the class becomes an obstacle for the efficiency of the F.

It is especially very difficult to give a F when it comes to the assessment of the, so called, process skills, for ex., for assessing TG which are used to measure the ability of the students to express themselves in written form, for a critical and creative thinking, for creative skills etc., because in this case it is difficult for the criteria and the indicators for objective assessment to be precise. For ex., it is certain that when assessing an essay with an extended answer¹¹, it is not enough to say or

write that the general sentence is not good, but it is even more difficult to say or write which are the components that make a general sentence to be good, satisfactory or excellent. In this regard, the analytical and holistic lists for assessing are of a great assistance, but even with their use it can not be said that the subjective factor is not present, in terms of subjective comprehension of the criteria and the indicators.

From all of the above, it is obvious that it is complicated to give a genuine effective F which will direct the student's subsequent development.

3. The teaching goals (TG). Students are supposed to be introduced to the TG, to know the TG they have to achieve and to be able to judge which level they can reach on their own. It is said that effective FA involves students in setting the TG for studying. From teachers' view-point, this component of FA is almost impossible to be realized because TG which are supposed to be adopted by students are given with the TP for every subject, so they are left with no possibility of involving students in setting the TG. It is evident that not all of the students will achieve every TG on the same level. How will the teacher include them in establishing the TG, can each student have the same TG? Can the TG be established for each of them individually? **Practice:** In this regard, this component refers to the fact that teacher is supposed to assist students in order for them to learn the standards towards which they should aim, but it's also a fact that every student cannot achieve the established standards. The TG which are presented in the TP for students are supposed to be operationalized through certain tasks, to be differentiated and the approach to the realization of the task to be individualized – this way within the globally presented TG, they set TG according to the necessities and opportunities of each student, i.e. both teacher and student set the TG towards which the student aims. It actually means choosing the methods, strategies, etc., in order for the TG to be available to students who differ by the abilities, knowledge, emotionality, social development etc. This explanation is entirely appropriate to the requests for an individualized F. From teachers' point of view,

of papers, International conference: Assessment for learning in 21 s. Skopje and J. Talevski, V. Janusheva. (2011). Assessment of essay questions with extended answer. Collection of papers, The Sixth International Balkan Congress for Education and Science: Modern Society and Education. Skopje: Pedagogical faculty (paper accepted for printing)

¹¹ s. Popovski, str. 56-58; V. Janusheva. (2011). Ocenuvanje na procesnite veshtini kaj uchenicite, str. 240-247. Collection

this is a complex activity and although they individualize and differentiate the tasks, the practice is more intuitive, than systematical and planned and to a great extent is based on their experience. In that regard, they emphasize the need of their subsequent education and involvement in the creation of the TG so as to implement FA in the TPr more competently, and improving its quality also.

As to the TG, it should be emphasized that teacher is supposed to share the criteria which is used to assess the students with them. The S and the IC merely confirm the well-known fact that, at least for now, the teacher introduces his own criteria using the directions given from the institutional authorities and that a certain imprecision and an incomplete definition of the criteria being used, are perceived. However, having to introduce satisfactory, objective and valid criteria and indicators which are used in every segment of TPr, is obviously very difficult. The teacher has to be very skillful and energetic in order to involve the students in the ascertaining of the criteria and the indicators (the students are not used to be included in activities for assessing their achievements), and if the results from the F and the IC through which it is perceived that the teachers find it difficult to individualize and differentiate the TG, to create valid criteria for assessment, that they seldom involve students in the introduction of the criteria and the indicators are taken into account, it can be concluded that these two characteristics of the FA, need to have serious attention paid to. On the other hand, because of the non-unification and imprecision of the criteria and the indicators for assessing the students' accomplishments, the realization of the TG becomes questionable, as well as the level of validity of the results given during the assessment of the students' achievements.

4. Involvement of students in self-assessment and peer-assessment activities. It is undoubtedly that students' involvement in self-assessment and peer-assessment activities, to a great extent, improve the students' accomplishments¹², their motivation improves as well because the assessment becomes a part of teacher's and student's team work, i.e. shared, partner activity. **Practice:** The S and the IC show that most of the teachers include the students in the assessment,

through activities for self and peer-assessment. But, our practice, however, raises the question: how much are students actually involved in the process of assessment, through the activities and how realistically are their comments taken into account?

The research show that students' involvement in the assessment is more marginal and formal than it is actually taking place. According to the teachers, analytic, holistic, check-lists, self-assessment lists, peer-assessment activities are used, but it is vital for the teacher to be willing to include students in the assessment, because on the contrary, the involvement may seem unserious and misunderstood by the students. If the teacher includes students in the assessment, and does not take their comments seriously, he is most likely to fail in achieving his actual TG. In the beginning, teacher is supposed to prepare the students for involving in different self and peer-assessment activities. How much time available does he have? Will he teach about TC or the activities for self and peer-assessment? It's a fact that a longer period of time is required for these concepts to gain the significance that they should realistically have.

Conclusions

From the analysis based on the actual teachers' practice, it can be concluded that a more serious and systematical approach in the use of FA for improving the students' accomplishments is imperative. This kind of approach, despite teachers' training through the projects for FA, is supposed to include all relevant factors, included in preparing the subject programs and in the selection of the contents. Moreover, special attention ought to be paid to the concretization of the TG and the defining of more objective and precise criteria based on which the gained knowledge about the TG will be determined, and they are supposed to be individualized according to the demands and abilities of each student.

The first steps, taking the complexity of FA into account, refer to understanding the essence of the FA, which is done to a great extent, through the project and teachers' training, but yet, their increased engagement when planning the FA is needed and a lot of institutional changes should be made too, so that FA can accomplish its practical function (teachers' involvement in creation of the TG and TP, reducing the number of students in each class, improving the teachers' motivation, reducing the content of the TP, teacher's promotion etc.)

¹² s. Popovski, str. 56-58; J. D. Talevski. (2011). Samooncuvanje i ocenuvanje od souchenici, CD, International Conference: Assessment for Learning in 21 c. Skopje

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