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W WARSZAWIE
ST. CLEMENT OF OHRID UNIVERSITY OF BITOLA
(УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ СВ. КЛИМЕНТОХРИДСКИ – БИТОЛА)

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**MODERN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL
CHALLENGES AND PHENOMENA
POLISH AND MACEDONIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Warszawa - Bitola 2014

WYŻSZA SZKOŁA PEDAGOGICZNA IM. J. KORCZAKA W WARSZAWIE

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INDRODUCTION

Formative assessment (FA), i.e. the assessment of students' learning process is a relevant condition for improvement of students' achievements⁷¹ and teachers' teaching. Students' results and the improvement of teachers' teaching are primarily a result from the efficient and effective realization of the formative assessment in the teaching process, which basically means a continuous assessment of students' achievements – the teacher is constantly gathering information on which he gives a quality feedback. In that sense an efficient and effective FA which is a guarantee of students' success during the teaching process means a timely support for students' achievements by means of continuous feedback for the quality and correctness of answers to certain questions, a given test or for every realized activity, and exactly those answers, reactions or actions give the teacher's feedback for the adopted material and students' progress or possible setback in the learning process and according to this the teacher makes the adjustment to his further teaching. In that way the teacher acquires the information about his teaching, while the student acquires the information about the quality of his learning and his achievements. Furthermore the whole process of planning the further teaching activities as well as the adjustments of the types of learning and the size of the realized content to the individual features of the students depend on the effective and efficient FA. Considering this, through the analysis of the surveys answers and the informal conversations with teachers, the paper makes an attempt to perceive the effects from the application of the FA on the improving of students' achievements which is an indicator of quality realization of the formative assessment during teaching and learning in the teaching process.

FA CHARACTERISTICS

FA is an integral part of the teaching planning, the teaching process, i.e teachers' teaching and students' learning. This is a rather new concept in

⁷¹The knowledge is not a homogenous concept, it obtains achievements on cognitive, psychomotor and socioemotional plan. They contain knowledge, skills and other competences, s. Popovski, 2005, str. 40

our everyday teaching practice, but it is characterized by a certain stability and the basic characteristics of the FA can be clearly pointed in the part that follows. Regarding this FA is characterized by the following features: *continuity* – the teacher is continuously following (observing) students' achievements and he is continuously gathering information on their achievements; *continuity of the feedback*⁷² – the teacher constantly gives feedback on students' achievements and receives feedback through students' reactions which gives him the opportunity to see the realised effect and according to it to plan and upgrade his work; FA is *developmental, current*, i.e. assessment for learning, assessment happening while students are still in the learning phase, i.e. when the teaching material is not finished and it takes place during the lesson when the teacher gives instructions on a new concept; FA is *preventive* – it affects students' further learning and results (success); *individual* – FA is directed to every student's achievements and the feedback is personalized – meaning that in order to give feedback the teacher starts from students' individual characteristics. The teacher needs to use different approaches appropriate to the individual characteristics of the students in order to realize an effective assessment of the learning process; *directed* – the feedback should direct student's learning to its improvement, its motivational function is important; *students active involvement* – students are actively involved in the process of acquiring the knowledge, the goal is clear and they get constant feedback of their learning; *a focus on the teaching and learning process* – FA is in fact in function of assessing the results from the teaching and learning because it leads to an assessment of the obtained results. It could not be possible for the teacher to assess the results from the learning and teaching, if that same process of learning and teaching has not been previously assessed.

WHICH FA IS BOTH EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT?

FA can complete its function only if it comes as a result of constant following of the students' individual progress and provides direction of individual developmental needs of the students in accordance with the defined goals of the educational process. Namely, the single role of the effective and efficient assessment is to affect student's work in the sense of supporting the progressive changes that take place during the learning process and in that way giving an opportunity to draw ultimate results at the end of the learning process. Considering this one of the presumptions for both effective and efficient formative assessment is the same to be practised continuously at every class, i.e. in every situation when the teacher gives a certain task and the students give an answer to it. During this interactive process according to

⁷² For the type, character and the content of the feedback, s. Popovski, 2005, and for the motivational function of the feedback, s. Pejchinovska, 2011

the quality of the obtained answers, results from tests and other work done, evaluation of students' achievements is done and on that basis the assessment of the learning process too. This leads to the fact that an effective and efficient formative assessment means that the teacher has to collect information on students' achievements very carefully in order the assessment to be well grounded.

In order the previously mentioned function to be successfully realized the effective and efficient formative assessment needs to be planned in advance. Every teacher's task is to plan which strategies and techniques he is going to use in order to provide effective feedback from and for the students. In his daily preparations he clearly defines lesson's objectives, his activities and those of the students so it is necessary in that part to define the techniques and strategies he needs to follow students' activities, for instance, in which part of the lesson he intends to use the techniques – strategies, which part he uses for his comments, what kind of feedback he gives to his students, whether the feedback is individual or it refers to the achievement of a specific group, whether he is going to apply self-evaluation activities, in what way he follows the relations of mutual cooperation in groups and so on. In this sense, formative assessment incorporation in the teaching planning especially in the planning of a single lesson is one of the most important segments in the organization and realization of the teaching.

For both effective and efficient formative assessment, the learning goal for each student has to be transparent and clear so he can independently estimate his level regarding the defined goal. Right before teaching a new concept the teacher has to define the goal of that concept, i.e he has to explain the benefit and importance of knowing that same concept. All students will not adopt the material at the same level. However, this component refers to the fact that the teacher should help students to get to know the standards they have to reach and it is more than clear that not every student can satisfy the set standards. Therefore, the objectives defined in the curriculum should put an accent on the individualized approach in the realization of the tasks so within the globally defined teaching objectives – objectives are defined according to the competences and abilities of every student. That involves variety of methods, strategies etc. needed for the teaching objectives to be accessible to students who are different in terms of abilities, knowledge, emotional and social development etc. It is necessary to emphasise that from teachers' point of view this is a complex activity and although the tasks are individualized, that practise is more and more intuitive than systematic and planned and it is mainly based on teachers' experience. Furthermore they bring up the need for their further education and inclusion in the process of

creating the teaching objectives in order to implement the FA in the teaching practice with more competence, and to improve its quality.

FA and its effectiveness and efficiency are closely related to the characteristics of the feedback from the teacher and students. Students' feedback is essential for the teacher considering the fact that it indicates to what extent the foreseen teaching objectives and teaching contents have been adopted, then students' progress, their behavior, style of learning and communication, how successful or unsuccessful the teaching methods and strategies are, the strategies and techniques for assessing the students' achievements, how valid, reliable and objective the assessment is, teacher's weaknesses and strengths as an educator etc. According to all the information he will make further modification to his teaching with a single goal of improving students' results⁷³.

From all the obtained information during FA, the teacher estimates which aspects are relevant for improving students' results and on that basis his task is to explain the student how to use it to make his own learning and results better. This exactly is the essence of the effective teacher's feedback – to estimate well so the aspect for which the feedback is given will be relevant for students' achievements – that is why the teacher needs a solid preparation, as well as psychological and pedagogical competence so he can be able to perceive all the information, to work on it and to make the right estimation. An effective and efficient FA in fact means teacher's feedback which has a motivational function, which will boost students' activities in their further learning, all that will mostly depend on the planning and application of the suitable techniques of the FA as well as to what extent the teacher modifies his further work considering the results from the assessment of the learning process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both causal and descriptive methods are the methods of scientific knowledge for the goals of this paper. Through a qualitative analysis as an operative method of the questionnaires and informal conversations with teachers an attempt is made to notice the effects of the application of the formative assessment on students' results which is an indicator of a successful realization of the FA during teaching and learning in the teaching process. The research methods and instruments for gathering information are: surveys and questionnaires which give the teachers' attitudes and opinion on effects of the formative assessment in the teaching practice and the informal

⁷³ About the modifications and adjustments in teaching, s. Janusheva, Pejchinovska, 2011

conversations with the teachers for examining the causal relation of both effective and efficient FA with students' results in the teaching practice.

The sample is intended and includes 50 teachers from the three high schools, one primary school from Bitola, and one primary school from the village Capari – Republic of Macedonia. Through the questions from the questionnaires we expect to get a clearer picture of the FA effects on the teaching practice from those directly involved in its implementation, primary school teachers from 1-3 grade, primary school teachers from 4-9 grade, high school teachers, as well as of its effectiveness and efficiency regarding the features which in the vocational literature are considered as paradigmatic for effective FA. The obtained results are compared in order to be seen if there is a difference in teachers' opinion in all three groups considering the subject, while the answers showing considerable declination regarding the all three groups are additionally pointed out and analyzed. In the analysis the information from primary school teachers from 1-3 grade and primary school teachers from 4-9 grade will be examined as one group.

ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION FROM TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRES, INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers from both groups who are familiar with the essential characteristics of the FA as assessment which is current and helps a student to make progress, and as assessment during which he gives and gets feedback are bigger in number. This is an equivocal indicator of the fact that there is a solid base for FA implementation and that its effects provide quality in the teaching process, i.e. teacher's teaching and student's learning. This is also an indicator of teachers' realization that FA is a constituent part of the teaching planning, the teaching process, teachers' teaching and students' learning. Although it appears to be less probable mostly because of the numerous workshops on FA where a lot of teachers took part yet unfortunately teachers from primary schools and small number of teachers from high schools have serious weaknesses in defining the FA, i.e. in its relation with assessment during which the teacher is recording the descriptive or numeral grade in the grading book. When the basic characteristics of the FA are taken into consideration and the fact that recording of the descriptive and numeral grade refers to the summative assessment then it is evident that there is a serious setback for these teachers which has to be taken into account in their further progress regarding the FA with a single goal of its effective and efficient implementation in the teaching practice.

The analysis of the results from the surveys and the informal conversations shows that all the teachers from both groups have the formative assessment planned in their annual and thematic preparations (generally the

techniques and the methods for assessing students' achievements) and in their daily preparations too (more detailed description of the techniques, methods and instruments for assessment of students' achievements and their implementation in a current situation). Only one teacher from primary school does not plan the formative assessment at all which should be not be neglected but it can not influence the realization that FA stands on very solid grounds in terms of stability and that the teachers are aware of the fact that the incorporation of the FA is a solid segment of the organization and realization of the teaching regarding the effective and efficient implementation of the FA in the teaching process, though, surely information about students' achievements in the teaching process are gathered without previous planing.

According to the information obtained from the informal conversations mainly most teachers from both groups pay attention to the connection of the FA with the teaching objectives, while a small number of teachers from both groups do not take into account the teaching objectives during FA. This is a strong indicator of the fact that the teachers operationalize the teaching objectives defined in the curricula for all the students, differentiate and individualize the approach in the realization of the tasks. Thus, within the globally defined goals (objectives) the teacher has in mind the needs and abilities of the student in defining the goals. Teachers' awareness of the connection of the teaching objective with FA points to the fact that assessment criteria are shared by both students and teachers although there is a certain inaccuracy in the already used criteria especially in the assessment of essays with a detailed answer (Talevski, Janusheva, 2011), and this is understandable if we consider the fact that it is difficult to define valid, precise and objective criteria in order the adopted teaching objectives to be measured in every segment of the teaching, i.e. assessment of students' results. Our longterm practice and the informal conversations with the teachers show that besides these results, the criteria are partially shared with the students and in primary school the teacher introduces the criteria to the parents at individual or collective meetings because of the age of the students. The individualization and differentiation of the tasks is a systematic and planned activity, which undoubtedly speaks of their competence in implementing of the FA. The relation of the FA with the teaching objectives is a vital condition for effective and efficient implementation of the FA, which is a condition for promoting of the quality of teaching and learning, i.e. the quality of the teaching process in general. Thus, solid grounds for advancement of the teaching quality are provided.

The feedback is a relevant segment of the both effective and efficient assessment. The results from the surveys and the informal conversations show that most of the teachers belonging to both groups always plan the form

and the time of the feedback they give to the students, while a smaller number of teachers frequently plan all these segments of the feedback. The obtained information clearly shows that the feedback is essential for teachers and their awareness of the fact that as an integral part of the FA, it is also an integral part of the planning of the teaching process, i.e. the teacher's teaching and student's learning. A planned feedback is a condition for effective and efficient FA, so in that sense a planned feedback is an indicator of teachers' competence in implementing of the FA and it clearly affects students' results and the quality of the teaching process.

The information from both groups regarding the surveys and the informal conversations shows that most teachers during group work always plan the way that group is assessed as a whole regarding the class, but also the contribution of the individual within that group. Smaller is the number of teachers who frequently plan these segments, and the smallest is the number of teachers who do not plan the assessment of the group achievements and of the individual within the group. Again the teachers' awareness of the importance of the mutual relations between the effective and efficient FA and the planning are pointed out as well as with the advancement of the quality of their work, students' learning and their achievements. Furthermore this implies the presumption that teachers are paying serious attention to the preparation of the assessment criteria, which makes their approach to the implementation of the effective and efficient assessment also serious.

Most teachers from both groups who very frequently on the basis of the feedback from the students if there is need to change/modify their work in order the students results to be improved, and smaller is the number of teachers who if there is need to always modify their work, and the smallest is number of teachers who rarely or never take into consideration the feedback in order to improve the quality of students' results. Most teachers from both groups on the basis of the feedback alter the way they teach, numerous teachers on the basis of the feedback find a way to change something in their own work, while there are not so many teachers who alter the techniques while teaching. Teachers teach students who are different in terms of their abilities, competences etc. Thus the feedback that comes from the students is indicative for the teachers pointing out the changes they need to make in their work. This is a clear indicator of the raised awareness of the teachers about changing their teaching practice on the basis of the feedback from the students.

According to the teachers from both groups applying the FA techniques considerably improves students' results. A smaller number of teachers state that applying of the FA techniques slightly improves students' results, while a dozen of teachers state that students' results are not improved at all with the application of the FA techniques. Almost same results from both

groups are obtained regarding the fact that the FA techniques condition students' motivation and activity. On one hand these results show that the application of the FA techniques to a great extent conditions the success, activity and motivation of students and that the effective and efficient FA influences positively on the results, activity and motivation of the students. On the other hand the results from the surveys and informal conversations which point to the the statements that students' success is very small or not improved at all, and that the motivation and activity are not increased, can be a sign of teachers' incompetence in defining the FA and its implementation, then of constantly using the same techniques, of uninventive teachers, inappropriately chosen methods, the time necessarily intended for the FA, the number of students in the class etc. but also that can happen for many other reasons, which require additional researches, and they are not the elaboration subject of this paper.

The analysis of the results and the informal conversations show that according to teachers from both groups, from all the FA techniques an accent is put on the the tests and oral presentations, as instruments of gaining optimal results regarding students' success, then discussion, techniques of self-evaluation, projects and structured conversations, and at the very end is the portfolio. These results are an indicator of teachers' variety of FA techniques. Even though some of the teachers state that students' results are not improved at all, it can be clearly seen from the survey that all teachers mention one or another technique, which is contradictory to the statement that the FA techniques are not related to students' better results. It can be seen that different teachers get better results regarding students' success using various techniques, which shows that choosing one or another technique depends on many other factors such as how adaptable a technique can be regarding students' age, how appropriate one technique is to the teaching content, then the selection of a technique regarding the nature of the subject etc., (about the use of techniques as a result of teacher's work modification, s. Janusheva, Pejchinovska, 2011).

The surveys and informal conversations point to the fact that as a result of FA techniques most of the teachers get better feedback from the students and their work makes considerable progress. A very small number of teachers do not gain better feedback as a result of the FA techniques and very small number of them reckon that the application of the FA techniques does not make their work better. These information are in a way contradictory, because there is a slight probability that the teachers' work will get better and that will not affect students' achievements in a sense of their improvement. The reasons for this may be located in the insufficient competences of the teachers regarding the effective and efficient implementation of FA or in the

resistance that some teachers show towards the modern approaches in the teaching.

CONCLUSION

Many aspects of the analysis of the surveys and the informal conversation with the teachers show that regarding the period several years ago (in 2011 a research about formative assessment through the prism of the teachers was conducted) the improvement which refers to more serious and more systematic approach towards effective and efficient FO in the teaching practice is evident. This is noticed, primarily in the increased consciousness of the teacher for the essential characteristics of FO as assessment which helps the student to improve his achievements, because of fact that FO is a constituent part of the teaching planning, i.e. of the teacher's teaching and of the student's learning, then because of the connection of effective and efficient FO with the teaching goals which imply their operationalization and adjustment towards the individual capabilities of the students, as well as the implementation of objective and precise criteria for assessment, because of the type and the character of the feedback, then the large number of techniques for FO which help them to achieve optimal results regarding the student's achievements etc.

Though the analysis implies that certain weaknesses are still present regarding this subject primarily taking into consideration the deduction of those teachers which presume that FO does not improve their work neither the success of the students, the issues mentioned above presents a strong confirmation of the fact that the concept formative assessment, in a large extent, has provided a high level of stability in the teaching practice, which on the other hand indicate the solid basis of the educational process for effective and efficient implementation of FO in the teaching practice, for the increased competences of the teachers regarding its implementation, for the relation between the FO an student's achievements, as well as for the great effects from the implementation of FO in practice. This shows that in this manner the quality of the teacher's teaching and the student's learning is advanced, i.e. the quality of the teaching process generally is promoted.

The analysis clearly shows that referring to effective and efficient FO there are needs for further researches in the way that teaching goals have been operationalized and for their adjustments to the individual abilities of the students, for defining more objective and precise criteria on which basis the assessment of the student's achievements will take place, for the way the feedback is given etc., with a purpose to provide more profound picture of the effects of implementation of the FO in the teaching practice. Also, there is a

need to analyze the reasons why some teachers do not practice FO in its complexity and even show certain reaction towards this concept.

The gained knowledge from the analysis may not give a very precise and complete pictures of the complex issue connected with the effects from the FO, but it surely is an indicator for the current situation in the teaching practice related to FO regarding its realization and the quality of the teaching process. Thereto, this knowledge is a relevant starting point for further examinations of this complex issue which will contribute the precise definition and realization of the effective and efficient FO through clear determination of the teacher's and student's activities.

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