

## 10 DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The key objective of this evaluation project has been to find out about the current situation of assessment culture, practices and competences, and to produce recommendations in support of further development. These recommendations are based on the view that assessment and pedagogy are inextricably linked. In practice, assessment is one of the most effective pedagogical methods of controlling the processes of teaching, studying and learning. Considerably less attention has, however, been paid to assessment as a part of the development of pedagogy and research.

The ambiguity of the concept of assessment has been taken into consideration when drawing up the recommendations (see section 2.1.2). On one hand, this may cause harmful variation in the interpretation of results, but on the other hand, it can enrich the debate on recommendations. *Conceptual clarification can be set as a type of meta recommendation that specifies how to read these recommendations.* The task is not easy, but assessment is not, in principle, any more difficult than other concepts in the field of education.

The development recommendations have been drafted using the following assessment criteria:

- *The promotion of learning processes* is associated with the recognition of differences in learners, offering diverse assessment methods, confirming the functionality of assessment guidelines, ensuring that the guidelines are encouraging, as well as supporting adequate assessment competence. This criterion will be studied, in particular, in terms of formative assessment, i.e. continuous assessment supporting the learning process during the studies (see figure 1).
- *The fairness and uniformity of assessment* is taken into account, first and foremost, from the perspective of demonstration of skills, i.e. summative assessment (see figure 1). By definition, the use of criteria ensures that in assessments, "people give and receive on their merits".
- *The communal nature of developing assessment* has also been under review in terms of assessment practices, competence and culture. The criterion describes how the different assessment parties recognise mutual activity in the spirit of educational partnership and responsibility.

The assessment criteria are:

- Promotion of learning processes
- Fairness and consistency
- Communal character of the development of assessment

### Recommendations for assessment practices in basic education and general upper secondary education

#### 1. Teachers should diversify the assessment methods so that they increase the transparency of learning processes, enable the demonstration of competence in different ways and encourage studying.

- The ability to assess all learning objectives through one assessment method is often limited. Therefore, in addition to assessment based on individual tests, more varied and more interactive assessment methods are required.
- There is a clear link between the learning process and the learning outcomes. Thus, more attention should be paid to the assessment principles and methods of formative assessment, i.e. assessment in support of learning.
- There is a need for more guidance and feedback identifying the learners' strengths. In that case, the assessment will be able to meet the individual learning needs of learners requiring support, and to maintain the learners' enthusiasm for studying.
- Since the effect of guidance and feedback is reciprocal, learner participation is required in the planning of assessment methods and use of assessment data.

- The diversification of assessment methods is not only the responsibility of each teacher, but the school community as a whole.

**2. The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), as well as the principals should strengthen the teachers', learners' and guardians' knowledge of the objectives and criteria of learning, as well as the assessment based on them.**

- Accurately formulated and quantitatively moderate objectives and criteria of competence are the most important preconditions for a fair and consistent assessment of learning processes and results. The mutual consistency of objectives and criteria should be ensured in the national core curriculum in order to sufficiently support the learner-specific assessment made by teachers.
- The assessment of learning, working skills and transversal competence is a demanding task for teachers as such, especially when determining a subject grade. Principles of the national core curriculum and local curricula need to be clarified in order to make the process of giving a grade clear and consistent.
- Teachers and learners have, in part, very different perceptions on the principles of behaviour assessment. Mutual consistency of perceptions is important, as the learners' perceptions on fair assessment are connected with their enthusiasm for studying, and positive experiences related to assessment.
- Assessment practices should ensure that the assessment is not targeted at the learner's personality or temperament, or based on a mutual ranking of members in a learning group.
- The relevancy and persistence of guidance and feedback can be safeguarded by adequately careful and inclusive documentation of learning and competence, which increases the assessment's transparency.

**3. Schools and educational institutions should provide learners' with more opportunities to improve the assessed performances.**

- Although grades cannot be the only goal of learning, the learner should, in principle, be provided with the opportunity to succeed in the best possible way.
- The current inconsistent practices for resits and for improving a grade do not promote fairness. Opportunities to resit an unsuccessful exam either as a whole or in part should also be discussed in basic education.
- Learners experience pressure to perform in relation to assessment, and especially a unilateral use of individual tests may weaken the learners' ability to demonstrate their competence in a diverse and equal manner. The emotional pressure caused by the need to demonstrate competence through a one-off performance may increase underachievement and prevent learning from guidance and feedback.
- Enough time and opportunities should be reserved for the use of assessment information, i.e. guidance and feedback, as well as demonstration of competence in the teaching and learning processes.

**Recommendations for assessment competence in basic education and general upper secondary education**

**4. Parties offering basic and continuing education should pay attention to the strengthening and diversification of the teacher's assessment skills.**

- Assessment is one of the most effective pedagogical ways to control the processes of teaching, studying and learning. Therefore, teachers' good assessment competence is a key asset in pedagogical development.

- The link between assessment and pedagogy is emphasised when the assessment practices are developed in cooperation with fellow learners and teachers within the work community. By so doing, the diversification of teachers' assessment competence can also be successfully developed using the school's own development projects and local peer training.
- The development of expertise requires that the teachers have sufficient opportunities to participate in diverse and inclusive, national or regional assessment training. On the other hand, there should be a sufficient supply of assessment training.
- According to studies focusing on teachers' assessment competence, teachers should "have knowledge of the central concepts, different assessment methods and their development, quality standards of assessment, and options for the traditional methods of measuring learning results, and know how to use assessment results in the development of teaching" (Atjonen 2017, 152). This broad entity should be strengthened at all stages of teachers' professional development.

**5. Teachers should develop learners' assessment competence, in particular, by providing guidance in self and peer assessment and reinforcing inclusion.**

- The development of learning-to-learn skills requires that the learners have a sufficient amount of supervised training in self and peer evaluation skills throughout their school years. Anticipation and preparing for methodologically varied assessments also reinforce the learners' metacognitive capacity.
- Setting goals for learning and making them understandable together with the learners is a prerequisite for successful assessment work.
- Listening to the learners and including them more strongly in the planning, implementation and decision-making, support their commitment to the learning objectives, and make them understand their own responsibility for the learning processes and results.

**Recommendations for assessment culture in basic education and general upper secondary education**

**6. Education and training providers should enter the assessment solutions required by the national core curriculum prudently and comprehensively in the local curricula.**

- In order to ensure that the assessment is fair and consistent, it is important that the assessment guidelines falling under local responsibility are specified, so that the teachers can understand their purpose and principles as well as possible. This way, inclusive curriculum work strengthens the teachers' assessment skills, and may result in a communal development of assessment practices.
- The objectives of each school year have not been specified comprehensively in the local curricula, which, in turn, would also clarify the assessment. This objective can be pursued also by local solutions regarding the distribution of lesson hours.
- Clarifying the assessment section in the national core curriculum will be successful in municipalities and schools through methodical, inclusive leadership. The local text resulting from this work will become relevant to the practical assessment work.

**7. It is the responsibility of the local education and culture department, principals and teachers to promote an operational culture in schools and educational institutions that strengthens the cooperation between teachers, teachers and learners, and the school and the home in terms of assessment.**

- Strengthening a common understanding of assessment requires a regular discussion between principals, learners and teachers on the principles and practices of assessment.
- In order to create genuine educational cooperation, the learners' and guardians' experiences should be heard regarding the fairness of assessment and its ability to encourage and promote learning.

- A fruitful dialogue between the home and the school requires time and opportunities for the parties to meet, and to provide information on assessment. These encounters will strengthen mutual understanding of the school community's common activities of guiding and providing feedback.

**8. The task of pedagogical leaders is to create, through the means of good pedagogical leadership, an assessment culture to schools that encourages experimentation with different assessment practices.**

- Goal-oriented pedagogical leadership characterised by a developmental attitude encourages interaction and promotes the use of assessment information in the communal development of the school and educational institution.
- The school management needs support in the selection and implementation of management principles of assessment, in which the municipal or regional network of principals can be a significant resource. Common debate on the complexity of assessment work, and solution-oriented processing of the related development challenges are required in the spirit of shared leadership.
- The management's appreciation for the teachers' expertise creates trust-based conditions to critically examine, at both individual and community level, what kind of development needs require attention in terms of assessment competence.
- The larger the school units are, the more effort is needed to build a communal understanding of assessment and its goal-oriented promotion.

***And all this in order to "know where we stand".***