

Assessment as Learning: The Scaling the Journey Approach/Engaging Students in Feedback

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Abstract

Most parents judge the efficacy of the teacher through the marks scored by students. As a progressive school leader, I face this challenge everyday. In order to help students, parents and teachers look at the journey of learning and assessment as a reflective practice and learning process, I started by asking myself this question: 'How to initiate reflective feedback amongst students?' The school was looking for solutions to address parents who held the teachers alone responsible for the child's performance. This article describes the action research undertaken by the Principal of a mainstream school to initiate reflective feedback amongst the students and teachers as a tool to bring about transformation in the students' performance and engage the students with the skill to assess their own progress over a period of time.

Keywords: Assessment as learning, reflective learner, empowering students, independent learner, interactive feedback, scaffolding with feedback

Introduction

As Founder Principal of Delhi World Public School, Bangalore, a mainstream CBSE School, I have observed that the parents are from a heterogeneous group that represents diverse backgrounds and literacy levels. The parents are driven by the "score factor" (the marks that their wards secure in the examinations) in their approach to learning and development. Their expectation from the school is that the child should be enabled from school to excel in academics without parental involvement.

In the traditional Parent-Teachers' Meeting, the teachers raise their concerns about students' performance and the parents are often helpless. The parents and teachers end up blaming each other for the poor performance of the students. This is like a postmortem report that ends with a full stop. This was the problem that we faced in our school during the academic year 2018-19. As a school, we questioned ourselves if there could be a solution for this problem.

Holt (1966) encourages educators to reflect upon the choices and strategies that teachers use to engage the learner. He asks the teachers to examine if the teaching-learning practices were helpful in getting the students and teachers towards the desired learning outcome.

This led me to introspect about the existing practices in our school and I questioned myself if we were doing things correctly?

- How do students respond to corrections and feedback from teachers?
- How do we know where the learner is in the learning curve?
- How can we get the learners to reach where we want them to reach?
- Are we doing enough to make our children become independent learners and develop reflective skills?
- Is there a better way of tracking a student's learning and progress?
- What if we empower students to monitor their own learning and progress over the course of time?

Literature Review

I discovered the solutions to some of these problems in Sen's (2017) book *Imagine*. This led to finding solutions to get the students involved in their progress by encouraging them to be more proactive about reviewing their progress and setting goals for themselves. Sen suggested the idea of 'scaling' as a tool that the teachers could use to help the students track their learning. The teachers could scaffold the pupils' learning and improvement through interactive feedback. The practice of self-assessment, scaling and student-led parent-teacher meetings initiative was introduced in the school.

The quest to look for strategies to provide engaging feedback led me to Black and William (2009). They, in turn, referred to Ramaprasad (1983) to map the learner on their learning curve and scaffold them with feedback

to move further on the learning curve. Black and William (2009) further accredited the Hattie and Timperley (2007) framework of four levels of feedback: at the task level, process level, self-regulation level and self-level to enhance learning. This led to a new approach to ‘Scaling the Journey Approach to Assessment’ using the insights gained from these readings.

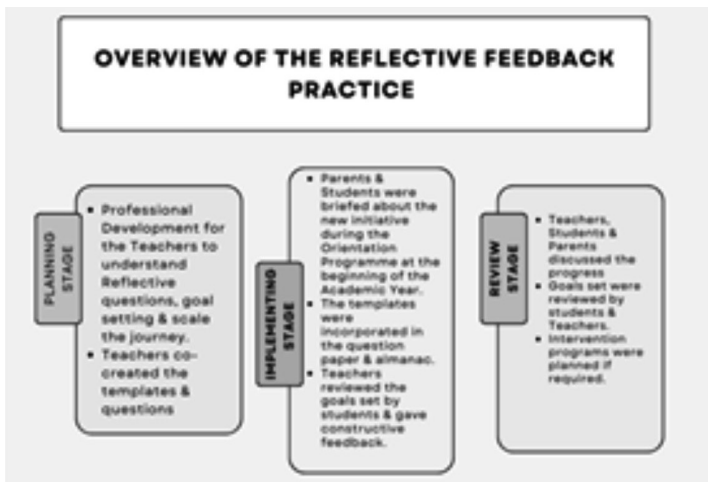
Scaling the Journey had three stages as follows:

- A. Planning and preparation of all stakeholders. E.g. Inhouse training session for teachers about the reflective questions and goal setting conducted.
- B. Goal setting by students (reflecting on their strengths and lacunae and articulating a goal to reach in the next few months. E.g. The subject teacher had discussions with the students and helped to set goals)
- C. Support on all fronts (parent, teacher, and student through tools based on the articles. E.g. The teachers helped the students to plan study time-table and reviewed the plan periodically through classroom discussions).

Methodology for Scaling the Journey

The method consisted of three phases, that is Planning, Implementation and Review.

Figure 1: Overview of the Three Phases of Implementing Reflecting Practice Among the Students



Phased Approach

Phase 1. Goal Setting by Students

The students from grades II to VII (in the academic year 2018-19) were introduced to goal setting. The student and the teacher together set a benchmark that students would strive to reach in each subject. I had worked at Vidyashilp Academy between June 2002 and July 2012. Benchmarking was one of the best practices of Vidyashilp Academy. I have used this practice in the current school where I am working at. The ‘Scale the Journey’ template was included in the students’ diary. Students from Grades II to VIII had to set a goal (score) that they could achieve. The subject teachers also had to write the score that a student could anticipate. On receiving their corrected test papers, the students wrote the marks that they had scored and compared them with their set goal. This helped the students to set a goal and work towards achieving it. The term ‘scaling’ is from the book *Imagine* by Sen (2017).

Figure 2: Scale the Journey Template from the Students’ Diary

Scale the Journey							
Subject Projected scores	English	H Language	Optional Language	Math	Science	Social Science	Computer Science
First Test	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Student's scores	$\frac{20}{25}$	$\frac{20}{25}$	$\frac{20}{25}$	$\frac{22}{25}$	$\frac{22}{25}$	$\frac{22}{25}$	$\frac{15}{25}$
Teacher's scores	22	$\frac{21}{25}$	$\frac{21}{25}$	$\frac{20}{25}$	$\frac{22}{25}$	$\frac{21}{25}$	22
Actual Score	$\frac{20.5}{25}$	$\frac{19.5}{25}$	$\frac{21}{25}$	$\frac{22}{25}$	$\frac{23.2}{25}$	$\frac{23}{25}$	$\frac{19.5}{25}$
Difference	+2.5	-1.2	+1	0	+1.2	+1	+4.5
First Term Exam	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
Student's scores	$\frac{57}{60}$	$\frac{48}{60}$	$\frac{52}{60}$	$\frac{52}{60}$	$\frac{50}{60}$	$\frac{50}{60}$	$\frac{45}{60}$
Teacher's scores	$\frac{54}{60}$	$\frac{51}{60}$	$\frac{52}{60}$	$\frac{58}{60}$	$\frac{60}{60}$	$\frac{53}{60}$	$\frac{50}{60}$
Actual Score	$\frac{55}{60}$	$\frac{48.5}{60}$	$\frac{48.5}{60}$	$\frac{44}{60}$	$\frac{52}{60}$	$\frac{48.10}{60}$	$\frac{56}{60}$
Difference	-3	-1.5	-1.5	-8	+2	-2	+11

Phase 2. Understanding the Learner

The teachers identified where the child was on the learning curve using classroom interactions, take-home assignments and diagnostic tests. This helped the teachers to identify the current learning levels of the students and the areas where they required additional support.

How Can the Learner Get to the Desired Goal?

Teachers chalked out intervention programmes, and remedial classes (for instance, students who needed more support had one-hour classes on Saturdays) were conducted to help reduce the learning gap. Teachers helped the students to prepare a study plan to be followed at home. Learning strategies such as the use of mind maps, mnemonics, hands-on learning, and additional worksheets were given. After setting the goal, the class teacher, and students (Grades IV to VIII) had to identify the areas to improve and support a student required from the teachers and parents. After the assessment, the children had to reflect if the strategies were of any help to reach their goal and relook at their approach.

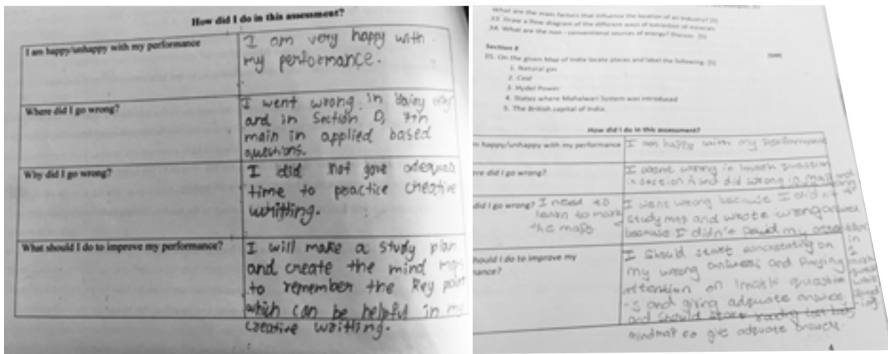
Figure 3: Goal-setting Template from the Students' Diary

	S	T	P	S
Assessment	Specific Goal • What do I need to improve? • How do I plan for it?	School Assistance • Identify student's areas of difficulty • Follow up with reflective based evaluation / activities.	Parental support • Follow-up with home assignment. • Setting specific time zone for study.	Revise • Were these steps helpful/successful? • Any new step or shedding of habit.
First Test	I need to improve my spellings. I will improve my spellings by learning Assignment booklet	Descriptive writing and time management in the test Study time table		yes, it was helpful.
First-Term Exam	I should start putting efforts to my studying and spend more time in reading educational books.	She should work on Spelling & Sentence formation Study time table and revision		

Meetings were held with parents to seek specific home support. After the assessment, the students and the teacher would analyse if these strategies were helpful and based on the performance, they would revise the strategy and adopt new ways. For example, in Maths, the teachers used error analysis as a strategy to help the students identify their mistakes and taught the students to do self-correction. During the remedial classes, teachers addressed the learning gap by working on individual learning plans.

Self-assessment questions were built into the question papers. On receiving the corrected papers, the students had to analyse their performance and answer the given questions.

Figure 4: Self-Assessment Questions Answered by the Students After Receiving Their Answer Paper



Evidence

The following are the assessment scores of two students from Grade VII: The following are the marks of two students from Grade VII over two Academic Years (2018-19):

Figure 5: Tracking Anjali's progress over two academic years. The blue bar indicates the scores (the test was conducted for 30 marks and the term-end exams were conducted for 80 marks) in the academic year 2018-19 and the orange bar graph indicates the scores in the academic year 2019-20

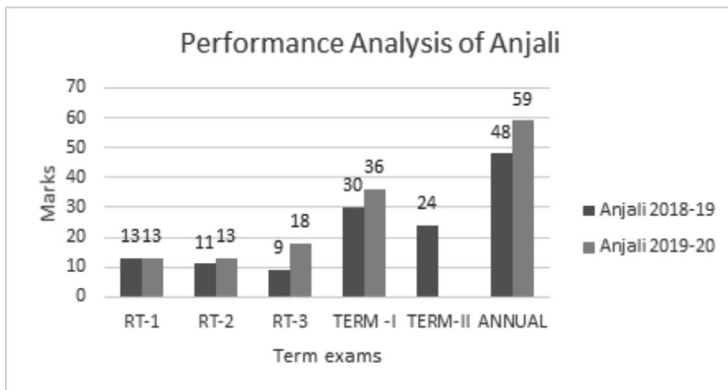
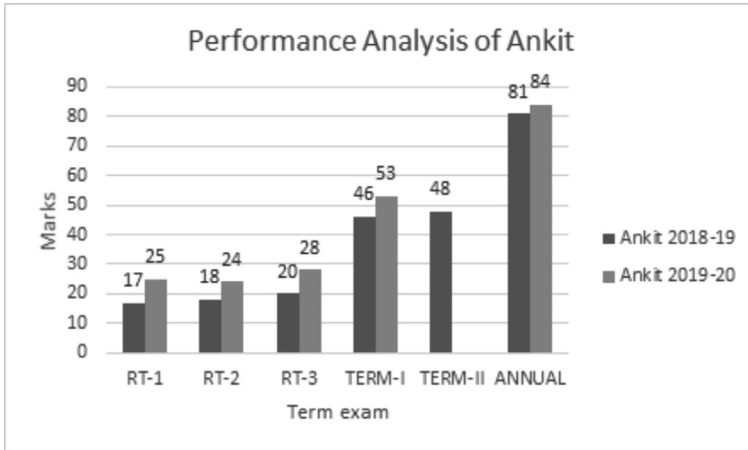


Figure 6: Tracking Ankit's progress over two academic years. The blue bar indicates the scores (the test was conducted for 30 marks and the term-end exams were conducted for 80 marks) in the academic year 2018-19 and the orange bar graph indicates the scores in the academic year 2019-20



The improvement is not evident and homogeneous across the whole class, as we had students who were on different learning curves and we had students with severe learning gaps in grades V, VI and VII. We have not been able to see a tangible difference, but intangible improvement was observed. Children are slowly learning that they are responsible for their learning and middle school students are able to recognize the effort required to reach their goals. In a few individual cases, we have seen considerable improvement. We have been practising this for more than two years and will gather further evidence to check the impact on middle school students in the coming years.

Outcome

In the first term, the teachers found it a challenge to get the students to understand goal setting, answering reflective questions and taking onus for their performance. However, by the second term, the teachers found that students were more willing. The improvement was not significant across the whole class, as we had students who were on different learning curves.

1. In a few individual cases, we have seen considerable improvement.
2. The students could identify their own areas of improvement using

- the reflective questions in their assessment papers (see Table 2).
3. The students slowly learned to set goals and began working towards them through the year. This also brought about a growth mindset in them.
 4. In three students, the teachers were able to identify the need for further learning assessment and for the parents to take the children for learning assessment. Assessment reports showed that the children had varying degrees of learning problems and further interventions were planned and recommended.
 5. This academic year (2022-23), the school has introduced the student-led parent-teacher meeting in middle school to discuss the progress of the child.

Figure 7: Student-led Parent-Teacher’s Interaction Template

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Student led parent teacher's interaction

Grade: 6 Students' Name: Manasvi S

Subject	I achieved	I did well because	I need to do... to improve...
English	68/80	I Planned a study plan for my prose and grammar because last time in the sound test, I got low marks because of that I thought of improving my writing skill. Before the exam day, I prepared the revision papers & the assignment booklet it helped me to understand the question paper pattern.	I need to practice creative writing, read the chapter again and again, use sticky notes for important information, improve grammar, improve handwriting and make a study plan for my prose and grammar.
II language Kannada/Hindi	58.5		I need to practice on how to make own sentence, not to make spelling

Impact of the Strategy

The goal setting, reflective question process and other collaboration and collective efforts resulted in a deep impact on the school, students and parents as indicated in Table 03.

<i>Impact on School</i>	<i>Impact on the Students</i>	<i>Impact on the Parents</i>
<p>It helped</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers, students, and parents to track the progress of the students regularly rather than taking stock of the situation at the end-of-term result. • The school to convince the parents for the need for home support. • The parents understand the specific areas that needed to be addressed and worked upon when the students' reflective questions and student responses were discussed during the Parent-Teacher Meeting. The teachers were able to provide constructive feedback and help parents to work with their children in overcoming learning issues. • The teachers to have an open conversation with the parents about the children's progress. • The teachers to identify students with severe learning gaps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It empowered the students to set goals and use strategies (study plan, reinforcement of concepts, practice, mind maps, mnemonics, time-line, templates) to achieve their set goal. • It helped the students to understand the areas of improvement and reflect upon them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It made the parents understand that the school genuinely cared for the students and did not see the school and teachers as intimidating. • It enabled the parents and the teachers to strengthen their relationship and also see each other as enablers instead of blaming each other for the child's lack of progress. • The parents were cognizant of the academic progress of their children, and this helped the parents to know the learning curve of their child and extend their guidance accordingly.

Conclusion

'It takes a village to raise a child,' is a well-known African proverb. Teachers and parents play a vital role in nurturing the growth of children. The process of setting a goal and getting the students to reflect on their performance has been a learning process for the teachers, students, and

parents. We have seen mixed results in our efforts and initiatives. Our effort through all this was to help the students take responsibility for their learning. Setting goals and working towards them has provided the students, teachers, and parents with a structure to work with. It has taught the students to prioritize, build motivation and understand that they are responsible for their learning.

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