

# OPEN ASSESSMENT FOR OPEN SCHOOLING IN THE (POST) PANDEMIC WORLD. A THEORETICAL APPROACH

KOUNATIDOU T, SAKKOULA N\* and LIONARAKIS A

*School of Humanities, Hellenic Open University, Greece*

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**Abstract:** Due to globalization and the unexpected pandemic outburst, the need for educational change and shift to openness came to the fore. Openness confirms the quality of education as a fundamental human right, providing educational opportunities to everyone and under any circumstances. Nonetheless, open educational practices are rarely applied and adopted by schools, and as a result, traditional school education remains outdated, maintaining its narrow and closed character. Student assessment, as an integral part of the educational process, can enhance either school's openness or closedness. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine – through a literature review of peer-reviewed, topic-related articles – how the implementation of open assessment can contribute to forming an open school, which aims at students' amelioration and not categorization, according to their scores. The major findings of our study show that open forms of assessment lead to promoting openness within schools, by developing 21st century learner skills in meaningful and authentic ways, as well as values related to democracy, human rights and equity. This paper adds up to the existing literature as it offers an alternative perspective regarding school assessment, which is in alignment with the needs of today's learners and can function as an assistive tool for opening up school education in the long term.

**Keywords:** traditional student assessment, open assessment, open schooling, equity, democracy, covid-19 pandemic

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## Introduction

In recent years, in the wake of the pandemic and the rapid changes taking place at all levels of the globalized modern world, much has been said about the promotion of Human Rights and Democracy, particularly in the field of education (Cunningham, 2017; Lionarakis, Manousou, Hartofylaka, Papadimitriou, & Ioakeimidou, 2020). The reconfiguration of traditional education systems and the creation of an Open School based on equity and social justice, as well as the implementation of Open Learning practices, are essential prerequisites for the foundation of sustainable democratic societies (United Nations, 1948; Lionarakis, et al., 2020). However, school continues to use outdated educational practices that promote inequity in all its manifestations, discriminations and fear of new initiatives.

Assessment, as an integral part of the educational process, is included in these practices. In fact, it is solely aimed at ranking pupils according to their scores, creating two-tier pupils and thus perpetuating existing inequity (Black & William, 1998, 2018). The transition to openness can contribute to transforming traditional assessment from a sterile ranking process into an ameliorative one that will

\*Corresponding Authors' Email: [nora\\_skl@hotmail.com](mailto:nora_skl@hotmail.com)

simultaneously affirm the pedagogical nature of teaching and learning and lay the foundations of an open school.

Given the above, the aim of this article is to examine the role of open student assessment in creating an open school, especially in the (post) pandemic world. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents related work on current forms of school assessment, while Section 3 presents the effectiveness of these forms. Section 4 discusses and tries to conceptualize the notion of open schooling, while section 5 presents open assessment, particularly in the context of the global pandemic. Finally, Section 6 discusses the main findings and suggests ideas for future research.

### ***From closed to open assessment***

Modern living conditions and the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic brought to the fore the already existing need to create an open school that can meet the needs of all students without restrictions and adequately prepare them for the globalized societies of the 21st century, cultivating skills related to cooperation, respect, acceptance, autonomy, democracy and equity (Lionarakis, 2006; Ossiannilsson, 2018). Student assessment has the potential to act as a complementary tool in this direction. However, summative assessment, which is largely applied in education, still serves the closed school today, as it evaluates what students learn after the end of the learning process by giving them a grade, confirming its ineffective teacher-centered nature, since students perceive it as a punitive and non-creative process (Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011; Anson & Goodman, 2014).

Formative assessment is on the opposite side of summative assessment. Formative assessment – through alternative authentic activities and continuous feedback – emphasizes the quality and improvement of the learning process, taking into account the specific and individual characteristics of students (Torrance, 2007; Gikandi et al., 2011; Black & William, 2018). While formative assessment appears to address the limitations of summative assessment and mostly meets the needs of students (Popham, 2009), it often misses out on its focus, as teachers usually make the decisions about the assessment process, they are the ones providing students with feedback and act more as instructors than facilitators, keeping their status quo (Black & William, 1998; Popham, 2009; Black & William, 2018). Consequently, both forms of assessment are not sufficient to lead to an open school, maintaining – to varying degrees – their teacher-centred nature, as they disregard students' right to choose the conditions and manner in which they are assessed, as well as their right to transparency of the process (Black & William, 1998; Torrance, 2007; Black & William, 2018).

There is, therefore, an emerging need to adopt a different system of assessment in education that is genuinely improvement-oriented and involves the implementation of open practices, so that all students, without exception, have the opportunity to develop their personality and be guided in their learning in ways that suit their own profile and needs (Bloom, 1969; Torrance, 2007; Black & William, 2018). Through open practices, students' autonomy, engagement, equal participation and active role in the learning process will be enhanced, qualities that will accompany them in their adult life and are in line with the 21st century learner skills (Brown & Knight, 1994; Stiggins, 2004; Ogange, Agak, Okelo, & Kiprotich, 2018).

### ***Assessing assessment's effectiveness***

Assessment in any form affects students at a pedagogical, psychological and social level. Thus, the controversy expressed about its effectiveness relates to these three dimensions (Dabbach, 2007).

According to the pedagogical dimension, it is argued that assessment disrupts the pedagogical relationship between students and teachers. The teacher is given the role of the grader and, thus, the gap between them and students widens (Pekrun et al., 2009). Grading becomes a kind of reward or punishment for students and sometimes oppresses and intimidates them (Pekrun et al., 2009). Students lose their motivation to learn and find it difficult to perform under these circumstances. Learning processes are driven to a subordinate level and examinations, as well as grades, become the ultimate purpose both for students and teachers (Kohn, 2011). In this way, it is established that in school students are not learning but are constantly under scrutiny. This belief elevates sterile memorization and superficial knowledge to an end in itself (Kohn, 2011).

With regard to the psychological dimension of student assessment, the problem is related to the negative psychological effects of examinations, as they transfer students' focus on scoring instead of learning. This means that students are more interested in getting a good grade than in gaining meaningful knowledge, which makes them feel anxious, frustrated and often leads to depression (Kohn, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012). Quite often, these psychological consequences can develop at a psychosomatic level and cause health problems to students (Thompson & Allen, 2012). Furthermore, students acquire negative and aggressive attitudes towards teachers as they identify them with the negative emotions caused by assessment (Thompson & Allen, 2012; Adair, 2015). Eventually, this situation leads students to lack of motivation and low academic performance.

As far as the social dimension of student assessment concerns, it fosters social inequality (Benner & Graham, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012). School failure is a criterion for social selection, ranking and exclusion (Benner & Graham, 2011; Adair, 2015). Assessment in school has become a means of oppressing students and a means of perpetuating class discrimination (Benner & Graham, 2011; Adair, 2015). School, in the way it currently operates, groups students based on their social class. More specifically, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to fail school exams and drop out of school more often than students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Benner & Graham, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012; Adair, 2015). Assessment is used by the upper social class as a tool to create two-tier learners, with the ultimate aim of maintaining the aforementioned discrimination, which is often not reversed in a lifetime (Benner & Graham, 2011; Adair, 2015).

However, as student assessment is a necessary process in order to ascertain whether learning objectives are being achieved, all of the above lead to the need of reshaping its character, so that it will become assessment for learning and not assessment of learning, as it currently is. In its current form, assessment reproduces and replicates the closed nature of traditional schooling and its outcome is more important than students themselves. The adoption of methods and practices that serve openness in education can help to reshape assessment, so that it will turn into a student-centered, improvement-oriented process that enhances equity and democracy in the school environment and, hence, in the wider social context (Ogange et al., 2018; Sakkoula, 2022).

### ***Open schooling for an open society***

The existence of openness in education has the potential to transform today's closed education systems into agents of democracy and equality (Lionarakis, 2008). However, opening up education – and particularly school education, which is generally considered closed – is a complicated and slow process, as there is no specific definition of openness and, consequently, it is difficult to define and apply (Baker, 2016). Moreover, openness influences and is influenced by the socio-economic, political and educational context at any given time (Baker, 2016). As a result, its philosophy is modified according to the respective circumstances and, in fact, is a reflection of the social context in which it takes place (Baker, 2016).

In a broader perspective, it could be said that open schooling is an educational model that aims to provide quality education to all children, recognizing their fundamental right to this good (United Nations, 1948; Sakkoula, 2021, 2022). Thus, while openness is modified and influenced by the aforementioned conditions, open schooling makes sure to respond to the needs of all students, without making discriminations in terms of their economic, cultural and social background (Morais, 2002; Abrioux & Ferreira as cited in Torres, 2013). In other words, an open school is characterized by flexibility, accessibility, inclusivity, the use of technology and Open Educational Resources (OERs), transparency and innovation in its methods (Abrioux & Ferreira as cited in Torres, 2013; Weller, 2014). In an open school, students have freedom of choice as to the pace and mode of learning, as well as the subject matter of their studies (Liyoshi & Kumar, 2010; Weller, 2014). Curricula are, also, flexible and students can reconfigure and personalize them, while being aware of expected learning outcomes (Liyoshi & Kumar, 2010; Weller, 2014).

In this context, it is evident that students are at the centre of the learning process and their voice and opinion are important (Mohammed & Mishra, 2012). Through freedom in their choices, they become more autonomous, creative and are able to use what they learn in authentic learning environments (Lionarakis, 2006; Liyoshi & Kumar, 2010). The idea of democracy that characterizes the learning process ultimately characterizes the relationships that develop within the open school. Partnerships are encouraged and strengthened and diversity among students acts as an asset rather than a weakness (Liyoshi & Kumar, 2010; Gikandi et al., 2011; Weller, 2014). The existence of openness in schools, therefore, can reshape the educational system. This reconfiguration also has social implications. An open school environment fosters critical thinking, problem solving and creates students who are independent, autonomous and with the skills that are prerequisites in 21st century societies (Lionarakis, 2006; Christensen & Horn, 2008; Ossiannilsson, 2018).

### ***Assessment as a key to opening schools***

As already mentioned, openness is influenced and shaped by many factors (Peter & Deimann, 2013). One of these factors was the pandemic, which affected all areas of life and played a key role in the shift of schools towards openness due to the specific circumstances and the mandatory use of technology for the implementation of distance education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Sakkoula, 2021). Schools, despite their inadequate resources and limitations, turned overnight to distance education (Kounatidou, Mavroeidis, & Marouki, 2022) and adopted open practices, which continue to positively influence face-to-face education in the post-pandemic world (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Sakkoula, 2021).

The pandemic, therefore, accelerated the processes of readjusting education systems in an almost universal manner, as it affected approximately one point six (1.6) billion students and over two hundred (200) countries worldwide (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). In the light of these changes, the implementation of open assessment, as an integral part of the educational process, has the potential to function in a reinforcing way towards openness (Gikandi et al., 2011; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Nowadays, teachers are required to use assessment, not as a method of ranking and dividing students according to their abilities, but as a pedagogical tool that allows students to show their progress, improve and receive support at all stages of the learning process (Torrance, 2007; Gikandi et al., 2011; Ogange, Agak, Okelo, & Kiprotich, 2018).

Open assessment refers to a pedagogical process that confirms learning results in a collaborative manner, giving teachers the freedom to use tools that are customizable and produce suitable resources, which students can utilize shape to create their own personalized assessment (Chiappe, Pinto, & Arias, 2016; Kounatidou et al., 2022). Moreover, it is characterized by full transparency, between and towards students (Torrance, 2007; Dalsgaard & Thestrup, 2019). Students have access to and are fully aware of the criteria and methods which they are assessed by, the educational materials they can use, the learning objectives set, and they have the choice of where, how and when they are assessed (Torrance, 2007; Gikandi et al., 2011; Ogange et al., 2018). Thus, students take an active role and assessment is transformed from a formal repetitive process to an authentic and meaningful learning experience (Chiappe et al., 2016).

Moreover, open assessment is directly related to formative assessment, being – possibly – its most sophisticated form (Chiappe et al., 2016; Ogange et al., 2018). It, therefore, has the potential to transform summative assessment into formative assessment and/or maintain a balance between the two forms, always aiming at student improvement through continuous constructive support and feedback, enhancing students' learning engagement, autonomy, reflection, motivation and self-confidence (Torrance, 2007; Gikandi et al., 2011; Glazer, 2014; Ogange et al., 2018). Consequently, it leads to better learning outcomes and improves the overall quality of the learning process (Gikandi et al., 2011; Torrance, 2007).

During the pandemic, the imposition of distance education as the only option for conducting lessons and the mandatory use of technology brought the issue of assessment to the forefront as teachers began to seek and implement alternative ways to assess their students (Gikandi et al., 2011; Ogange et al., 2018; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The techniques utilized in open assessment are multidimensional, authentic, and connected to the real life and needs of both typical and diverse learners, so that they are able to express their needs and personalities in meaningful ways (Gikandi et al., 2011; Chiappe et al., 2016). Typical examples of these techniques are open-book examinations and notes, projects, online quizzes, real-life simulations, debates, presentations, self-assessment and peer-assessment, as well as online portfolios and e-journals (Natarajan, 2005; Hutchinson, 2007; Motte, 2013; Chiappe et al., 2016; Khan, Egbue, Palkie, & Madden, 2017).

Of course, open assessment is not a panacea for all problems of traditional assessment (Chiappe et al., 2016). However, it creates environments of mutual trust between teachers and students and teaches the latter the value of accountability (Chiappe et al., 2016). At a practical level, it enables students to show "what they can do with what they have learned" (Lionarakis, 2006) in a creative and stress-free way, within an environment of interactions and equal opportunities, where uniqueness is perceived as

an asset for learning rather than a barrier (Gikandi et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be a powerful educational tool to enhance openness in either face-to-face or distance education, which became evident both during the pandemic and the post pandemic era (Ogange et al., 2018; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

## **Conclusions**

In this article, we have attempted to present the ways in which open assessment can be a tool for reshaping and opening modern school. School education is a closed model of education, without much flexibility and is purely teacher-centred. Summative assessment – which is mostly utilized – is solely based on student performance on specific tests, which treat all students as a single entity, without differentiations (Gikandi et al., 2011; Anson & Goodman, 2013). On the other hand, formative assessment adapts to the needs of children through alternative practices and aims to improve rather than rank them based on their performance (Black & William, 1998, 2018). Nevertheless, in both forms of assessment, the teacher is at the spotlight and decides regarding the whole process.

In the wake of the pandemic from covid-19 and the implementation of distance education to conduct courses, there has been a shift towards openness and search for alternative forms of assessment (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Open assessment puts the learner at the centre of the process. While it has many elements in common with formative assessment, it differs at a crucial point. In open assessment, teachers only act as facilitators and students, who are aware of the learning objectives, choose the material they will study and the way they will demonstrate what they have learned (Chiappe et al., 2016; Ogange et al., 2018). It is the most democratic manifestation of assessment and enhances students' freedom of expression and responsibility within a safe educational environment. In fact, open assessment turns students into evaluators of themselves and their peers, which contributes to their self-improvement and the cultivation of 21st century skills such as respect, collaboration, adaptability and autonomy (Lionarakis, 2006; Ossiannilsson, 2018). Therefore, openness in assessment has the potential to contribute to forming an open school and possibly, a future open society, a conclusion that can be confirmed by conducting empirical research with a similar purpose

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