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Adaptive Comparative Judgement: A Mechanism to Enrich and Enhance Assessment Practices to Support Teaching and Learning

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One of the most fundamental and challenging aspects of pedagogical practices is assessment of student learning. Assessment mechanisms are adopted in response to a variety of agendas, such as providing a summative ‘grade’ to facilitate student matriculation into further study, or to provide students with critical information regarding their own progress with the goal of guiding the next stages of their educational experience. Irrespective of the agenda driving assessment, it is paramount that the method of assessment is both reliable and valid. In addition to this, it is critical to acknowledge that assessment mechanisms are simply tools to support the assessor in making value-laden, professional decisions.

Traditional assessment practices succumb to many issues in achieving these aims of validity and reliability. Sadler (2009) highlights two critical problems in that the sum of criteria scores may not always reflect the intuitive or holistic mark of the assessor, and that there may be criteria missing from an assessment rubric that are important or alternatively may set the particular work aside as exemplary. In a response to issues such as these, the method of Adaptive Comparative Judgement (ACJ) has emerged through contemporary research (Pollitt, 2012). ACJ typically involves an assessor, or a group of assessors, making holistic binary decisions on two pieces of evidence multiple times based on an intrinsic qualification of capability, however external criteria can be mandated. The result of these decisions is a rank where evidence is positioned relative to other evidence in the ACJ session with the meaning and value of the rank deriving from the opinions of the judge(s). ACJ has proven to be a highly valid and reliable tool in a variety of educational contexts. (Pollitt, 2012; Seery & Buckley, 2016; Seery, Canty, & Phelan, 2012).

Of particular interest is the broader impact ACJ can have within educational settings. The need to exercise binary decisions on quality mandates judges to espouse and develop their personal construct of capability. Considering either a student or teacher as a judge, ACJ provokes a deep level of critique on personal values, which has the potential to result in an

increased discourse pertinent to student learning and attainment. Considering further that a collective of judges engage in an ACJ session, they get to experience their peers' constructs of capability which they can use further to assess their own values. This communal understanding of levels of attainment has the capacity to increase teacher efficacy where assessment practices traditionally occurred in isolation. Considering educational assessment is still an emerging field of research, ensuring support exists for teachers and learners to grapple with the intrusion of assessment and helping them establish its purpose and place is important. The role that ACJ can play in this process has multiple possibilities in both the development and measurement of student capability and in teacher efficacy, especially in Swedish context where teacher based assessment and digitalisation of national assessment is under review.

Reference

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